

PUBLIC NOTICE: INVITATION OF COMMENTS

Pursuant to *Section 45-22.2-9(c)(2) of the General Laws of Rhode Island*, the Division of Statewide Planning hereby invites comments from the public, regional and state agencies, contiguous municipalities, and other interested parties regarding the local comprehensive plan document listed below.

Town of Exeter, Rhode Island
Comprehensive Plan: 2024-2044
ID#: EXE-CP-24

Posted October 25, 2024

This Comprehensive Plan is currently under review by the State to ensure “consistency with the goals and intent established in the [Comprehensive Planning Act] and in the State Guide Plan.” The comment period shall extend for thirty days from the posted date. All comments should reference the **document title and identifier number**, and should be submitted to:

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Exeter 2044 Comprehensive Plan



TWENTY-YEAR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FOR EXETER, RHODE ISLAND
| 2024 |

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**Adopted by the Town of Exeter, Rhode Island
April 2, 2024**

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Acknowledgements

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- **Diane B. Allen**
- **Olivia DeFrancesco**
- **Calvin A. Ellis**

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How to use this plan

The *Exeter 2044 Comprehensive Plan* includes an Executive Summary and covers a broad range of topics in thirteen elements, or chapters, about current trends, the planning process—all aspects of community life that affect the way our town can develop in the future and implementation actions.

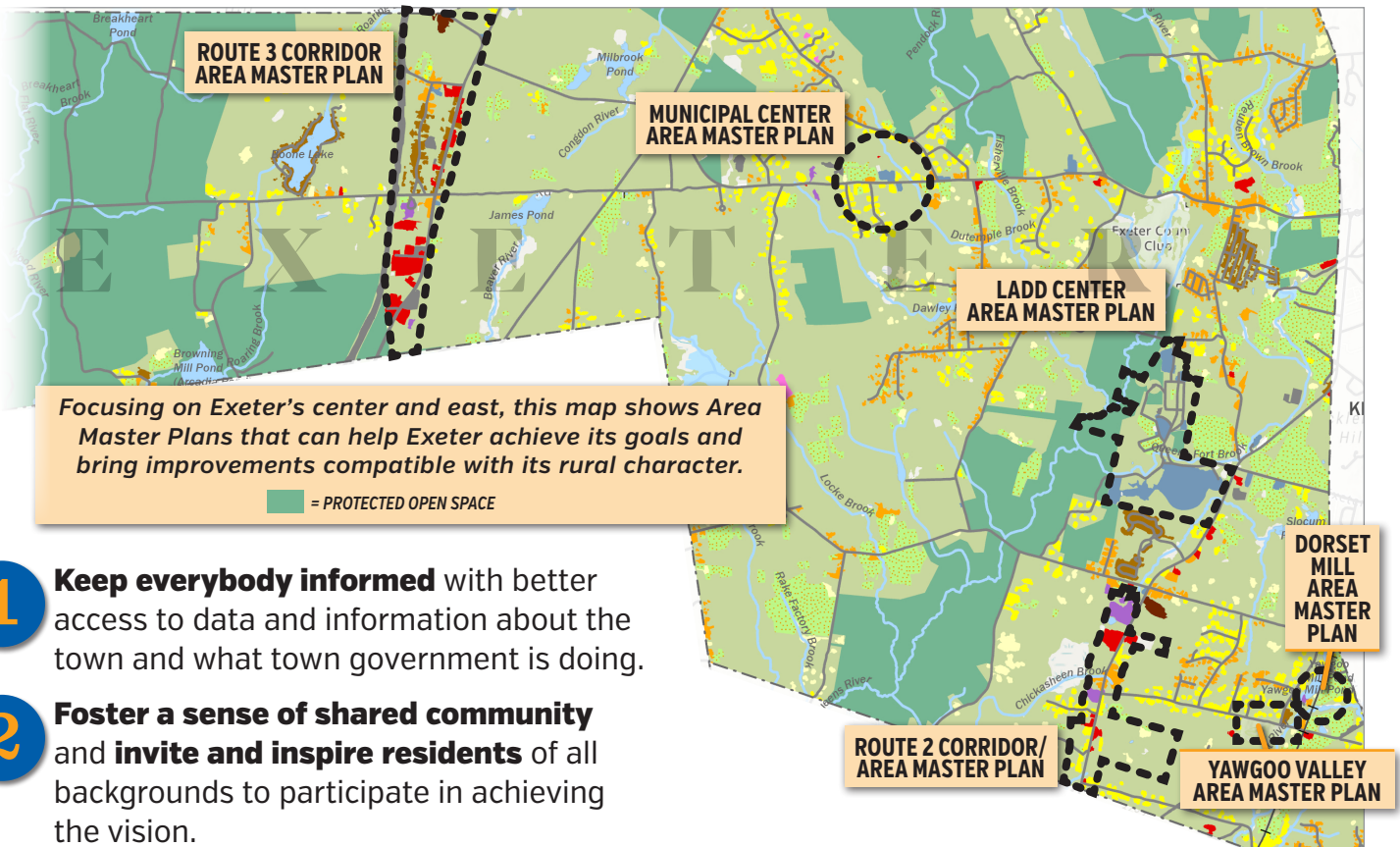
The plan organizes the elements into five parts, each of which starts with a summary of the contents of its elements. The plan can be read all the way through or selectively, according to each reader's interests. Citizens, government agencies, businesses, nonprofit institutions, and others can choose specific topics relevant to their activities. An appendix contains more detailed information on various topics.

- For a **quick overview of key themes, major recommendations**, and the process to create the plan, read the *Executive Summary*.
- To understand **community aspirations and values for the future**, read Elements 1–2. They provide the town's vision for the future and overall goals, as well as a description of the community engagement process. These elements are designed to answer the question: What kind of place do we want to be in 20 years?
- To understand the starting point for the comprehensive plan and how we got here, read Element 3—*Understanding Exeter Today*. It lays out the **key existing conditions and trends** when the plan was developed in 2022–2023.

- To find out about **specific topics**, from natural resources to housing to economic development and infrastructure, choose the topics of interest to you from Elements 4–11. Each element provides a table of goals and policies; a discussion of findings, challenges, and opportunities; and a set of recommended strategies and actions to achieve the goals. Implementation actions are grouped into a five-year plan for the short term; a second five-year plan for the medium term; and long-term actions for the last ten years of the planning horizon.
- To find out about **existing and proposed land use policies**, read Element 12—*Land Use*.
- To find out about **how to make this a living plan and how to implement it**, read Element 13—*Stewardship and Implementation*. This also includes a summary matrix of all actions, responsible parties, and timelines from Elements 4–12.
- Each element is paginated sequentially within the element. Additions and amendments can be added and paginated at the end of the appropriate element.
- It is expected that most readers will read the plan online, where maps and other images can be enlarged for detailed viewing. In addition, a separate map file with 11" x 17" maps is available from the Town for downloading and printing.

Executive Summary

10 Key Concepts and Strategies for Exeter's Future— Preserving our environment, building on rural assets, and cultivating community



- 1 **Keep everybody informed** with better access to data and information about the town and what town government is doing.
- 2 **Foster a sense of shared community** and **invite and inspire residents** of all backgrounds to participate in achieving the vision.
- 3 **Protect our natural and historic heritage**—ground and surface water, wildlife corridors, historic sites and landscapes, forests, fields, wetlands, and farms.
- 4 Locate a **new or renovated town hall and new community center** near the library through a Municipal Center Area Master Plan.
- 5 **Pursue an economic development strategy** to increase nonresidential tax revenue that builds on rural assets and nature recreation.
- 6 Gain benefits for Exeter through a **joint Town-State Ladd Center Area Master Plan**, including affordable housing.
- 7 Provide **more recreation opportunities** for children, youth, and adults, from a network of multi-use trails to better parks and athletic fields.
- 8 Facilitate balanced, compatible development to gain **nonresidential tax revenue** adjacent to exit 14 for I-95 as part of a **Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan**.
- 9 Market the **Village Center concept** to potential developers as part of a **Route 2 Corridor Area Master Plan**.
- 10 Seek **partnerships to achieve Exeter 2044 goals**: work with government, nonprofits, businesses, and community members.

Exeter 2044 is a new comprehensive plan as required by Rhode Island law. Guided by an Advisory Committee, the Planning Board, and input from residents, the Plan builds on a vision of preserving sensitive environments and rural character balanced by economic strategies that support agriculture, forestry, and nature recreation with select economic development opportunities in a welcoming community.

Our Vision

In 2044...Exeter remains a peaceful and welcoming small town with a strong sense of community, a rural tradition, and a landscape of space and privacy. Residents cherish its forests, fields, and wildlife, streams and ponds, historic places, and the conservation lands and working lands—farm and forest enterprises—that anchor the town’s rural character. We protect environmentally sensitive places, wildlife corridors, and our clean water sources. To help preserve our open space tradition, new residential development within the landscape is primarily focused in hamlets, villages or conservation subdivisions. At the same time, we welcome balanced nonresidential development in designated areas that enhances our tax base and respects our natural resources and general character of the community.

We value Exeter’s location within Washington County, convenient to the natural, cultural, and economic opportunities in the rest of Rhode Island and New England.

- To strengthen our **sense of community** for new generations, we have created a new community center, revived old community traditions, and created new ones to bring people together in community activities.

- We are a **family-friendly and aging-friendly community**, supporting young families with attainable housing, an excellent school system and youth activities, while seniors can find services and housing choices that allow them to remain in town as they get older.
- We are committed to pursuing **balanced economic growth policies** that strengthen the town’s tax base, build on our assets, and enhance small scale businesses that serve residents. We promote the economic viability of our farm and forest enterprises, recognizing their importance as both heritage and continuing assets.
- We protect the qualities that make Route 102 our designated Scenic Road and we have cost-effective policies to maintain our road system. There are expanded opportunities for safe bicycling, walking, and hiking in Exeter. Greenways link wildlife habitat and recreation sites in a continuous network, preserving the health of the entire ecosystem and enhancing outdoor recreation. At the same time, the Town cooperates with others to support **mobility and transportation** innovations, such as electric vehicles or on-demand public transportation to better serve our population.
- We contribute to **sustainability and climate-change resilience and a transition to renewable energy** by fostering excellent ecosystem management, adapting to extreme weather events, and serving resident needs for new energy opportunities.
- **Town government is responsive, transparent, and accountable.** Public facilities and services are resource-efficient, well-maintained, cost-effective, sustainable, and resilient. The Town maximizes long-term benefits through improved planning, enforcement, implementation and coordination between departments and volunteer committees.

In the transition to new generations of leadership in Exeter, the town is committed to preserving the essential elements of our community’s unique heritage by managing the impacts of changing environmental, economic, and social conditions while seeking innovative solutions. Through an intentional process of planning, implementation, and execution, we renew our commitments to our special environment, to one another, and to future generations.

The Big Picture: Inventing Our Future

☑ **Be proactive rather than reactive.**

Get ready for generational turnover of town officials and staff, large property owners, and farmers.

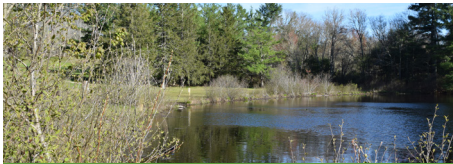
☑ **Inspire and invite new residents and younger people to participate** in town government and volunteer efforts to achieve town goals.

☑ **Enhance Exeter's information infrastructure.** **Start by creating a virtual town square in an improved town website** to engage residents. Collect and disseminate useful information about what's going on in town.

☑ **Be strategic.** Invest time, thought, money if necessary, and action to **pursue and achieve town goals, such as balanced economic development and affordable housing.**

☑ **Be ready for environmental change.** **Actively protect and support the natural resources** the Town wants to conserve, especially water, forests, and farms.

☑ **Make Exeter 2044 a living plan.** **Use the plan to guide decision making** in budgeting, an annual review, and a public process every five years to evaluate the vision, goals, and implementation strategies: What's working? What needs to change? Are there new opportunities, threats, partners...?



Natural & Cultural Resources

NATURAL RESOURCES

- Recruit members to reestablish a Conservation Commission, possibly using incentives.
- Identify, map, and prioritize key conservation gaps in areas with high ecological connectivity, such as stream corridors and contiguous forest blocks.
- Leverage partnerships with state, regional, and local actors to access grants and to support conservation efforts, including outreach to property owners to develop a shared understanding of land-protection goals.
- Strengthen and enforce performance standards and regulations to protect surface and groundwater quality, including in specific areas of town such as the Ladd Center Area and land north of Routes 102 and 3.

- Ensure that Town government adopts performance standards and exemplifies best management practices for landscape management.

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

- Create an open space and recreation plan with goals and actions for land conservation and outdoor recreation.
- Map public access to conservation areas, trails, boating access, and similar facilities and identify needed connections and improvements.
- Set aside matching funds (annual/capital) for state grant open space applications.
- Continue to pursue funding and grants to expand recreational facilities at Chelsea Park and other locations.

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Designate the Exeter Historical Association to lead a non-regulatory historic resources program.
- Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners and provide matching funds to apply for grants to support restoration and preservation of historical and cultural resources.

- Build public awareness about historic resources and landscapes.
- Foster a sense of community by cultivating gathering spaces such as the Library, a new Community Center, and events.



How We Live

HOUSING

- Encourage new subdivisions to use zoning tools that result in preservation of environmental resources and connectivity.
- Activate a housing policy and implementation program within Town government to achieve and maintain 10% state-defined affordable housing.
- Actively pursue strategies to attract affordable housing and senior housing development.
- Market the Exeter Village Center concept, including with potential incentives.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Establish a permanent Economic Development Commission and hire an Economic Development coordinator.
- Establish a regular inventory of real estate, businesses, and an annual engagement program, as well as a business-recruitment package.
- Develop and support a long-term strategy for economic development based on rural assets—agriculture, forestry, nature recreation, events.
- Facilitate nonresidential tax-paying balanced and appropriate development in the Route 3 corridor as part of a master plan and in collaboration with Rhode Island Commerce.



Town Systems

TRANSPORTATION

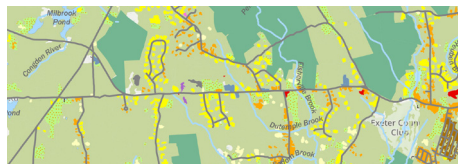
- Create an asset-management system to track and manage road maintenance and equipment. Use the pavement assessment study to secure additional funding.
- Develop and implement a plan to manage speeding.
- Develop and pursue a plan for safe walking and biking routes that connect town destinations.
- Coordinate with RIDOT on multimodal options in commercial corridors, such as a road diet on Route 3, and coordinate with RI State Police on state roadway work.
- Inventory the scenic resources of Route 102 and any future designated Scenic Roads and ensure protection of these resources through design standards for adjacent land.
- Survey town residents every five years about transportation needs, with special attention to seniors.

FACILITIES, SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Develop a program to collect and report town data and governing activities and upgrade the town website to be useful and attractive to residents and others.
- Establish a new or renovated Town Hall.
- Build a new Community Center.
- Establish a cost-effective asset-management system and implement it incrementally.

SUSTAINABILITY, CLIMATE RESILIENCY, ENERGY, AND HAZARD MITIGATION

- Reduce emissions through energy efficiency and use of renewable energy with a greenhouse gas inventory and free audits.
- Incorporate energy efficiency into new and renovated town buildings.
- Participate in the State's Municipal Resilience Plan Program.
- Investigate participation in community electricity-aggregation programs.
- Maintain an updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.



The Future Town

LAND USE

- Continue the existing general distribution of land use types.
- Use land-use regulations to protect water quality, prevent flooding, maintain farms and forests, and preserve environmentally sensitive lands in connected networks.
- Allow accessory uses that support the economic viability of agriculture and forestry and the preservation of rural character.
- Encourage growth in village districts that can support more density to provide balanced housing, economic development, and community services.

- Revise, reorganize, and amend categories in the zoning ordinance in conjunction with Area Master Plans for areas such as the Ladd Center and Routes 3 and 2 corridors.
- Rewrite the zoning ordinance to create a modern, functional, and user-friendly zoning ordinance.

STEWARDSHIP AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Establish a small Comprehensive Plan Implementation Advisory Committee composed of residents to assist the Planning Board and Town Council in implementation.
- Use the comprehensive plan to guide town decision making in annual budget planning, capital planning, and so on.
- Publicize actions and activities that implement the comprehensive plan.
- Hold a public hearing once a year to discuss implementation progress.
- Hold a public process every five years to review goals, strategies, and actions.
- Submit a Five-Year Progress Report to State Planning every five years.
- Update and readopt the plan every ten years.



**Town of Exeter,
Rhode Island**
www.exeterri.gov

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- **PLANNING BOARD**
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- **TOWN PLANNER**
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 - > **DODSON & FLINKER**
 - > **MASS ECONOMICS**
 - > **YELLOWWOOD ASSOCIATES**
 - > **STEVE WOLF STUDIO**



Exeter 2044: Our Vision for the Future

Exeter 2044 is a new comprehensive plan for the Town of Exeter, Rhode Island. With a 20-year time horizon, the plan follows the 2004 Exeter Comprehensive Plan that was approved by the State of Rhode Island Planning Office. Exeter 2044 was developed during 2022–2023 and adopted in 2024. The State of Rhode Island requires that all municipalities create comprehensive plans and that those plans be consistent with the State guide plans. Municipal comprehensive plans combine a focus on the specific issues and opportunities facing their communities with the ways that individual communities can contribute to Rhode Island’s overall quality of life and prosperity.¹

Like all communities, Exeter experiences change and faces challenges. The planning process for Exeter 2044 gave community members an opportunity to think about what kind of place they want Exeter to be in the next 20 years. What do we want to keep, protect, and enhance? What needs improvement, and how can we make needed changes? The comprehensive plan identifies ways for the Town and community to be ready for change rather than reacting to change already underway. By using the comprehensive plan to guide Town decision making, Exeter can be prepared to manage change to benefit the community.

¹ RI Division of Statewide Planning, <https://planning.ri.gov/planning-areas/local-comprehensive-planning>

A. OUR VISION FOR 2044

Vision statements focus attention on a community's values, sense of identity, and aspirations. They identify what

citizens want to preserve and what they want to change, and articulate their desires and hopes for the future. The vision statement functions as the

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“constitution” of a comprehensive plan, setting the course for the future by guiding the creation of the plan and its implementation. This vision statement for Exeter provides a guiding image for the town as it

faces choices and challenges over the next twenty years. It was developed based on the values, concerns, and aspirations expressed through a public opinion survey, committee discussions, and public meetings..

and forest enterprises, recognizing their importance as both heritage and continuing assets.

- We protect the qualities that make Route 102 our designated Scenic Road and we have cost-effective policies to maintain our road system. There are expanded opportunities for safe bicycling, walking, and hiking in Exeter. Greenways link wildlife habitat and recreation sites in a continuous network, preserving the health of the entire ecosystem and enhancing outdoor recreation. At the same time, the Town cooperates with others to support **mobility and transportation** innovations, such as electric vehicles or on-demand public transportation to better serve our population.
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B. THE RHODE ISLAND PLANNING CONTEXT

Rhode Island state requirements and planning goals

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (Chapter 45-22.2.1-14) provides a context for municipal comprehensive plans and guides the municipal planning process through a set of overarching planning goals for the entire state. Municipal plans must be consistent with these goals (italicized text is a direct quotation from the legislation):

- *To promote orderly growth and development that recognizes the natural characteristics of the land, its suitability for use, the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services and facilities and is consistent with available resources and the need to protect public health, including drinking-water supply, drinking-water safety, and environmental quality.*

STATE PLANNING THEMES

The State Planning Office has identified planning themes of statewide importance that represent interconnected aspirations for Rhode Island's future development. They include:

- Supporting place
- Social equity
- Public health and safety
- Stewardship
- Economic vitality
- Resiliency
- Connectivity
- Regional approach.

These themes will appear throughout the plan.

Source: Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Guidance Handbook #1: The Comprehensive Plan 101.

- *To promote an economic climate that increases quality job opportunities and overall economic wellbeing of each municipality and the state.*
- *To promote the production and rehabilitation of year-round housing and to preserve government-subsidized housing for persons and families of low and moderate income in a manner that considers local, regional, and statewide needs; that achieves a balance of housing choices for all income levels and age groups; that recognizes the affordability of housing as the responsibility of each municipality and the state; that takes into account growth management and the need to phase and pace development in areas of rapid growth; and that facilitates economic growth in the state.*
- *To promote the protection of the natural, historic and cultural resources of each municipality and the state.*
- *To promote the preservation of the open space and recreational resources of each municipality and the state. To provide for the use of performance-based standards for development and to encourage the use of innovative development regulations and techniques that promote the development of land suitable for development while protecting our natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources, and achieving a balanced pattern of land uses.*
- *To promote consistency of state actions and programs with municipal comprehensive plans and provide for review procedures to ensure that state goals and policies are reflected in municipal comprehensive plans and state guide plans.*
- *To ensure that adequate and uniform data are available to municipal and state government as the basis for comprehensive planning and land use regulation.*
- *To ensure that municipal land use regulations and decisions are consistent with the comprehensive plan of the municipality, and to ensure state land use regulations and decisions are consistent with state guide plans.*

2023 STATE LEGISLATION RELEVANT TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- **H 6058 and S 1051:** changes to the inclusionary zoning statute.
 - **H 6081 and S 1037:** reducing the number of phases required to approve affordable housing
 - **H 6086 and S 1038:** standardizing notification procedures for permitting
 - **H 6061 and S 1034:** standardizing subdivision and land development permits
 - **H 6085 and S 1033:** requiring municipalities to update their comprehensive plans every five years and stating that any plan older than 12 years cannot be used to deny a zoning change
 - **H 6059 and S 1032:** changing zoning standards
 - **H 6060 and S 1053:** creating a housing and land use court calendar
 - **H 5853A and S0684A:** no solar installations in defined “core forest”
 - **H 5760 and S 0470:** Forest Conservation Commission
 - **House Resolution 6089:** continuation of Legislative commissions on Housing and on Land Use
- New laws less likely to have an impact on Exeter are **H 6084** and **S 1052**, which create a pilot program to fund projects around transit centers, like bus and train stations, and **H 6090** and **S 1035**, which allows developers to always turn commercial structures into housing.

- *To encourage the involvement of all citizens in the formulation, review, and adoption or amendment of the comprehensive plan.¹*

2023 Legislative changes that affect the comprehensive planning process

During the 2023 session, the Rhode Island legislature passed a series of new laws and amendments to existing law that affect comprehensive planning, housing, land development regulations, zoning, and other issues relevant to Exeter. Municipalities are required to update their zoning to comply with the statewide changes. In this comprehensive plan, these changes are discussed where relevant in the topical elements and in more detail in *Element 12—Land Use*.

C. THE EXETER CONTEXT

Over the next 20 years, Exeter will continue to experience the enduring challenge of finding a balance between the rural characteristics, natural environment, and small government

that so many residents value, and the uncertain challenges of residential development pressure, potential tax benefits of economic development, and environmental change.

At the same time, the town will confront new social, environmental, economic, and administrative changes.

- **Generational turnover.** As baby boomers in town government get older—both staff and elected officials—generational changes will be a challenge for the Town’s small, volunteer-based government. Two-earner families, particularly if they work outside of town, as is common, can find it difficult to find time for local volunteer activities. The high cost of housing and land in Exeter is also unaffordable to younger families. It is already difficult to find candidates for elected office and volunteers for boards and commissions and for the volunteer fire departments.
- **Municipal capacity of small government.** Many Exeter residents are satisfied with the Town’s lean government model with a small,

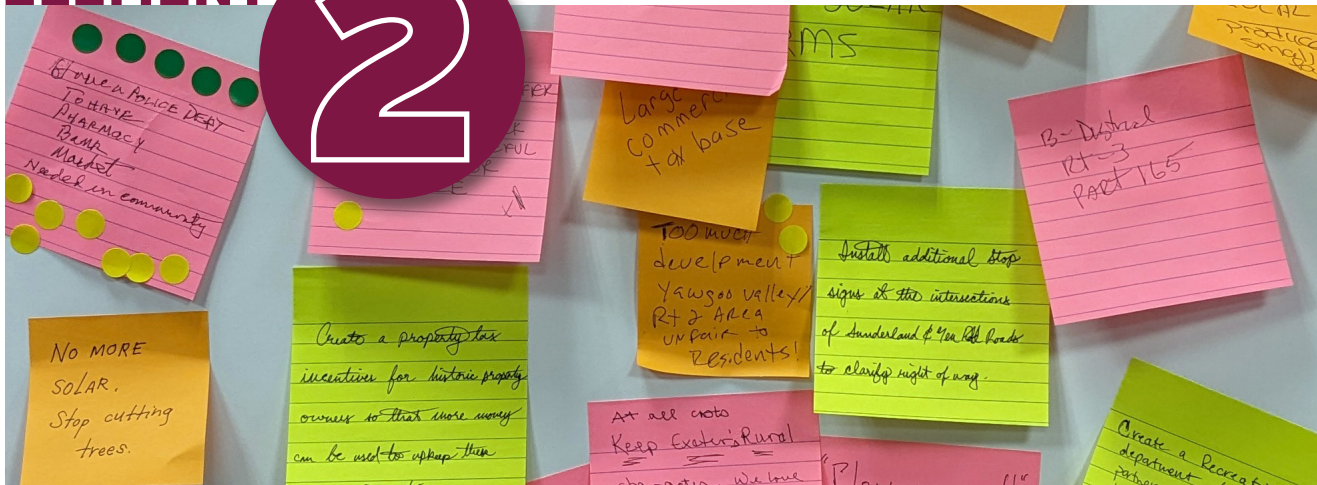
¹ *State Planning Council, Guidance Handbook #1, Comprehensive Plan 101 (2015).*

predominantly part-time staff receiving modest compensation and management by a town council elected every two years. However, others have expressed concern that Town government increasingly needs more active management to be effective in achieving town goals, including the desired balance between rural character and economic development. For example, there have been discussions from time to time about creating a municipal police force, both for security and economic development reasons (some businesses will not locate where there is no local police). Over the next 20 years, the town will periodically evaluate challenges and changes to discuss Town management needs and capacity.

- **Management of nature and environmental resources.** As a small community within a matrix of rural forest and farm landscapes, Exeter plays a special role in Rhode Island, one of the most urbanized states in the country. The town's forest and farm lands contribute to meeting state goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and agricultural production. Residents are proud of the town's rural character, open spaces, and water quality, but Town government plays a very limited

role in helping the community manage these resources to ensure the preservation of high quality environmental resources.

- **Long-term economic viability of rural farm and forest enterprises.** Although most Exeter residents do not depend on agriculture or forestry for their livelihoods, the presence of farms and forests is very important to Exeter's sense of rural character and contribution to long term regional goals for a resilient food supply. An economic strategy that builds on Exeter's rural assets will require persistent focus and partnership.
- **Climate change, resilience, and renewable energy.** Climate change has already begun happening, and the impacts of higher average temperatures and more extreme storm events will increasingly affect Exeter. While the role of utility-scale solar developments in the context of state goals for renewable-energy production has been contentious for years and recently resulted in the introduction of some local and state controls, the continuing impacts of climate change and renewable-energy development will likely remain a matter of concern, to be managed with a balanced approach of resource management and sustainability.



Community Engagement

This comprehensive plan is rooted in an understanding of the values, aspirations, and concerns of Exeter residents within the broader context of state planning goals. The planning process for the Exeter 2044 Comprehensive Plan provided multiple opportunities for Exeter residents and other stakeholders to participate by sharing their experience, ideas, and comments on the plan as it was developed. The outreach process was guided by a Community Engagement Plan and an Advisory Committee, as well as the Planning Board, which has legal responsibility for the comprehensive plan. Major elements of the engagement process included:

- A 20-member Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC), composed of members of the public and the Planning Board, appointed by the Town Council. All meetings were open to the public.
- An interactive project website, www.Exeter2044.com.
- Interviews of town officials and staff and selected residents.
- Outreach through three townwide mailings, an email list, and through other lists.
- Presence at community events.
- An online survey with 287 responses.
- A mail survey of farm and forest land property owners.

- An agriculture focus group.
- A community open house to identify support for planning directions.
- Public review and comment on the Final Adoption Draft, online and with availability of a hard copy in the Library.

A. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CPAC)

Based on discussions with the Planning Board and public solicitation of interest, the Town Council appointed an advisory committee of residents to assist in updating Exeter's comprehensive plan. The CPAC included the seven members of the Planning Board and represented a broad array of Exeter community interests. The CPAC assisted in promoting public participation, worked with the planning team to develop a vision to guide Exeter's future, and reviewed the entire draft plan before it went into the public hearing process.

B. EXETER 2044 WEBSITE

The Comprehensive Plan website, www.Exeter2044.com, included the opportunity to sign up for an email list about plan resources and

events and extensive background information. Visitors to the website could ask questions and comment directly on documents and maps posted on the website in PDF form, including the opportunity to comment on the final draft of the comprehensive plan before public hearings.

C. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Exeter has very few community meeting places and organizations. There is no town center or significant informal gathering places. The Town website provides minimal information and is not widely consulted. The planning process began after several pandemic years of limitations on face-to-face events. As a result, outreach to the public required a variety of efforts. During the course of the planning process, three mailings to every Exeter address were made to ensure that residents and other stakeholders knew about the planning project and were invited to key outreach activities, such as surveys and events. Outreach activities included:

- Three townwide mailings, an email sign-up list on the website, and outreach through other lists
- Interviews of town officials and staff and selected residents included the Planning Board, Town Council, Director of Emergency Management, Director of Social Services, Director of Public Works, Zoning Officer, Economic Development Task Force Chair, Town Moderator, RIDEM Director of Agriculture and Forestry, Rural Land



Preservation Trust, selected business owners and landowners

- Exeter 2044 table at the 2022 Car Show fundraiser event for the Animal Shelter
- Exeter 2044 table at the 2022 Exeter Fall Festival fundraiser event for the Public Library
- Email messages to those who signed up on the website for information
- Distribution of flyers through the Library and through activities for seniors and others through the Director of Social Services
- Surveys and focus groups
- Community Open House
- Online commenting opportunities

Informational Mailing to All Exeter Addresses

The first all-address mailing informed residents and business owners about Exeter 2044, the project website with maps and other materials for review, and the availability of an online survey. It invited them to stop at the Exeter 2044 table at the Exeter Fall Festival on September 24, 2022.



Friends of the Animal Shelter Car Show

The annual car show to raise funds for the Animal Shelter on September 10, 2022, offered an early opportunity during the planning process to



Exeter 2044 at the Animal Shelter Car Show.
[Source: W. DePasquale]

raise public awareness about Exeter 2044 and encourage residents to participate in the planning process.

Friends of the Library Fall Festival

At the Fall Festival on September 24, 2022, the Exeter 2044 table included map displays, an “Exeter At A Glance” handout, Exeter 2044 magnets with the website address, and sign-ups for the website. As people came into the festival, they engaged in discussion with members of the planning team.



Exeter 2044 at the Exeter Fall Festival. [Source: LBA]

D. PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

As part of Exeter 2044, the comprehensive plan team developed a public opinion survey for Exeter residents and business owners/managers. The survey was online, and hard copies were also made available in the Library, by the Director of Social Services, and at the Exeter 2044 booth at the Exeter Fall Festival. (See the Appendix for the survey questionnaire.)

The purpose was to find out what members of the Exeter community value and want to protect, as well as what they are concerned about. The survey was designed to “take the temperature” of the Exeter community at the start of the planning process and inform the development of a draft vision statement to guide the comprehensive plan. The survey included yes/no, multiple-choice, and ranking questions, open-answer questions, and demographic questions that indicate how representative the respondent group is relative to the overall population. In fact, all but two respondents were town residents.

KEY FINDINGS: SURVEY

- **Most survey respondents think Exeter is a good place to live:** Eighty-seven percent ranked overall quality of life as “Good” or “Excellent.” The majority of respondents think that in the time they have lived in Exeter, quality of life has improved or stayed the same. Only 22 percent think that quality of life has gotten worse, and 8 percent are not sure.
- **What people like most about living in Exeter:** What respondents liked most about Exeter is its rural qualities, particularly its peace and quiet, forests and farms, and natural environment. At the same time, many mentioned the town’s convenient location near cities, beaches, shopping, and cultural opportunities. This was an open-answer question. Example comments from respondents:
 - > *My family enjoys the space and tranquility. We enjoy the schools....We take advantage of our public library and its many activities. We appreciate our volunteer fire staff....We also enjoy the many trails in town allowing us to enjoy the outdoors.*

DATES OF THE SURVEY:

- August 4–October 7, 2022

RESPONSES: 287

- Not all respondents answered or commented on all questions.

RESPONSE RATE:

- 13% of households
- 6% of population over 18 years old
- Outreach for the survey:
 - > Mailer to every address in Exeter
 - > Flyers posted in public places
 - > Hard copies made available at the public library and Town Hall
 - > Hard copies made available to seniors and others by the Town Social Services Director
 - > Hard copies made available at the Exeter 2044 booth at the Exeter Fall Festival
 - > Social media

- > Project website “What’s New” on home page

RESPONDENT GROUP CHARACTERISTICS:

- Respondents to the survey were self-selected and the group reflects some characteristics often seen in community surveys about planning. The respondent group is older than the population as a whole, has lived longer in Exeter, and is somewhat more likely to be a homeowner. The respondent group overrepresents population over 35 years old and underrepresents the population aged 18 to 34. Half of the survey group has lived in Exeter over 20 years. Almost two-thirds of respondents live south of Route 102 and east of Route 3; 22% live north of 102 and east of Route 3; and 14% live west of Route 3.



- > *Open space, farms, access to locally raised meat, vegetables, and other food...proximity to URI and the highway, awesome neighbors.*
- > *True small town. No mayor/town administrator/Police. People don't bother each other.*
- > *Community if and when you want it AND privacy if and when you want it.*
- > *Land/space while still close to all the state has to offer (beaches, tertiary healthcare, trains to Boston).*
- > *Open space and bucolic nature of the town, yet close to retailers and other services.*
- > *Excellent schools with a stellar Superintendent. Competent and reliable public works employees. Amazing Library programming and staff.*
- > *I love how peaceful it is to live in Exeter. Love how there's no major businesses. It's mainly residential and woods.*
- > *Rural charm, peace and quiet, undeveloped open spaces, great school staff, and a good value for our taxes.*
- > *Friendly, conservative, hardworking people.*
- > *I like most the balance of business, school, and farm/produce creation.*

In response to this open-answer question, the top five themes for what people like least were traffic, taxes, differences between long-term residents and newcomers, the town economy, and the lack of community. Under many of the categories, there were differing opinions—for example, some respondents want more town services, while others do not.

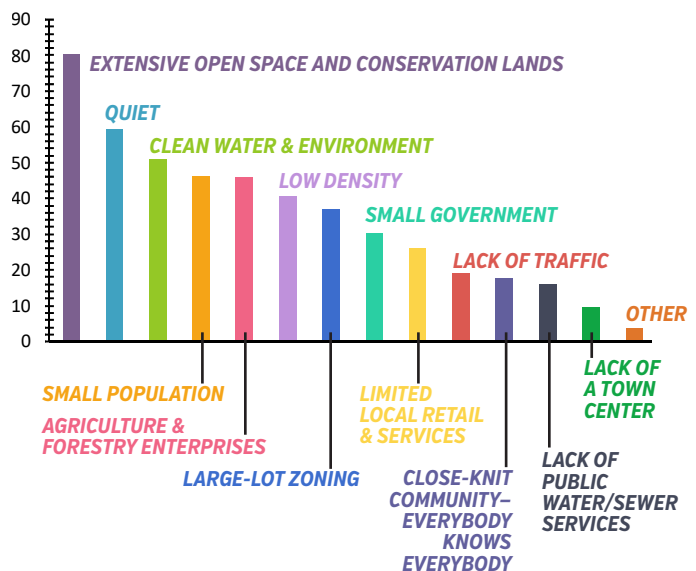
| THEME | MENTIONS |
|--|-----------|
| Traffic | 40 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speeding on major roads • Unsafe for walking and biking | |
| Taxes | 39 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High, given no services except education • High for seniors—want cap • High residential tax burden in general | |
| Old vs. new resident ideas | 31 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomers want change, more urban-style services • Old residents resistant to change, not welcoming | |
| Economy/business | 31 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more community-serving retail and services • Need more business to balance residential taxes • Too much commercial | |
| Lack of community | 28 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of gathering spaces • Lack of community events • Lack of town center • Lack of youth and senior activities | |
| Town services | 25 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited services • Need professional public safety (fire and police) • No need for police • Need public water/sewer | |
| New development | 18 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much development and loss of nature and open space | |
| Nothing | 15 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No complaints | |
| Town government | 12 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of transparency and communication • Politics • Need professional town manager and staff | |
| Housing | 40 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro: Need affordable housing for young families, seniors • Anti: Against low-income housing | |

This was an open answer question. Example comments from respondents:

- > *New residents, trying to make Exeter what it is not.*
- > *There is very little business life. I'm sure there's a way we can keep the small town feel while promoting business growth.*
- > *I do not enjoy the speeding cars on the back roads as well as on 102.*
- > *I think taxes/fees are high considering the lack of services.*
- > *No complaints. I love it here.*
- > *Old thinking that opposes Exeter's ability to adequately manage what it has and opposes any opportunities to grow.*
- > *Lack of social connectivity within town, lack of community events.*
- > *The friction between residents trying to earn a living in Town and those that earn their living outside of town that want the town to be a 'scenic vista' only without the activity and noise that is part of maintaining/creating that scenic vista.*
- > *There is not a lot to do. I can't meet up with friends anywhere.*
- > *Its lack of town center or community center. Also its lack of parks and rec for the children.*
- > *If you weren't born here, many residents think you don't belong here (even if you mostly agree with their ideals).*
- > *No real town center, lack of cohesive local community.*
- > *I am afraid that the taxes will be the deciding factor on whether I can live here after I retire and...that my children will not be able to take over my home because the taxes will be too high for them.*
- > *That so few take an active role in their community.*

- **What “rural” means in Exeter.** To further explore what the idea of “rural” means to Exeter residents, the survey included a question asking respondents to choose five characteristics that make Exeter rural from a list of fourteen common rural descriptors. The top five chosen, in order, are Extensive open space and conservation lands; Quiet; Clean water and environment; Small population; and Agriculture and forestry enterprises. The characteristics at the bottom of the list that respondents did not see as important to Exeter’s rural character were close-knit community; lack of public water and sewer; and lack of a town center.

Fig. 2-2 Survey: What qualities make Exeter rural?



- **What needs to be preserved in the future.** When asked what the most important qualities are to preserve for the future, respondents turned to the same themes, focusing on the overall need to preserve open space, farms, and forests.

Example comments:

- > *Large lot zoning.*
- > *Open spaces, trees, clean water, clean air, wildlife, lack of development.*
- > *Keeping us rural. Letting land owners develop*

solar to produce a modest income and generate more tax revenue for the town without bringing in more people, therefore lowering the tax burden of the residents.

- > Low density, low population, large lots... lack of public water and sewer, open raw undeveloped land and conservation areas....no large attractions or shopping centers, no police station....
- > Agriculture. Limited retail. Excellent schools.
- > ...respecting the history of the town....When you respect and preserve the history of a town, you are preserving and respecting its personality the very thing that gives it character.
- > Ample forested land. Quality school system. Limited industry. Ample farm land. Limited traffic.
- > Low density population, small government, open space and clean water/environment.
- > Beauty, open spaces, quiet, agriculture, low traffic volume, low taxes, low crime



Survey: What to preserve

- **Priority improvements.** Respondents were asked to rank up to five priorities for town improvements from a list of fourteen possibilities (plus a “nothing needed” category). The top choices were 1) routes for safe hiking, walking, or biking; 2) a community center for cultural, recreational, educational, and social activities; 3) road improvements; and 4) senior center. Youth sports facilities, playgrounds, and an outdoor entertainment area, which could be assimilated into the community center priority, ranked as the next two priorities.

Fig. 2-3 Survey: Desired improvements

| PRIORITY IMPROVEMENTS | RANK |
|---|------|
| Trails, paths or routes for safe hiking, walking, or biking | 1 |
| Community center for cultural, recreational, educational, and social activities | 2 |
| Road improvements such as paving | 3 |
| Senior center or senior recreational activities | 4 |
| Youth sports facilities | 5 |
| Playgrounds for children | 6 |
| Outdoor entertainment area | 7 |
| No additional facilities needed | 8 |
| Additional public safety services | 9 |
| Improvements to Town Hall | 10 |
| Local housing authority for low/moderate income families and seniors | 11 |
| Other | 12 |

- **Does Exeter need more local, small-scale businesses?** Throughout the survey, respondents were divided on the question of whether Exeter needs more community-serving commercial development such as stores and restaurants. While most do not want to see typical suburban-style chain commercial development, many respondents are interested in reducing the residential tax burden with more non-residential development. Responses to a survey question on whether Exeter has enough community-serving small businesses were divided. About a quarter said there was no need for more of this type of development, while the majority said that the town does lack sufficient small-scale businesses of this type. However, of those, about half said they were willing to drive for these goods and services.
- **Town government needs better communication.** Seventy percent of respondents would like better communication from Town government. Over half (52%) would like more transparency as well. Only 30% are satisfied with current practice.

- **One thing that Town government can do.**

When asked what one thing Town government could do to improve quality of life, the major themes among the answers were better Town government communication; community-building events, facilities, and places; town recreation; and activities and opportunities for youth and seniors. Respondents also mentioned improved traffic enforcement and specific aspects of tax incentives and discounts. A broader and more general theme was controlling development. Example comments from this open answer question:

- > *Communication with the residents. Listen to their concerns. Involve the stakeholders before making decisions.*
- > *Create a better communication system among the departments and public.*
- > *Promote town meetings better by communicating the issues at hand much more clearly vs attaching the agenda to an email.*
- > *Listen to all constituents with an open mind.*
- > *Better online presence/website for government services.*
- > *More town sponsored events to meet local families and better advertisement of events.*
- > *Community center.*
- > *Plan events, parades – things that bring our small community together.*
- > *Focusing on keeping Exeter just the way it is!*
- > *Keep taxes low.*
- > *Nothing! Everyone is great. Please don't change.*
- > *Create outdoor recreation areas.*
- > *Senior services.*

- **Taxes and small government.** The subjects of taxes and small government came up repeatedly in different contexts in free answer questions and comments. For some respondents, Exeter's small government is a hallmark of a small, rural community and is beneficial to town residents. At the same time, other respondents would like to see more professional, full-time, staff in town government in order to face the challenges of

the future. On the question of taxes, the issue is not simply that taxpayers want the lowest taxes possible. In many cases, respondents expressed the opinion that taxes in Exeter are high considering that the Town provides very few services outside of public education. Some people are concerned that taxes are too high for low-income seniors.

- **Biggest future challenges.** When asked in an open answer question what they thought were the biggest challenges facing Exeter in the future, survey respondents identified a set of interrelated issues about effectively balancing growth while preserving aspects of rural character and providing supports or services to all groups, such as seniors and youth, in the town population. Major themes included:
 - > Manage to balance growth: development pressure, impacts of new development
 - > Solar farm development pressure
 - > Loss of farms and open space
 - > Economy and business development to reduce residential tax burden but keep rural character and taxes "reasonable"
 - > Cost of education, invest in high quality education
 - > Affordability: opportunities for young families and seniors; impacts of affordable housing
 - > Aging population and aging in place
 - > Divided community, community cohesion
 - > Town government capacity to effectively meet challenges

Example comments covered concerns about potential development pressures (including solar farms) and loss of open space; how to have business development that can help support costs, including high-quality public education, without sacrificing character; and questions around both affordability for young families and seniors and the potential impacts of affordable housing developments.

- > *Funding an out of control school district.*

- > *Relying on a predominantly residential tax base and affordable housing.*
 - > *Impossible for new young families to move to town currently.*
 - > *Population growth.*
 - > *Keeping taxes reasonable.*
 - > *Aging population and lack of senior services.*
 - > *Keeping Exeter a quiet, beautiful and semi-rural community while still increasing activity in the community.*
 - > *Solar companies buying the land here because it is cheap.*
 - > *...be future oriented first and listen to what the opportunities might be for Exeter to grow yet retain the country life many folks move here for.*
 - > *Balancing growth with the desire to remain more rural.*
 - > *Balance growth with small town charm. Harder to do than you would think.*
 - > *Reconciling level of services and density with level of taxes.*
 - > *Land is not cheap anymore....the world has changed and we need to be planning based on the world that we live in, not the world that we want....I'm not pro-development and think I want the same thing as everyone else that's pro-rural, but I'm also pro-reality.*
 - > *Population is getting old.*
 - > *We need more services that serve needy.*
 - > *Balancing the need for a larger tax base/rising municipal and school costs with keeping the population and new development in check.*
 - > *Managing change! Including changes in demographics, economic conditions, and the expense of staying rural.*
 - > *Much of the 'open' land is owned by a few. That isn't inherently an issue but if they decide to divide and cash out, the money isn't with widely spaced-out single-family homes and that will drastically change the feel of Exeter.*
 - > *Agriculture sustainability. Farmers need ability to use their land for such things as wind and solar energy to enable them to keep farming.*
 - > *Complexity of governing is too much for town council structure.*
- **Concerns about community and town capacity.** In the free-answer questions, a number of respondents expressed their feelings that Exeter lacks a sense of community. In addition, some respondents think that the current organization of Town government does not provide enough capacity to deal effectively with the challenges of the future. Responses included repeated comments that the Exeter community is divided between long-term and newer residents. Some long-term residents do not want to see changes and feel that newcomers want to change Exeter into a more urban place. They like the fact that in Exeter they can live with a lot of privacy and do not have to interact with others unless they want to. Other residents think that the longer-term residents are not welcoming, resist any changes, and are not realistic about managing the challenges of the future. Example comments from various questions:
 - > *Exeter is a divided community. There are very small and vocal groups on either side of the debate and a large group in the middle who either don't care to engage or don't know how to engage. There is no community center or community event(s) that bring together the sides in a meaningful way to break the ice between them and allow them to interact as a group in a positive manner where they can learn who the people are behind the platform.*
 - > *No one agrees on anything.*
 - > *...very hard to get to know anyone and there is nowhere for kids to go on their own.*
 - > *Lack of positive community*
 - > *Disconnected community*
 - > *Isolated feeling*
 - > *...creating a small "downtown" area would make Exeter feel more like a community rather than just a huge area where you barely know your neighbors.*
 - > *...the Town's ability to effectively manage complex, rapid technological changes occurring*

(solar, wind, batteries, large scale farming, etc.) with part time staff and limited government.

- > *Create a town manager position and stagger town council terms. The council turnover every 2 years and lack of town manager is unsustainable for Exeter to survive into the future.*

E. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AROUND NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

When virtual public meetings of the CPAC were still permitted by state government as part of pandemic policy, the Exeter 2044 team organized two Zoom meetings of the CPAC with invitations to other town leaders and members of the public who had signed up for the website email list.

WealthWorks Meeting

The first meeting was on a holistic approach to rural economic and community development called “WealthWorks.”¹ The goal of this approach is to build community wealth and connect communities with market demand through investing in and developing multiple types of capital, not just money capital. By strengthening and combining these different types of capital—social, political, cultural, built, intellectual, individual, financial, and natural—communities can be more successful in developing long-term economic strength. This discussion was led by Shanna Ratner, who developed this approach over a long career in rural economic and community development in New England, the country, and the world.

The CPAC and members of the public who attended the meeting discussed these types of

capital in Exeter (see Figure 2-3) and suggested ways to strengthen them:

- Conserve more land to avoid sales of large properties for residential development.
- Partner with Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management on forest maintenance.
- Create cooperatives that combine local resources, e.g., an egg cooperative functioning as a social network that combines local knowledge, local wood products.
- Provide information from knowledgeable residents on succession planning to older large landowners who may not have a succession plan for their properties.
- Develop a bike path as a catalyst for recreation.
- Create a program of short presentations at the library from local people on practical or cultural knowledge that they have (from how to take care of a bicycle to native plant gardening, and so on).
- Support having some kind of town center.
- Provide better communication vehicles in town.
- Support developing a community center.
- Create a place for people to meet so they get to know each other as people, not just in potentially confrontational occasions like town financial meeting.
- Promote community-building events like movies or town dinners with food trucks, music, etc.
- Promote farm visits and open houses; farmers market
- Potential interest in the idea of a community fund/trust created by donations
- Community fund raisers
- More efficient use of buildings than currently

Additional information on this meeting can be found in Element 8—*Economic Development*.

¹ *Shanna Ratner, principal of Yellow Wood Associates, developed the WealthWorks approach through a long-term practice in rural communities around the country and the world. The Exeter 2044 team donated a copy of her book, Wealth Creation: A New Framework for Rural Economic and Community Development, to the Exeter Library. Additional information is available at wealthworks.org, including many case studies.*

Natural and Cultural Resources Meeting

The second Zoom meeting focused on Natural Resources and Conservation; Open Space and Recreation; and Historic and Cultural Resources, the three elements of the plan in Part II Natural and Cultural Resources. After a presentation on findings, challenges, and opportunities, as well as draft goals, the participants provided comments and engaged in discussion around the following themes.

Natural Resources

- Include nature tourism resources as well as ecological assets.
- Concerns about potential waterway risks.
- Need better publicity about how to use river resources (where to put in boats, etc.).

Open Space and Recreation

- Availability of school recreational resources outside of school hours can be an issue.
- Reynold's Park needs places to sit, more amenities to encourage use.
- The Town does not need a recreation department.
- Important to identify open space needs and goals ready to apply for funding.
- Trail and blueways maps are needed.
- Interest in more indoor recreational facilities, e.g., basketball.
- Main point—need structure for making facilities available to people

Historic and Cultural Resources

- People take historic resources for granted.
- Simple things such as markers and plaques can raise public awareness.
- Community does not have a strong sense of connection with past.
- Limited other cultural/community life, traditions and gathering places.
- How to have more activities and let people know what's going on.

F. MEETINGS WITH THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

Meetings of the Economic Development Task Force (EDTF) focused primarily on the state-funded study of undeveloped land adjacent to I-95 Exit 14, but there was also general discussion of Exeter's economic development issues and long-term lack of a clear economic strategy.

EDTF members reported that one of the biggest obstacles has been difficulty in developing a consensus. While residents state a preference for "balanced economic development," there is not always agreement on what the specific characteristics of "balanced" development or growth for Exeter would be. There is often little consensus among residents and town leaders on what constitutes acceptable economic development and on the potential environmental impacts of various types of development. The EDTF members also pointed out the small amount of land zoned for commercial and industrial uses, as well as competition from neighboring towns.

Moreover, as the name suggest, the EDTF was created as a temporary committee, and members said that economic development policy has no structured longer-term focus or follow-through when projects get started, no point person in Town government, and lacks a group responsible for moving projects through a pipeline. The group also pointed out that although residents are supportive of farming, agriculture is often financially precarious. Because farmland is typically prime land for real estate development, the price paid for development would be good for the farmer but would not meet the community's desire for preservation of farmland.

G. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CPAC) MEETINGS

The CPAC met 13 times over the course of the planning process. A few initial meetings were held during the pandemic period by Zoom; a few hybrid meetings took place with some participants meeting live and others participating remotely; and, after the State declared that all Town public meetings were to be held in person, the CPAC meetings took place in person. All CPAC meetings were open to the public and provided for public comment.

The topics for the 13 meetings were:

1. Introduction to the comprehensive plan process
2. Review community engagement plan, opportunities for outreach, comments on draft survey and draft mailing
3. Identify priorities and “hard questions.” Members were divided into three groups to discuss their top five priorities for the comprehensive plan.
4. Report on Exeter 2044 survey results; Exeter 2044 presence at the Antique Car show and Fall Festival. Questionnaire for CPAC members on what elements should be included in a Vision Statement for Exeter in 2044. Discussion of how to get new people involved in Town committees. Many participants liked the idea of developing a community center as a way to bring residents together.
5. Draft Vision discussion based on CPAC member identification of important elements and initial draft provided by the consultant; agreement on a working draft.
6. WealthWorks presentation and discussion.
7. Presentation and discussion on Understanding Exeter Today (existing conditions)
8. Review Draft Part II—Natural and Cultural Resources; Element 4—*Natural Resources*

and Conservation; Element 5—*Open Space and Recreation*; Element 6—*Historic and Cultural Resources*

9. Review Draft Part III: Element 7—*Housing*
10. Review Draft Part III: Element 8—*Economic Development*
11. Review Draft Part IV—Town Systems: Element 9—*Transportation*; Element 10—*Facilities/Services/Infrastructure/Communications*
12. Review Draft Part IV—Town Systems: Element 11—*Sustainability, Climate Change, Natural Hazards, and Energy*
13. Review Draft Part V—the Future Town: Element 12—*Land Use; Implementation*. Discuss implementation over the long term.

CPAC PRIORITIES FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

| GROUP 1 | GROUP 2 | GROUP 3 |
|--|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding for the Town 2. Housing and transportation 3. Recreation opportunities 4. Building a sense of community 5. Keeping rural spaces and farming | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintaining farms 2. Promoting business on Rte. 3 3. Not allowing big box stores 4. Promoting a town center 5. Fostering compromise and bringing people together | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having a community center 2. Keeping working forests 3. Maintaining Route 102 as a scenic highway 4. Keeping schools competitive 5. Supporting green development standards—adding additional incentives for new development 6. Keeping Exeter's tax base stable |



CPAC meeting (Source: LBA)

H. AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY LAND OWNERS: SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP

The planning team sent a short survey (by mail and where possible, by email) to 92 property owners in Exeter who are enrolled in the agriculture and forestry programs within the state's Farm, Forest, and Open Space (FFOS) tax-incentive program and to farmers not in

the program who could be identified. (The FFOS owners have to meet criteria for size and production of some revenue from their farm or forest activities. Owners in the open space section of the FFOS program were not contacted because they are not required to meet these criteria.)

Thirty of 92 people responded, for a 33% response rate. Not all respondents replied to all questions.

Exeter Agriculture/Forestry Survey

To better understand issues and conditions facing owners who use their land for agriculture or forestry, the planning team conducted a survey and convened a focus group. This is a summary of what owners said. [More detailed results can be found in Element 8—*Economic Development*.]

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

- **AGE** Of 24 who answered, 45% aged 36–64; 54% aged 65-plus.
- **OWN OR RENT:** 87% own and operate their farm or forest enterprises; the remainder either own and rent, or rent all land.
- **SUCCESSION PLAN** past age 65: Of 11 who answered, 55% yes; 45% no.
- **LABOR FORCE** (including owner): Of 26 who answered, 38% employ 1–2 people; 61% no more than 4; only one had more than 5 or 6 people. (One to two people worked the farm among 38% of respondents.)
- **VARIETY OF PRODUCTS:** About half of respondents raise vegetables, greens, and produce for sale, and a third have animals, from beef cattle to small livestock to poultry/eggs. Forestry operators mostly sell firewood; about a third of respondents say they operate a forestry enterprise only to fulfill FFOS requirements and keep forests healthy.
- **INCOME:** Of 24 who responded, 62.5% receive less than 10% of their income from agriculture, forestry, or value-added products (including 20% who say it's a net loss)

- **ACREAGE:** Of 22 total, 3 have between 500 and 700 (including combined crops, forest, and sod); 3 between 80 and 100; 11 fewer than 80 acres (including partial in Exeter). Includes forest, field crops, hay, vegetables, sod, 1 homestead-only farm.
- **BEST YEAR OF GROSS INCOME:** Of 23 who answered, 38.7% made less than \$5,000; 47.4% made less than \$10,000; and 48% made \$20,000 or more.
- **BEST YEAR OF NET INCOME:** Of 22 who answered, 54% made less than \$5,000; 72% made less than \$10,000; 27% made less than \$20,000.

MARKETING CHANNELS

- Most do not operate a CSA (community-supported agriculture) program; about a third have a farm stand or shop and a third do not.
- Only 2 out of 30 participate in farmers markets; two-thirds don't participate in farmers markets (although that figure includes foresters).
- **Farm fresh RI:** 1 yes; 17 no
- **Sell directly to stores and restaurants:** mostly no
- **Host activities or entertainment:** 60% no
- **Interest in selling value-added products**

► **Example respondent comments to open-answer questions from the survey**

What makes Exeter a good place to operate a farm/forestry enterprise?

- *Small government, farm community, reasonable taxation, less regulation.*
- *People in Exeter seem to support a rural, agricultural way of life.*
- *It's rural enough for some privacy and solitude, but also close enough to cities for easy marketing of products.*
- *Great neighbors, clean water, peace and quiet. Beautiful town, great community, great soil and location.*

How would you define successful farming or forestry?

- *Definition of success for me would be the ability to produce a living wage for myself and my employees through the practice of farming this land—and ability to keep the farm from being sold for development because of inability to be viable as farmland.*
- *Capable of providing financially and spiritually for employers and employees, while operating in a way that will at least sustain if not rejuvenate the natural resources.*
- *Being able to comfortably pay your bills at the end of the day and not always feeling like the wolf is at your door and you are up against the world when you try to do something new or innovative.*
- *Getting products to a viable, consistent market. Make enough in 7 months to survive 5 non-revenue months.*



What are the biggest barriers to success?

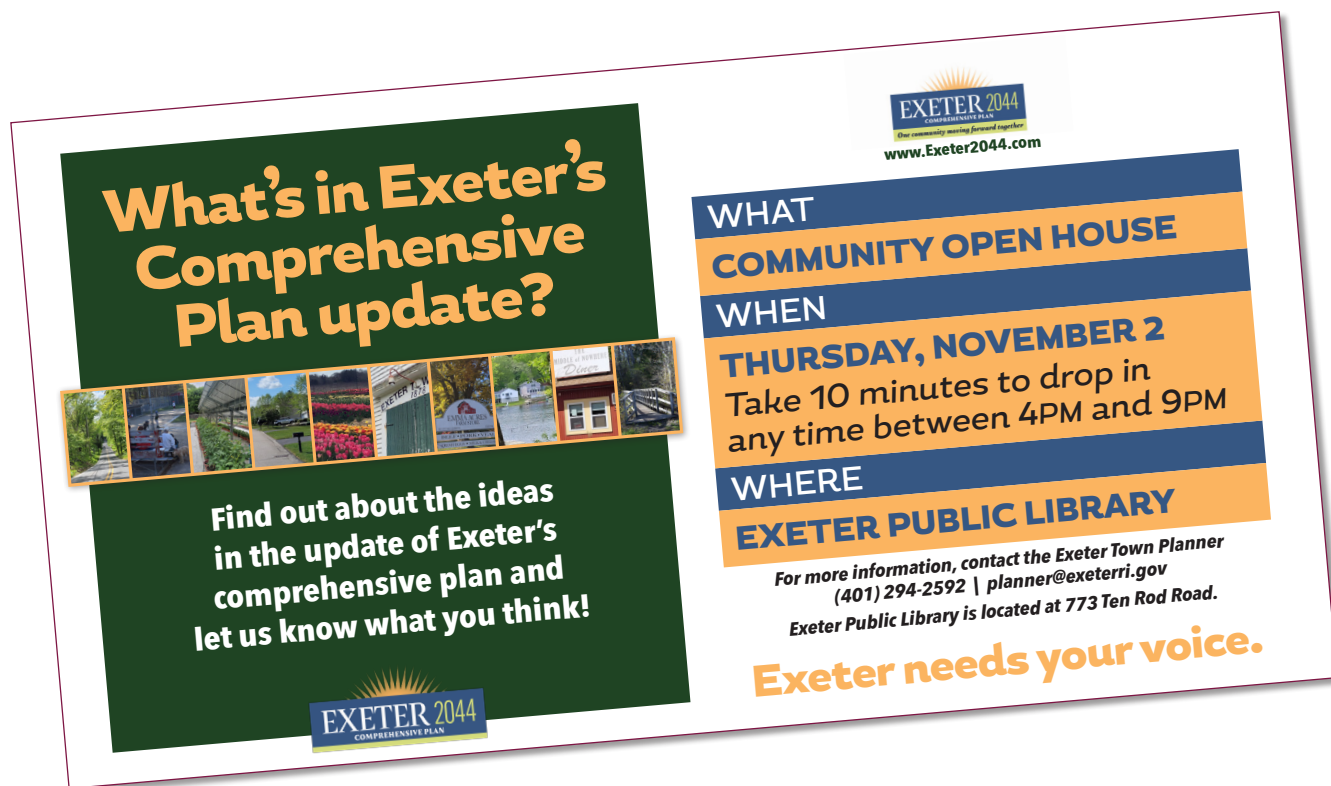
- *Not being able to produce or have activities that will sustain the farm in the future and the cost of taxation of farm buildings. Farm buildings being taxed prevent expansion since taxation affects the cost of materials stored, therefore you produce less due to storage limitations.*
- *Farming and forestry are very expensive occupations, therefore, keeping costs low, like real estate taxes, and regulations reasonable, helps us to reinvest in our properties and activities.*

► What the agricultural focus group said

A small focus group of farmers was convened to discuss the issues they see in Exeter agriculture. Participants appreciated the general community support for farming in Exeter. But...

- **Financial issues and insecurity.** *“I don’t think people realize how difficult it is to be able to continue to function financially.” “We feel like 95% of the public has no idea what goes into trying to run a farm and also the financial difficulties of trying to keep a farm, even an established farm.”*
- **Lack of connections.** *Participants said that the farm community is not strongly connected. Farmers need to come together, help and support each other more, show up at town council meetings to support each other, and so on.*
- **Need to communicate more with the public.** *It is also important to communicate more with the general public.*
- **Other issues**
 - > *Need hayfields to feed livestock. “I don’t like fields and hedgerows disappearing.” “Having to go further out to get hay is hard, and it’s expensive. And then the more fields we lose, the worse it’s going to get.”*
 - > *Hard to find labor for the farms. Many farmers work by themselves or with very little help.*
 - > *Bigger space needed for farmstands*
 - > *Encourage technology use in farms as a way to make them more sustainable. Need more flexibility and individuality in use of solar, for example, look for solutions like keeping the traditional agriculture look at the front of a farm and more solar/tech at back.*





J. COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

Through a townwide mailing, community members were invited to a drop-in open house to find out about the planning directions developed in initial drafts of the plan and participate in an exercise designed to elicit opinions about priorities.

The Open House took place on November 2, 2023, from 4pm to 9pm at the Exeter Public Library Program Room. Every address in Exeter received a mailing about the Open House approximately two weeks in advance; people who had signed up online for email notices about the Exeter 2044 planning process received a reminder about the open house on October 31; and the Town website posted a reminder on November 1.

- Seventy-three participants signed in.
- Each participant was given 10 green and 10 yellow dots to distribute among the items listed on the topic display boards.
 - > **Green [G] = important to the town as a whole**
 - > **Yellow [Y] = important to me/my family.**

Participants therefore had to make some choices about their priorities and think about priorities for the town as a whole and for their individual interests and preferences. Dots could be distributed any way a participant preferred among goals and action items and in number of dots.

- The goals and action items were organized by topics corresponding to comprehensive plan elements. In some cases, there was overlap in content and somewhat different language describing the items, which could attract the interest of participants in different ways.
- The summary below analyzes the results of the dot exercise; it assumes that all 73 participants used all of their dots of each color. Of course, the cutoff numbers of dots are somewhat arbitrary, but this analysis shows areas of relatively high agreement.
 - > High agreement (50%) = 36 or more dots
 - > Agree (25%–50%) = 18–35 dots
 - > Some agreement (10%–24%) = 7–17 dots
- The full list of dots for each item follows the key findings and summary analysis.



Community Open House [Source: LBA]

KEY FINDINGS: OPEN HOUSE

Like the online public opinion survey at the beginning of the Exeter 2044 project, this exercise shows relatively high levels of agreement for two **priorities for the town** (green dots):

- The need to preserve ecological and environmental systems and rural character.
- The idea of pursuing economic development in the Route 3 corridor that would provide more nonresidential tax revenue for the Town.

Personal priorities, reflected in the yellow dots (“important for me and my family”), generally ranged more widely. Some participants may have decided that certain goals or actions are important for the town but, because of their own situations, are less a priority for themselves. Three categories of actions attracted significantly more yellow dots than green dots:

- items related to trails and multi-use routes
- items related to better communication and transparency from Town government

- the need for an economic strategy based on rural assets (i.e., more than a tax-revenue economic development strategy)

More yellow dots (personal priorities) than green dots (town priorities) appeared for these goals:

- *Exeter’s trails for walking, hiking, bicycling, boating, and other recreational activities and facilities are connected and distributed throughout town.*
- *Exeter has multimodal routes for safe walking and biking that connect town destinations.*
- *Upgrade the Town website to be more useful and attractive to Exeter residents, businesses, and visitors.*
- *Develop a program to collect and report town data and town government activities and make the information easily available online, at the Library, and in Town Hall.*
- *Develop a long-term economic strategy for rural assets such as agriculture, forestry, and access to outdoor recreation, that enhances their economic viability and sustainability while contributing to rural character.*

A summary list of key findings appears on the following page, followed by a full listing of all results.



Community Open House [Source: LBA]

Fig 2-4 Summary: Priorities with relatively high levels of agreement, both for the town as a whole and for individuals and their families

| PRIORITY | AGREE FOR THE TOWN | AGREE FOR ME/MY FAMILY |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Exeter maintains the integrity of its ecological systems, including its surface and ground waters, wetlands, forests, fields, and wildlife habitat.</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>Agree</i> |
| <i>Revitalize the Route 3 corridor to serve as an attractive area with a mixture of uses, especially for tax-paying nonresidential development in a gateway to I-95, and a visitor gateway to the Arcadia Management Area.</i> | <i>High</i> | <i>Some agreement</i> |
| <i>Exeter fosters a sense of shared community by cultivating gathering places and events.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>—</i> |
| <i>New residential development is managed to protect drinking water and to promote preservation of environmental connectivity and rural character.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Some agreement</i> |
| <i>Exeter's economy supports rural character.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Some agreement</i> |
| <i>Commercial and light industrial development in appropriate locations in the Route 3 and Route 2 corridors contributes to town financial resources and eases the residential tax burden.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Some agreement</i> |
| <i>Continue to focus commercial and light industrial development in the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors and support improvements that attract higher-value and mixed-use development.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>—</i> |
| <i>Consider options to increase nonresidential tax revenue, such as small to medium-scale warehouse/distribution uses...on undeveloped land adjacent to the I-95 ramp near the Route 102 and Route 3 intersection, avoiding traffic and other impacts on residential areas.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Some agreement</i> |
| <i>Organize and build a new town hall and a community center as a gathering place for indoor activities and recreation.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Some agreement</i> |
| <i>Land use regulations are used to protect water quality, prevent flooding, maintain farms and forests, and preserve environmentally sensitive lands in connected networks.</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> |
| <i>Exeter's trails for walking, hiking, bicycling, boating, and other recreational activities and facilities are connected and distributed throughout town.</i> | <i>Some agreement</i> | <i>Agree</i> |

FULL LISTING OF DOT EXERCISE RESULTS

Fig 2-5 ALL RESPONSES for Natural Resources & Conservation; Open Space & Recreation; Historic & Cultural Resources

| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
|---|------|-----------|
| <i>Exeter maintains the integrity of its ecological systems, including its surface and ground waters, wetlands, forests, fields, and wildlife habitat.</i> | 39 | 34 |
| <i>Exeter protects and stewards its surface and groundwater resources and maintains the excellent quality of its water supply.</i> | 26 | 16 |
| <i>Exeter's trails for walking, hiking, bicycling, boating, and other recreational activities and facilities are connected and distributed throughout town.</i> | 14 | 25 |
| <i>Exeter protects and celebrates the historic sites and structures that embody the town's history.</i> | 16 | 10 |
| <i>Exeter protects and celebrates its heritage landscapes—the network of historic roads, farms, and sites of former mills and villages that give it rural character and sense of place.</i> | 14 | 8 |
| <i>Exeter fosters a sense of shared community by cultivating gathering places and events.</i> | 21 | 6 |
| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
| <i>Focus conservation efforts to identify and protect areas of high ecological value, such as the most important forests and unique wildlife habitat, cold water streams, groundwater aquifers/recharge areas, and the integrity of the Wood/Pawcatuck watershed (Rhode Island's only federally-designated Wild and Scenic River).</i> | 6 | 8 |
| <i>Focus conservation efforts to prioritize connecting ecological resources, rather than preserving isolated resources.</i> | 5 | 6 |
| <i>Adopt best practices in landscape management and maintenance of environmental resources on both private and public land.</i> | 11 | 4 |
| <i>Create an open space and recreation plan that consolidates information, goals, and actions for land conservation and outdoor recreation in Exeter.</i> | 9 | 8 |
| <i>Support historic preservation through a non-regulatory program of partnerships with community members, such as by designating the Exeter Historical Association to lead a historic resources program with an annual budget from the Town, as well as external grants, fee-based historic plaques and markers, and other funding sources.</i> | 4 | 4 |
| <i>Work with landowners to identify, protect and maintain historic walls, trees, views, and other aspects of the historic landscape.</i> | 10 | 12 |
| <i>Create a dedicated location and upgraded space for Exeter's Old Town Hall, such as a proposed Municipal Center in the Library area, where historic documents and artifacts could be displayed and archived.</i> | 8 | 9 |
| <i>Promote and expand events and activities for community gathering such as parades, festivals, music and movie nights, races, community farm dinners, and so on.</i> | 14 | 14 |

Fig 2-6 ALL RESPONSES for Housing; Economic Development

| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
|---|-------------|------------------|
| <i>New residential development is managed to protect drinking water and to promote preservation of environmental connectivity and rural character.</i> | 25 | 11 |
| <i>Exeter has a range of quality housing choices to meet the needs of households at all income levels and stages of the life cycle.</i> | 17 | 7 |
| <i>Exeter takes proactive measures to advance development of a village center connected to a transfer of development rights program to preserve rural lands and with access to drinking water from the Ladd Center system.</i> | 8 | 6 |
| <i>Exeter's economy supports rural character.</i> | 19 | 17 |
| <i>Commercial and light industrial development in appropriate locations in the Route 3 and Route 2 corridors contributes to town financial resources and eases the residential tax burden.</i> | 27 | 11 |
| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
| <i>Encourage new subdivisions to use zoning tools that result in preservation of open space, environmental resources, and connectivity, such as conservation subdivision development, updating ordinances and standards as needed.</i> | 6 | 8 |
| <i>Continue to support affordable housing development to achieve and maintain Exeter's recent achievement of the state goal of 10% affordable units, providing housing opportunities for income-eligible and elderly residents.</i> | 5 | 6 |
| <i>Communicate with large land owners about options to preserve rural character and open space.</i> | 11 | 4 |
| <i>Establish a permanent role for economic development coordination and guidance in town government, such as an Economic Development Commission and a coordinator to develop a business inventory and engagement program with local businesses.</i> | 9 | 8 |
| <i>Develop a long-term economic strategy for rural assets, such as agriculture, forestry, and access to outdoor recreation, that enhance their economic viability and sustainability while contributing to rural character.</i> | 4 | 4 |
| <i>Continue to focus commercial and light industrial development in the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors and support improvements that attract higher value and mixed use development</i> | 10 | 12 |
| <i>Research and recruit innovative and online business types for the commercial corridors that would have limited impacts on residential areas.</i> | 8 | 9 |
| <i>Consider options for increasing non-residential tax revenue, such as small- to medium-scale warehouse/distribution uses described in a state-funded study of development constraints and market opportunities on undeveloped land adjacent to the I-95 ramp near the Route 102 and Route a3 location, avoiding traffic and other impacts on residential areas.</i> | 14 | 14 |

Fig 2-7 ALL RESPONSES for Transportation; Facilities/Services/Infrastructure

| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
|---|-------------|------------------|
| <i>Exeter has well-maintained and cost-effective road management.</i> | 39 | 34 |
| <i>Exeter has multimodal routes for safe walking and biking that connect town destinations.</i> | 26 | 16 |
| <i>Exeter protects the character of Scenic Roads.</i> | 14 | 25 |
| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
| <i>Create a pavement-management system to make road maintenance more cost effective.</i> | 5 | 7 |
| <i>Support a traffic-calming program to manage speeding and test options with pilot projects.</i> | 6 | 5 |
| <i>Seek opportunities to integrate safe walking and biking facilities into road maintenance projects, where appropriate.</i> | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Protect the scenic resources of Route 102 and any future designated Scenic Roads with development standards for properties along the road.</i> | 13 | 3 |
| <i>Organize and build a new town hall and a community center as a gathering place for indoor activities and recreation.</i> | 18 | 15 |
| <i>Use stormwater best practices in all Town projects and promote stormwater best practices for public and private property owners.</i> | 4 | 0 |
| <i>Enhance collaboration between the Town and the Volunteer Fire Departments to plan for future public safety needs.</i> | 7 | 3 |
| <i>Upgrade the Town website to be more useful and attractive to Exeter residents, businesses, and visitors.</i> | 4 | 14 |
| <i>Develop a program to collect and report Town data and Town government activities and make the information easily available online, at the Library, and in Town Hall.</i> | 1 | 13 |
| <i>Create a GIS-linked asset-management system for Town-owned assets and implement it over time, starting with pavement management and the new Town Hall project.</i> | 2 | 1 |

Fig 2-8 ALL RESPONSES for Sustainability/Climate Resilience/Energy

| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
|---|-------------|------------------|
| <i>Exeter is reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</i> | 7 | 4 |
| <i>Exeter has a Municipal Resilience Plan to prepare for climate-change impacts.</i> | 10 | 3 |
| <i>Exeter maintains an updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and provides public information about risk mitigation.</i> | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Exeter considers a community electricity aggregation program as a way to provide lower electricity costs and offer renewable energy sources.</i> | 8 | 10 |
| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
| <i>Secure a basic greenhouse gas inventory for municipal and community-wide emissions using EPA tools or URI assistance.</i> | 2 | 0 |
| <i>Request a free energy audit of municipal facilities from RI Energy and incorporate energy efficiency and renewable energy into design and construction of new facilities such as a new town hall and a community center.</i> | 3 | 1 |
| <i>Install a public EV-charging station at the Library.</i> | 10 | 2 |
| <i>Encourage and promote energy efficiency and use of renewable energy by residents and businesses, including free energy-efficiency audit programs, incentives, and rebates.</i> | 1 | 10 |
| <i>Apply for and participate in the state's Municipal Resilience Program, a community-based program to identify climate-change-related priority projects, thereby becoming eligible for state funding of priority projects.</i> | 2 | 0 |
| <i>Evaluate the seven-town community electricity-aggregation program (which includes South Kingstown) for possible benefits to Exeter.</i> | 5 | 2 |
| <i>Update and implement the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan regularly and keep it in force and the town eligible for grants and disaster funding.</i> | 7 | 0 |
| <i>Raise public awareness about hazards and risk mitigation by providing information in addition to the hurricane planning guide, such as wildfire risk mitigation.</i> | 3 | 1 |
| <i>Update land-use regulations if needed for additional safety and risk management.</i> | 2 | 0 |

Fig 2-9 ALL RESPONSES for Land Use

| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
|--|-------------|------------------|
| <i>Land use regulations are used to protect water quality, prevent flooding, maintain farms and forests, and preserve environmentally sensitive lands in connected networks.</i> | 39 | 34 |
| <i>Planned districts can support more density to provide balanced housing, economic development, or community services.</i> | 26 | 16 |
| <i>Revitalize the Route 3 corridor to serve as an attractive area with a mixture of uses, especially for tax-paying nonresidential development in a gateway to I-95, and a visitor gateway to the Arcadia Management Area.</i> | | |
| <i>The Exeter zoning ordinance is user-friendly, functional, and organized according to modern standards.</i> | 14 | 25 |
| GOAL | TOWN | ME/FAMILY |
| <i>Continue to maintain low-density residential development and use conservation development and residential compounds to minimize impacts on water quality. Promote open space protection in major subdivision design by updating conservation subdivision and rural compound ordinances as needed.</i> | 10 | 2 |
| <i>Consider establishing an Onsite Wastewater Management Plan (OWMP), linking rules for siting/maintaining septic systems and land use regulations. With an OWMP the Town can apply for state funds to assist property owners in septic system repairs/upgrades.</i> | 3 | 2 |
| <i>Continue to support land use policies and ordinances that provide space for agricultural and forestry uses.</i> | 12 | 1 |
| <i>Update or create Special Planned Districts (SPD) with associated master plans to accommodate special uses that can benefit the town while protecting the overall preferred rural character in most of the Town. SPDs would include:</i> | 13 | 3 |
| ▶ <i>Municipal Center Master Plan: add new town hall and community center to Library area</i> | 11 | 5 |
| ▶ <i>Ladd Center Joint State-Town Master Plan: including access to water system, affordable housing, and public hearings to review State proposals for this state-owned area</i> | 6 | 2 |
| ▶ <i>Route 3 Corridor Revitalization Master Plan: I-95 access economic development uses, a mid-corridor mixed-use visitor hub as a gateway to the Arcadia Management Area, and improved road conditions including bicycle and pedestrian facilities</i> | 9 | 2 |
| ▶ <i>Route 2 Corridor South Master Plan: compatible with village center plan</i> | 5 | 2 |
| ▶ <i>Yawgoo Ski and Water Park Master Plan: work with owners on a plan to keep this important recreational area viable in the future</i> | 9 | 16 |
| <i>Rewrite the zoning ordinance to be consistent with state law, reflect contemporary best practices in administration and user-friendliness, and to be consistent with the comprehensive plan.</i> | 8 | 3 |

K. ONLINE PUBLIC REVIEW

The Draft Comprehensive Plan was posted on Exeter2044.com for public review between February 7 to March 4. There was a third public



mailing, plus emails to the email list, and other outreach efforts. A hard copy of the plan was made available in the Library.

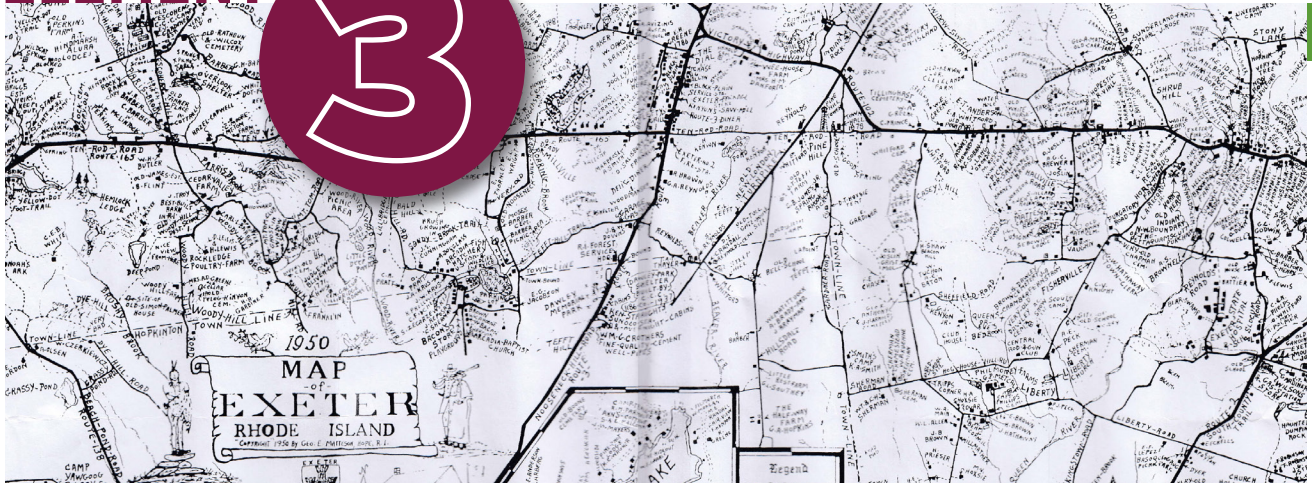
The Plan appeared on the website in two parts: Part I (Executive Summary, Elements 1-7) and Part II (Elements 8-13). Commenters added their reactions directly to the documents, and comments were visible to all commenters.

- Part I: 946 total views; 154 total comments
- Part II: 398 total views; 26 total comments

A matrix of the comments was prepared for the Planning Board and the Town Council.

L. ADOPTION PUBLIC HEARING

A joint Town Council/Planning Board public hearing took place at the Wawaloam School on March 11, 2024. After a summary presentation on the Draft Plan, the Planning Board and Town Council opened the hearing for public comment and then discussed questions and concerns. On March 13, the Planning Board approved four amendments. On April 2, the Town Council held a Special Meeting and approved the Exeter 2044 Comprehensive Plan, subject to completion of amendments approved by the Planning Board, the Town Planner, and the Town Council.



Understanding Exeter Today

By many measures, the Town of Exeter has remained the most rural community in one of the most urbanized states in the country. About 35% of the town's acreage is conservation land owned by the State or conservation nonprofits. Another 39% of the town is privately owned land that is enrolled in a state tax incentive program for agriculture, forestry, or open space. These conditions have preserved some of Rhode Island's most exceptional natural and water resources and landscape character.

Working farms and forest enterprises still exist in Exeter. In 1977 Exeter was the last town in Rhode Island to pass a zoning ordinance, and today it has no public water or sewer service and retains minimal local government with limited public services. Exeter's rural identity has long been very important to residents for whom the main markers of this identity are the extensive open space and conservation lands, quiet atmosphere, clean water and environment, small population, and the continued existence of agriculture and forestry

activities. However, Exeter today also exhibits some less rural characteristics and its natural and environmental resources are experiencing threats.

- **Early agriculture and rural industry.** The town's early economy was based on agriculture and then small industry, but population loss and decline of village life set in by the mid-nineteenth century. Over time, this rural society was increasingly replaced by conventional residential development.

- **Suburban-style development.** Exeter participated in the twentieth century suburban expansion after World War II, growing 223% in population between 1950 (population 1,870) and 2000 (population 6,045), with more modest growth since 2000. This residential growth was characterized by suburban-style single-family housing on large lots, where most residents do not depend on rural economic activities for their incomes and instead commute to jobs in urban areas. Those conditions are characteristic of much Exeter residential development today.
- **No historic town center.** Unlike many rural towns, Exeter has no historic town center, and, at the turn of the twenty-first century, many Exeter residents began to worry about residential development pressure and its potential impact on rural character. The Town's 2004 Comprehensive Plan recommended creating mixed-use village centers or districts, and by 2011 the Town had gone through a two-phase process of evaluating potential locations and preparing zoning with the idea of directing new development to a mixed-use center combined with preservation of rural lands through a Transfer of Development

A NOTE ON THE DATA

U.S. Census Bureau population data

In most planning projects, the US Census Bureau is the primary source of demographic, social, housing, and economic data.

There are two types of census data, the decennial census of the entire population and estimates made by the American Community Survey (ACS), and the differences can be significant for communities with small populations. This is why some exact data numbers will vary according to which datasets are used by a source.

- The **decennial census** is a count of population based on the idea of “usual residence” on April 1, with congressional districting as the primary purpose. The latest release is 2020, which faced challenges with impacts of COVID-19 and new privacy methodologies. Before 2010, the decennial census was taken using a “Short Form” with a limited number of questions and a “Long Form” sent to a sample of the population with questions on social, housing, and economic characteristics. Since the 2010 census, there has been no Long Form in the decennial census. All households receive a short questionnaire to fill out for all members of the household. The questions on the 2020 census form asked for name, gender, race, ethnicity, date of birth (for age), housing tenure (own or rent), relationship to the person filling in the form for the household, and whether a person in the household “usually lives” somewhere else (including a seasonal or second home). The results of the 2020 census are the most recent census data based on an attempt at an actual count of residents as of April 1, 2020.
- The **American Community Survey (ACS)** is a continuous monthly survey collected since 2005 and designed to measure changing demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the population, replacing the old Long Form surveys. The Census Bureau mails questionnaires about these characteristics to approximately 300,000 addresses across the country every month,

Rights program.¹ This was one of the most significant ways that Exeter implemented the recommendations of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, but the village concept has not attracted investment from developers.

- **Persistent planning issues.** Today, Exeter residents remain interested in the potential of a village district—both to direct potential development and to provide some variety in housing types, small business options, and community gathering spaces within a walkable environment. Some other concerns persist from the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, such as the desire to moderate the residential tax burden, as well as differences of opinion

¹ *2011 A Vision for Exeter Plan (Phase II Final Report, December 2011)*

about whether the town should provide more services, but new issues have also emerged 20 years later. These include the financial viability of farm and forest businesses, new forms of agriculture, Exeter’s role in the twenty-first-century resilience economy of renewable energy and natural resource preservation, high housing costs as part of the state housing crisis, municipal government capacity to meet new challenges, and the need for more communication, cohesion, and sense of identity among community members. Moreover, Exeter’s relatively high proportion of households with people 60-plus years old (now 51% of all households, in contrast to 42% statewide) highlights the need to plan for the future.

a sample designed for good geographic coverage. The sample sizes are smaller than the old Census Long Form samples. Unlike the April 1 count in the decennial census, the ACS uses a “current residence” rule in which people interviewed for the survey expect to be at the sample housing unit for at least two months. Results from the ACS are issued annually and in three-year and five-year average compilations. For communities with small populations like Exeter, the ACS samples mean that many data values have large margins of error because they are imputed from data in other communities.

- **Data in this Comprehensive Plan** reflects the 2020 decennial census count for the categories in the 2020 census form when available. For other data, the Plan uses the 2015-2019 ACS Five-Year Average data. It is regarded as more reliable for planning purposes than later five-year compilations because of the disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Census Bureau–Longitudinal Employer–Household Dynamics–On The Map:** This data provides commuter-flow information for

residents and workers. The latest release is from 2019.

- **Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages:** This is detailed industry data on jobs by county and larger geographies, available annually, quarterly, and monthly, with 2021 the latest release.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture:** This data source provides information every five years on farms and agricultural production by county; the latest release is from 2017.

Data interpretation

- Exeter’s small population and relatively few jobs means the underlying sample sizes are small and have large margins of error. It is important to use caution in analyzing the data, especially across several groups.
- Some economic data is only available at the county level: It is still useful to provide economic context and the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for Exeter’s residents, workers, employers, and businesses.

Exeter at a Glance

Planning for our future in 2044 means understanding where we are today.



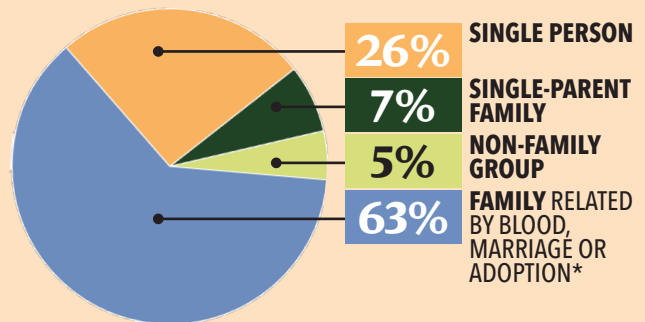
WHO WE ARE

Demographics

OVERVIEW

- Small, low-density population
- From the 2020 census:
 - > 6,460 residents
 - > 2,293 households
 - > 2.78 average people per household
- **Race:** 93% white, non-Hispanic
- **Median age:** 41 years
 - > **17.6%:** population under 18 years old (statewide: 19%)
 - > **18.9%:** population 65 years and older (statewide: 18%)
 - > **23.1%:** households with people under 18 (statewide: 33%)
 - > **50.7%:** households with people 60 and older (statewide: 42.3%)
- **Education:** 50% of residents aged 24 to 64 hold a **bachelor's degree or higher** (statewide: 35%)

HOUSEHOLD TYPES

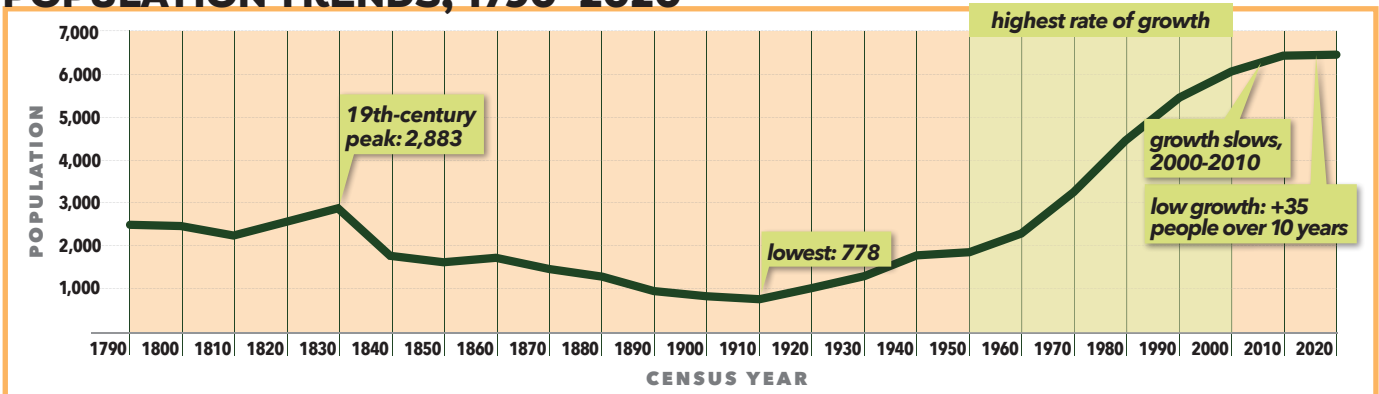


* Family households may or may not include children.

INCOME

- **Median household income** (2020 estimate): **\$83,750** (statewide income, 2020 estimate: \$70,305)
- 26% of households make **\$50,000 or less**
- 25% of households make **\$150,000 or more**

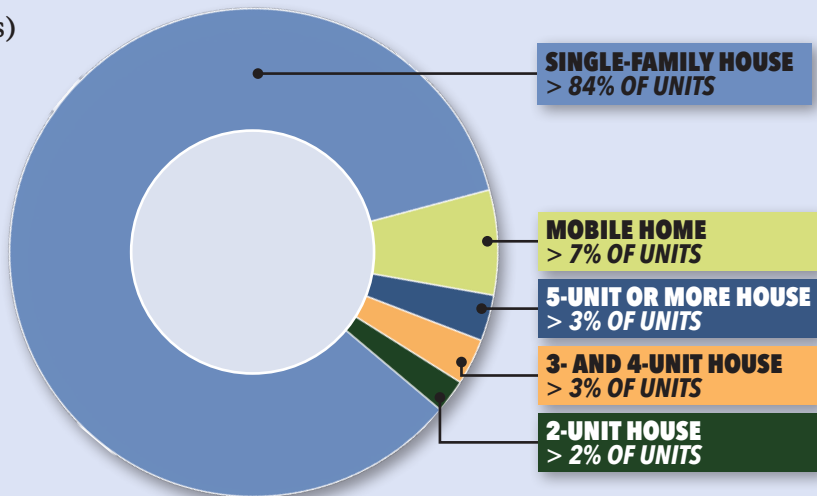
POPULATION TRENDS, 1790-2020



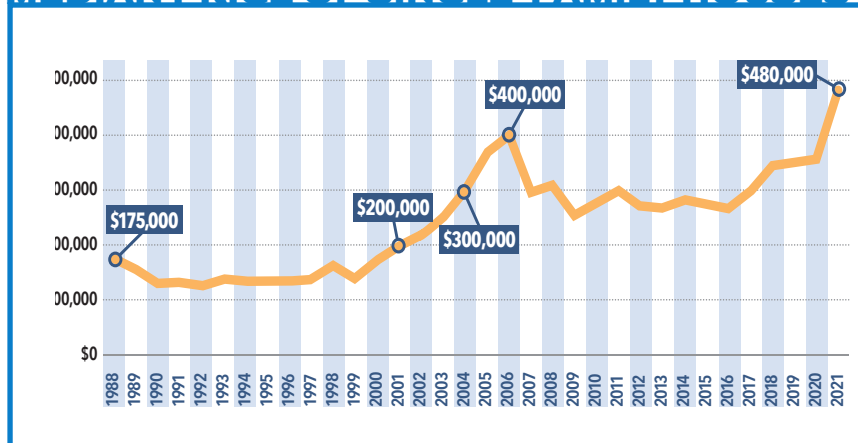
HOW WE LIVE Housing

HOUSING STOCK

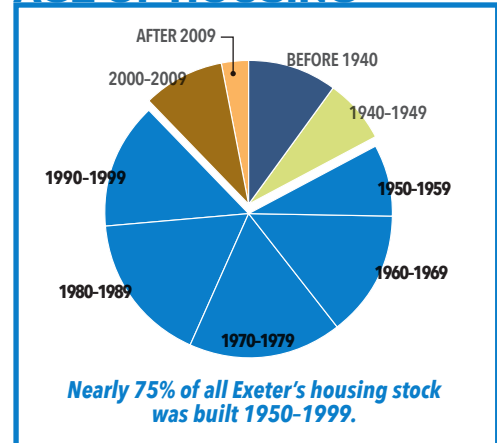
- **2,647 housing units** (2020 Census)
- Median **age** of housing: 42 years
- **Owner-occupied** housing: 83%
- 33% of households **pay more than 30% of income** for housing.
- 9% of households **pay more than 50% of income** for housing.
- Median **house value** in 2022: \$537,800
- 7.28% of housing qualifies as **affordable** under RI's Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act (R.I. Gen. Laws 45-53) as of 2023.



MEDIAN PRICE OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSES



AGE OF HOUSING

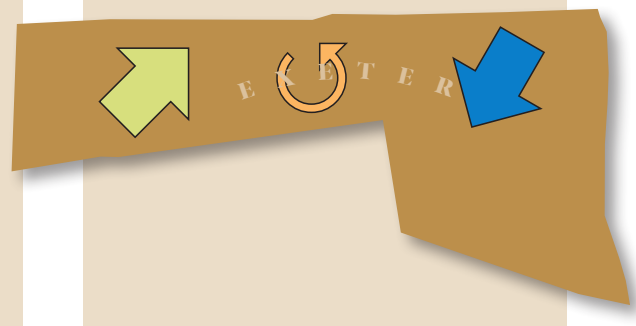


HOW WE LIVE Economy

HOW WE MAKE A LIVING

- Exeter has **small agricultural and business sectors** and functions primarily as a bedroom community.
- About **1,500 private-sector jobs** are located in town; 88% are held by people who live outside of Exeter.
- The **average annual wage** for private-sector jobs is about \$45,000.
- The Town's 2022 tax rolls contain **252 business enterprise** owners.
- The vast majority of residents who are employed **work outside of town**.
- The **average commute** is 25.5 minutes.
- There are about **twenty small commercial farms**, of which three are certified organic.

PRIVATE-SECTOR JOBS FLOW



GREEN SYSTEMS

ENVIRONMENT, OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

Exeter is recognized for its high-quality environmental resources

- Exeter has more than **13,500 acres of protected land**, which represents about 35% of all town land.
- **Three-fourths of the protected land is managed by the State**; conservation groups such as The Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society manage most of the remainder.
- A majority of the town's protected open space is **publicly accessible**.
- Groundwater meets the state's two highest grades for **water quality**. The highest-



quality areas account for one-third of all groundwater.

- The **Wood River** is designated as “wild” and the **Queen and Beaver rivers** are designated as “scenic.”
- The Wood River, Queen River, and the eastern segment of Beach Pond and Tippencasett Pond have been designated by the state as **Special Resource Protection Waters**.
- 12 state-identified lakes, ponds, or reservoirs and 30 state-identified rivers or streams.



- Approximately one-sixth of town is **wetlands**.
- A majority of land is an **upland forest** mix of conifers and deciduous trees.
- 19 **Natural Heritage Areas** indicate sites where noteworthy, rare or threatened species have been observed.



- **Agricultural soils** include state-designated “prime agricultural soils” or soils of “statewide importance.”
- About 39% of land—266 parcels—is enrolled in the state's **Farms, Forests and Open Space program**, which provides tax incentives for owners to maintain property as farms, forests, or open space. Most owners don't depend on these resources for their income.
- **Nature recreation** includes hunting, fishing, boating, and about 60 miles of trails. The town maintains sports fields at Reynolds Field and Wawaloam School and a playground at Chelsea Park.



LAND USE Development

DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS & TRENDS

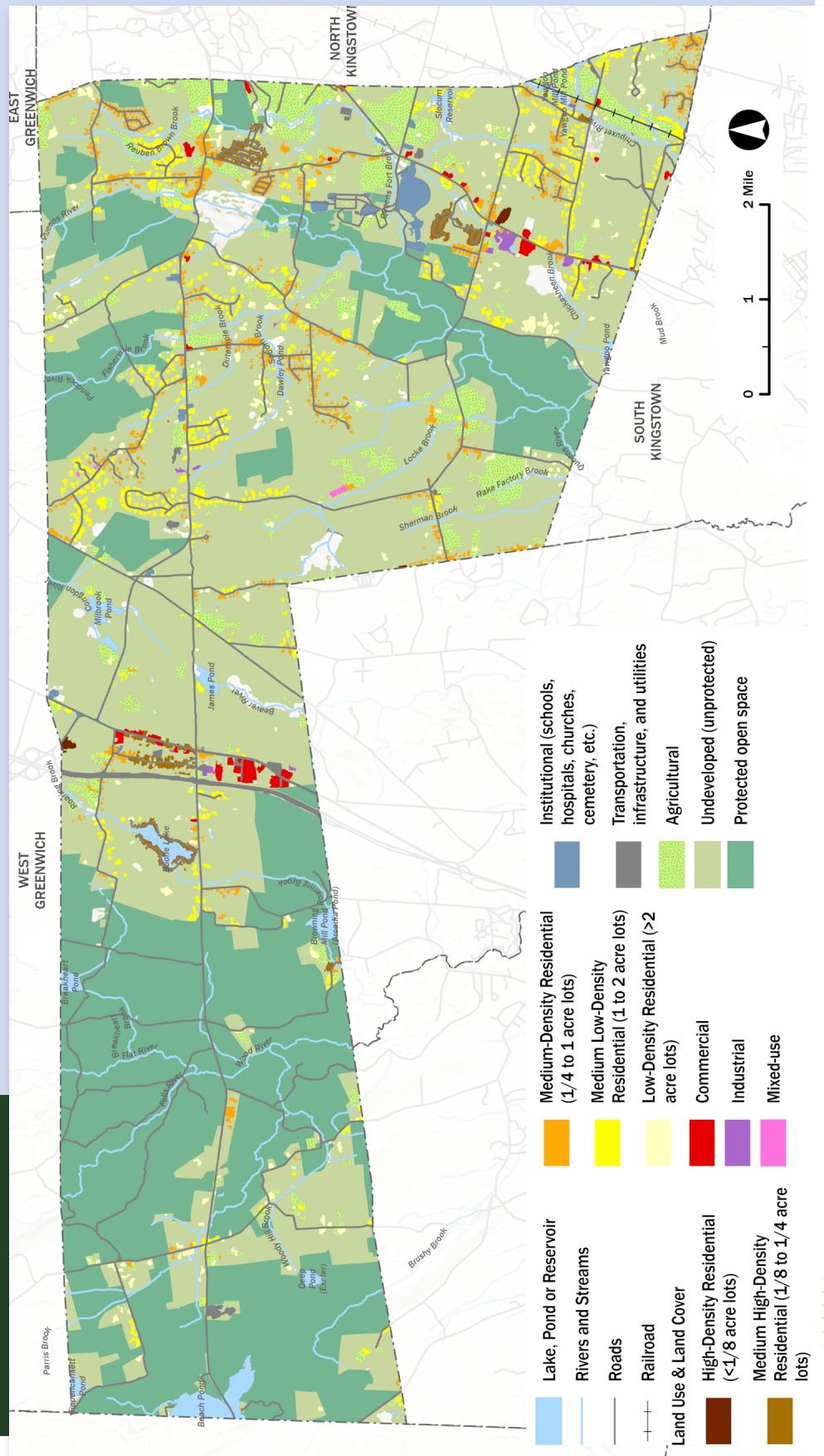
- Development in Exeter is mostly **low-density residential** scattered throughout town, particularly east of I-95. Most land west of the interstate is state conservation land.
- Exeter has **no town center**. In the early 19th century, several hamlets grew up around small industrial mills, but most of the mills went out of business by mid-century and the hamlets disappeared, except for some place names.
- Concerns about residential development pressure led to creation of a **2009 vision plan for a mixed-use town center** and adoption of appropriate zoning. However, the concept has yet to attract developer interest.
- **Residential development** since 2010 has been modest compared to the previous 20 years.

EXETER 2044 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

One community moving forward together

AT A GLANCE DATA SOURCES:

Census Bureau: Decennial Census; 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates; 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates; 2019 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics—On The Map | **Banker & Tradesman**—the Warren Group | **Policymap.com.** | **BestPlaces.net**



A. HISTORY, GROWTH, AND DEVELOPMENT

- Exeter has a rich history stretching back to before the arrival of European colonists.
- In addition to agriculture established in the colonial period, during the nineteenth century Exeter had eight villages built around early industrial mills making textiles, nails, and other goods, as well as buildings for workers' housing, taverns, shops, a bank, and a hotel.
- Loss of economic competitiveness over the course of the nineteenth century resulted in population decline and eventual disappearance of villages except for their place names.
- Exeter today preserves many landscape characteristics from a century ago, but it has also been shaped by large-lot suburban-style residential development patterns established in the post-World War II period of the twentieth century.

Native American and colonial history

Exeter plays a significant role in Native American and colonial history and local place names reflect that Native American heritage. Archaeological evidence indicates that southern New England was first inhabited by ancestors of Algonquian-speaking people at least 10,500 years ago.² In the last 2,500 years, during the Woodland archaeological period, Native Americans established more extensive farming practices, planting what many northeast Native groups refer to as the three sisters—corn, beans, and squash—while continuing to hunt and fish along rivers and streams.³ Prior to English colonization, Narragansett people lived

throughout Rhode Island in small villages of about 500 people and moved between summer homes on the coast and winter homes further inland. Evidence of a Narragansett winter camp has been found along the upper Wood River,⁴ and an older site is along Parris Brook.⁵

Exeter Hill is the site of the Narragansett settlement Aspanansuck. Today, three stones commemorate Aspanansuck along an embankment of Ten Rod Road near the junction with South Road. The stones pay tribute to the seventeenth-century Narragansett leaders Miantonomi and his wife Wawaloam, the namesake of Wawaloam Elementary School.⁶

Smallpox killed about 700 Narragansett in 1633, three years before Roger Williams arrived in Narragansett lands and disease took the lives of an even greater portion of their Wampanoag neighbors.⁷ The Narragansett sachem Canonicus provided land that Williams named Providence, and precipitated a complex relationship of alliances and hostilities between the Narragansett and the English, as well as with other neighboring Native groups.⁸

In 1675, the Wampanoag sachem Metacomet, whom the English called King Philip, declared war on the English. Following the Great Swamp Massacre at the hands of the United Colonies military, the Narragansett and Niantic peoples, who lived to the south and west, joined in fighting the colonists in King Philip's War. During the war, the Niantic "Queen" Quaiapen led her people to refuge in a stone fort, known as the Queen's Fort, that had been built by the Narragansett stone mason Stonewall John.⁹ In

⁴ *Wood-Pawcatuck Wild & Scenic Study Committee. 2018. p. 46.*

⁵ *US National Park Service. 2022a.*

⁶ *Exeter Historical Association and Borden, Gary. 2015; Simister, Florence P. 1978. p. 90.*

⁷ *New England Historical Society. 2022. Citing Cook, S.F. 1976; and Steckel, R.H. & Rose, J.C. eds. 2005.*

⁸ *Spears, Loren. No date.*

⁹ *Simister, Florence P. 1978. p. 87.*

² *Luedtke, Barbara E. 1985. p. 284; Hoffman, Curtiss R. E. 1990. p.34-35*

³ *US National Park Service. 2022; National Geographic Society. 2022. US Department of Agriculture. 2022.*

1676, she was killed by the colonists as she fled north, signaling the end of the war. Today, the Queen River refers to her legacy.¹⁰

Following King Philip's War, Narragansett and Niantic people who were not killed or enslaved retreated to forest and swamplands, near what would become the present-day Narragansett Indian Tribal Reservation in Charlestown, RI.¹¹ Many Native Americans who survived the war were subjected to religious and cultural re-education efforts by colonists and, later, the US federal government.¹² Some Narragansett-Niantic left the area, though others have remained in Rhode Island. In the twentieth century the Narragansett leader Princess Red Wing worked to regain visibility and autonomy for the tribe and helped establish the Tomaquag Museum, located in Exeter since 1969. In 1983, the Narragansett Tribal Nation received federal acknowledgment and recognition, and the Tribe continues to cultivate traditional practices, such as making wampum beads, belts, and jewelry, and host an annual August Meeting Powwow that is open to the public.¹³ The Tomaquag Museum is moving in 2024 to a new site on the University of Rhode Island campus.

Establishment of the Town of Exeter

As colonial settlement spread across Rhode Island, English families established farms and mills on land that would become Exeter. As early as 1680, the Wing family settled near Boone Pond, and from 1690 to 1725 families from Connecticut and elsewhere established small farms in the west, while others from the port of Wickford settled in the east. Settlers used Native American foot paths as cart paths, and around 1703 farmers expanded on paths connecting Connecticut to Wickford to create Ten Rod Road. The road was named for its broad width, to accommodate

herders taking livestock to market.¹⁴ By 1740, about 1,000 people lived in the area, still part of North Kingstown at that time. In 1742, with permission from the English Crown, settlers established the township of Exeter, named after the city in southwest England.

Farmers in Exeter grew corn, rye, and oats and established dairy farms,¹⁵ and the town continued to grow during the Revolutionary War, perhaps in part due to colonial interest in moving away from coastal towns occupied by the British.¹⁶ Along Ten Rod Road, the West Exeter Baptist Church was built in 1753, and the first schoolhouse was built in eastern Exeter in 1776. Other historic properties from this period include farmhouses, primarily in western Exeter, such as the Sheldon House on Austin Farm Road and the Lillibridge House, now called Johnnycake Acres, on Summit Road.¹⁷

By the early 1800s, Pine Hill was the center of government in Exeter.¹⁸ This village hosted the seat of the old Town Bank, between 1833 and 1865, a post office, built in 1840, and the old Town Hall, built in 1878 at the present site of Wawaloam Elementary School, where the town council continued to meet until switching to the present Town Hall along Ten Rod Road in the 1960s.¹⁹

Slavery in Exeter and Rhode Island

During the eighteenth century, between the end of King Philip's War and the Revolutionary War, large plantations were worked by slave labor in Washington County, including the area that would become Exeter. The "Narragansett Planters" owned large properties by New England standards and provided food for sugar plantations in the Caribbean that they shipped by

¹⁰ Kirakosian, Katharine and Tomaquag Museum. No date; Spears, Loren. No date.

¹¹ Narragansett Indian Nation. 2018.

¹² Spears, Loren. No date.

¹³ Spears, Loren. No date. Mach, Stephanie. 2017; Wampum-Trail.wordpress.com. No date.

¹⁴ RI Historical Preservation Commission. 1976; Simister, Florence P. 1978. p. 83.

¹⁵ Exeter Historical Association, no date

¹⁶ Simister, Florence P. 1978. p. 26.

¹⁷ RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, 1976.

¹⁸ Simister, Florence P. 1978. p. 85; Exeter Comprehensive Plan. 2004.

¹⁹ Exeter Comprehensive Plan, 2004; Simister, Florence P. 1978. p. 41

Ten Rod Road and the port at Wickford. By 1730, the county population was one-third Black.²⁰ Washington County, to which Exeter belongs, had a larger proportion of enslaved people than any other Rhode Island county.²¹ Slavery was legal in Rhode Island until 1842 and included both Native Americans and Africans brought by the transatlantic slave trade, in which Rhode Island merchants and ships played a significant role.²² The first captive Africans arrived in Rhode Island in 1696, and by 1755, people of African descent made up 11.5% of the total Rhode Island population, a greater proportion than any other New England colony.²³ Evidence of slavery in Exeter exists in cemeteries such as at the Judge Crandall House and near Lewis City, in western Exeter.²⁴

While Rhode Island's Gradual Emancipation Act of 1784 attempted to limit slavery, the institution existed in the state until 1842. Many Black men gained their freedom by serving as soldiers in the Revolutionary War, and Black men gained the right to vote in Rhode Island until the new state constitution outlawed slavery in 1842. State law banned segregation in public schools in 1866. Over the course of this time, enslaved and free Blacks in Rhode Island introduced traditions rooted in West Africa to the region, and civic activity by groups such as the African Free Union Society in Providence worked to expand democratic values in the state.²⁵

Mills and villages

Rhode Island was an industrial pioneer. Exeter's early grist and sawmills of the eighteenth century grew to include textile mills and factories in the first half of the nineteenth century. Mills

provided power for cotton manufacturing and a woolen factory, a clothier's works, a nail factory, a flannel mill, a denim mill, and more grist and sawmills. Villages and hamlets sprang up around the mills to house and supply workers with goods and services such as general stores, blacksmith shops, taverns, inns, schools, a library, a bank, and churches. Exeter came to have at least eight villages, including Arcadia, Millville, Austin, Lawtonville, Hallville, Fisherville, Exeter Village, and Liberty.²⁶ With village growth and the addition of the 1815 New London Turnpike running north-south, Exeter's population tripled to nearly 3,000 by 1830.²⁷

The village of Lawtonville is an example of this early growth and transformation. Located west of Exeter Hill on Ten Rod Road, it included a blacksmith shop, paint shop, carriage factory, goods store, and a hotel. A 1795 snuff mill became a cotton mill in 1825, and later converted again to a warp (thread) mill, then to a gristmill, and finally to a sawmill. Hallville was also a locally important mill village that changed over time. A gristmill was built there in the late eighteenth century and a series of textile mills went into operation in the early nineteenth century, including the well-known Boss Rake Factory, destroyed by fire in the 1870s. A short distance from Hallville, the village of Fisherville at one time had a warp factory, later converted to a flannel mill. A post office was built there in 1850. Evidence of other milling villages can be found in the west, in Millville, south of Boone Lake, and in the southeast, by Yorker Mill Pond.

Twentieth-century transitions

Despite early manufacturing activity, Exeter's population declined after peaking in 1830. With the advent of the railroad in 1837, New England agriculture had difficulty competing with more productive farms in the Midwest.²⁸ By 1900,

²⁰ Paul Davis, "Plantations in the North," <https://stories.usatodaynetwork.com/slaveryinrhodeisland/plantations-in-the-north-the-narragansett-planters/site/providencejournal.com/>

²¹ Simister, Florence P, 1978. p. 81.

²² Melish, Joanne P, no date.

²³ Melish, Joanne P, no date.

²⁴ Simister, Florence P, 1978. p. 81-82; *Exeter Comprehensive Plan*. 2004.

²⁵ Melish, Joanne P, no date.

²⁶ *RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, 1976 Exeter Comprehensive Plan, 2004; US Census, 2022.*

²⁷ *Exeter Comprehensive Plan, 2004; Simister, Florence P, 1978, p. 84.*

manufacturing had coalesced in the nearby urban centers of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and other cities with greater populations that could support larger work forces. Exeter's farms and mills were slowly abandoned, and many of the stores and shops that defined the village centers were closed or converted to other uses. By the 1930s, Exeter's mix of agriculture and rural milling was practically gone.²⁹

Over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, growth resumed in Exeter, predominantly in the form of large-lot residences, as the construction of state and interstate highways allowed Exeter residents to work in nearby cities. However, despite the addition of a few commercial areas such as the Oak Harbor Shopping Center, recreational facilities such as the Exeter Country Club and Yawgoo Valley Ski and Water Park, and public institutions such as the public library, re-established in 2004, Exeter's nineteenth-century villages and hamlets had effectively disappeared by the late twentieth century except for their names on the map.

²⁹ *Exeter Comprehensive Plan, 2004.*

B. POPULATION TRENDS

- The decline of agriculture and small industry in the nineteenth century resulted in depopulation of Exeter. In the twentieth century, population grew primarily through large-lot development as Exeter became a bedroom community for residents who work outside of Exeter.
- Exeter population growth has been modest in the last decade after a half-century of more rapid growth. However, the number of housing units is still growing faster than population.
- Exeter residents are relatively well-educated and affluent compared to the State as a whole, but the town also includes low-income populations without post-secondary education.

Total population

As noted earlier, Exeter's total population grew during the early national period of agricultural and industrial expansion but declined precipitously during most of the rest of the nineteenth century as many farmers decamped for the Midwest and small mills and factories could not compete with urban industry. In the twentieth century, total population expanded significantly between 1950 and 2000, but growth has been very modest since 2010.

- The Town established an ordinance in 2002 to control residential growth by limiting the number of new residential building permits in relation to the number of seats available within the Exeter-West Greenwich School District and providing for a public facilities impact fee. There are some exceptions to this ordinance, for example, in relation to affordable housing projects. As of 2023, there have never been enough building permit applications to trigger the Growth Management ordinance.

- The 2020 Census population was 6,460. Between 2010 and 2020, Exeter's population grew by only 35 people or 0.5% in ten years. The number of housing units, however, grew by 136 or 5.4%.

Fig 3-1 Exeter Population Growth

| CENSUS | POPULATION | CHANGE |
|--------|------------|--------|
| 1790 | 2,495 | -- |
| 1800 | 2,476 | -0.8% |
| 1810 | 2,256 | -8.9% |
| 1820 | 2,581 | 14.40% |
| 1830 | 2,883 | 11.70% |
| 1840 | 1,776 | -38.4% |
| 1850 | 1,634 | -8.0% |
| 1860 | 1,741 | 6.50% |
| 1870 | 1,462 | -16.0% |
| 1880 | 1,310 | -10.4% |
| 1890 | 964 | -26.4% |
| 1900 | 841 | -12.8% |
| 1910 | 778 | -7.5% |
| 1920 | 1,033 | 32.80% |
| 1930 | 1,314 | 27.20% |
| 1940 | 1,790 | 36.20% |
| 1950 | 1,870 | 4.50% |
| 1960 | 2,298 | 22.90% |
| 1970 | 3,245 | 41.20% |
| 1980 | 4,453 | 37.20% |
| 1990 | 5,461 | 22.60% |
| 2000 | 6,045 | 10.70% |
| 2010 | 6,425 | 6.30% |
| 2020 | 6,460 | 0.50% |

SOURCE: US DECENNIAL CENSUS

Population density

Because so much of the land in Exeter is conservation land, particularly in the western part of the town, it is interesting to understand the population density overall and in terms of the land that does not include permanently protected land. The density numbers below are based on the 2020 Census enumerations.

- Total population is 6,460 persons. The town's total land area is 57.45 square miles. Total land minus protected land (20.45 square miles) is 37.00 square miles.
- Population per square mile of total land: 112.44 people
- Population per square mile of total land minus protected land: 174.59 people

For comparison, the population density based on total land area of Richmond is 198 people per square mile and the population of West Greenwich is 129 people per square mile.

The low-density character of Exeter also reflects the fact that the Town provides no water or wastewater services.

Age composition

Exeter's age composition is very similar to Washington County's as a whole; compared to the state it has a smaller proportion of households including people under 18 years old and a larger proportion of households including people 60 years old and above. As would be expected for a community with few jobs and relatively expensive housing, it has a small percentage of young adults (18-34 years), who are going to college, starting careers, and forming families, and skews somewhat older than the state as a whole. The median age is 41 years.

- 17.6%: population under 18 years old (statewide: 19%)
- 18.9%: population 65 years and older (statewide: 18%)
- 23.1%: households with people under 18 (statewide: 33%)
- 50.7%: households with people 60 and older: (statewide: 42.3%)

Race and ethnic composition

An estimated 93% of the population in Exeter is White, non-Hispanic; 1% identified as Black non-Hispanic; 6% other non-Hispanic; and less than 1% Hispanic.

Number of households and average persons per household

The 6,460 residents counted in the 2020 census lived in 2,293 households, resulting in an average of 2.78 persons per household, somewhat above the average for the state as a whole.

Household types

The Census Bureau divides household types into family and non-family households. Family households include persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption. (They may or may not have children living at home, since married couples are classified as family households.) All other households are non-family households. Compared to the state as a whole and Washington County, Exeter has a significantly higher percentage of married-couple family households and a much lower percentage of single-parent households.

- 70% of all Exeter households are family households (7% of all households are single-parent households). This compares to 62% family households statewide (19% of all households statewide are single parent households).
- 63% of Exeter's households are married-couple family households (with or without children at home)—20 percentage points higher than the state as a whole.
- 25% of all households are non-family single-person households (compared to 32% statewide).
- 5% of all households are non-family group households (compared to 7% statewide).³⁰

Educational attainment

Exeter residents are significantly more educated than residents statewide. Fifty percent of residents aged 24 to 64 hold a bachelor's degree or higher (statewide: 35%) Only 5% of Exeter residents have less than a high school diploma, while 21% ended their educations with a high school diploma.³¹

³⁰ US Census Bureau, *American Community Survey (ACS) 2015-2019 5 Year Estimates*.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Income and poverty status

Estimated median household income in Exeter before the pandemic was \$85,000 annually (compared to \$64,000 statewide), with a poverty rate of 5%, compared to a statewide rate of 13%. (Median household income means half of households have higher incomes and half have lower incomes.) In 2019, 25% of Exeter households were estimated to have annual incomes of over \$150,000, with 16% receiving more than \$200,000 annually. At the other end of the income scale, 26% of households received \$50,000 or less in annual income.³²

Public school population

The Exeter-West Greenwich School District as a whole has seen a decline in enrollment since the late 1990s. Between the 1998-99 school year and the 2019-20 school year, the district lost 403 students or 21%, like all but three school districts in Rhode Island.³³

As of October 2, 2022, Exeter students made up 48.81% (799 students) of the total enrollment of students (1,637 students) in the Exeter-West Greenwich schools. This total is somewhat higher than the total anticipated for 2022-23 in the district's most recent projected student enrollment. Total annual enrollment for the years 2022-2031 is projected to be approximately 1,400 students, which would result in 683 students from Exeter, based on the 2022 percentage. In 2021, there were 14 home-schooled students in the entire district (that is, students from both Exeter and West Greenwich); 34 in charter, magnet or other choice schools; 25 special education students in other schools; and 22 students who are non-residents but pay tuition or otherwise are "choiced-in."

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *I Viz RI*, "RI School District Enrollment Shift Since 1998," <https://ivizri.com/posts/2020/02/ri-school-enrollment-shift-1998/>

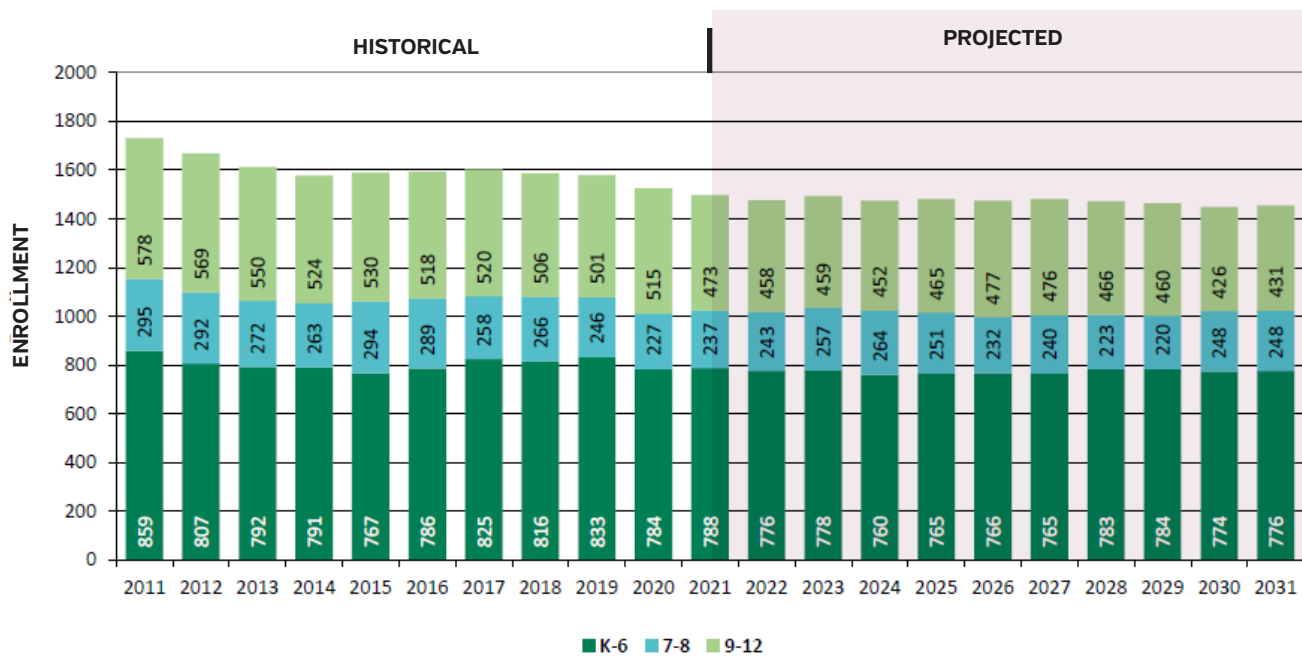


Fig. 3-2 Historical and Projected Enrollment Levels in the Exeter-West Greenwich School District (Source: Exeter-West Greenwich School District; analysis by New England School Development Council)

Recent population trends and population projections

As noted above, 2020 census data indicate very modest population growth in Exeter since the 2010 census. The Rhode Island State Planning Office in 2013 created population projections for the state and every municipality for every five years to 2040, starting with the 2010 census enumeration. The report projected that negative net migration would result in very low or negative growth statewide through 2020, a return to growth due to higher net migration through the 2030s, and then a decline in state population because of an increase in the older population. City and town population projections “were extrapolated mathematically from historic trends and then fitted to the statewide total. In other words, the city and town extrapolations were all adjusted by the same factor so that they would add to the statewide projection produced through the cohort component model.”³⁴ However, the projection fell short of actual population numbers in 2020 for the state as a whole and for most municipalities in the state. The 2020

statewide population was 48,000 greater than projected earlier, and 32 out of Rhode Island’s municipalities had a higher population in 2020 than projected (though in some cases by a small amount).

- **Exeter was one of the seven municipalities that grew less than projected between 2010 and 2020.** Interestingly, the seven towns whose population did not grow as much as projected included four other small-population, more rural towns at the western edge of the state: Foster, Richmond, West Greenwich and Hopkinton. (The other two are Charlestown and South Kingstown.) Exeter was projected to have 347 more people in 2020 than in 2010, when in fact the town population had net growth of 35 persons in the 2010-2020 decade (0.5%). Whether this very modest population growth will continue to characterize Exeter depends on a variety of conditions, such as the wider state and regional economic and migration context, and the real estate market in terms of costs and housing preferences.

³⁴ *Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, Rhode Island Population Projections Summary Tables, April 2013;; Rhode Island Population Projections 2010-2040, Technical Paper 162. (www.planning.ri.gov)*

- **2040 population and housing unit projections.** Under existing zoning and continuing modest average growth, Exeter's total population in 2040 is projected to be approximately 7,500 to 7,600 people. The state's 20-year projection to 2040 resulted in a total Exeter population of 7,624. At the 2020 average household size of 2.78 people per household, this would require 431 housing units over 20 years added at an average of 21 units per year.³⁵ Between 2011 and 2021, Exeter averaged somewhat fewer new units: 19 new housing units per year (11 new single-family houses and 8 multifamily units, including affordable units). Continuing that rate of average new housing units would result in 380 new units over 20 years. At 2.78 people per household, that would bring 1,056 additional people to Exeter, for a projected total in 2040 of 7,516 residents, 108 fewer than the state's projection.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

C. LAND USE TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

- During the decade 2010-2020, the number of housing units in Exeter grew 5.4%, ten times faster than population, which rose by 0.5%.
- More than one-third of Exeter land is permanently protected from development, much of it west of I-95.
- Private land uses are predominantly single-family residential within a matrix of forest and some agriculture and pasture.
- Residential development patterns include small-lot residential in a few locations; large-lot residential; a limited number of small multifamily structures, condominiums, and mobile home parks; and very large properties with residential uses. Forestry and agricultural enterprises are located adjacent to home lots.
- As of 2023, RI Housing finds that 7.28% of total housing units in Exeter meet the 10% goal for towns found in the RI Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act.
- Exeter has very limited community-serving retail and services, predominantly located, along with some office and other commercial uses and light industrial uses, along or near Exeter's major arterials, Routes 2 and 3.
- There is no town center, although zoning was adopted in 2012 to enable creation of a mixed-use town center linked to a Transfer of Development Rights program.

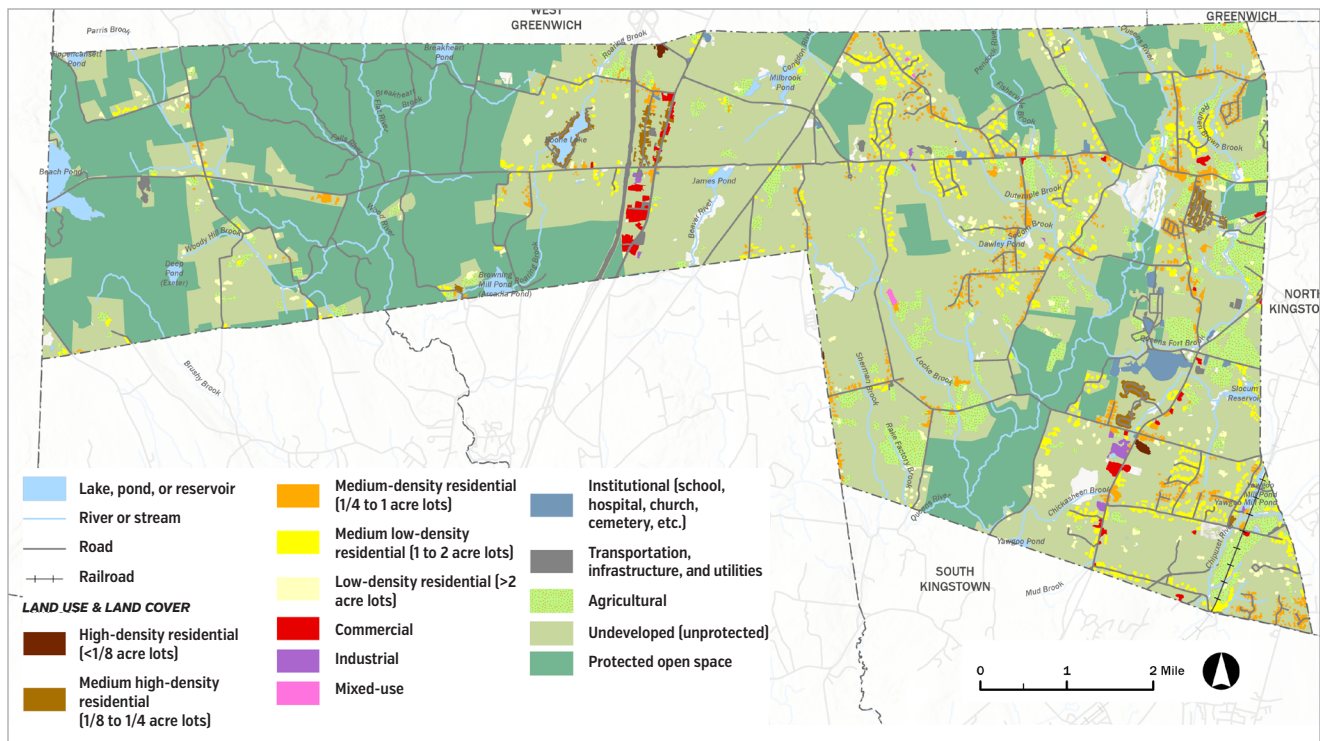


Fig. 3-3 Existing Land Use. (Source: Dodson & Flinker mapping of data from Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP)

Land use

Land use is not permanent and can change over time. For example, in its nearly three centuries of history, the same Exeter parcel may have had agricultural, forestry, mill industry, commercial, or residential uses.

- **Conservation land.** The town has more than 13,500 acres of conservation land protected from development, representing 35% of all Exeter land. Eighty percent of the protected land is managed by the State; conservation

groups such as The Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, and a few land trusts manage most of the remainder.

- **Tax-incentive land program for forestry, farming, and open space.** More than 14,000 additional acres are enrolled in a tax-incentive program designed to encourage keeping land in open space, forestry or agriculture uses. Forestry and farm lands in the program are required to have management plans.

Fig. 3-4 Summary of Land Uses in Exeter, 2022

| LAND USE | TOTAL PARCELS | TOTAL ACRES | VACANT DEVELOPABLE ACRES | VACANT DEVELOPABLE ACRES |
|---|---------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| All Uses | 3,199 | 36,455.7 | 358 | 1,689.0 |
| Residential | 2,625 | 7,822.5 | 337 | 1,520.9 |
| Commercial | 109 | 855.0 | 15 | 104.6 |
| Industrial (including Utility) | 25 | 265.4 | 6 | 63.5 |
| Exempt: Government, Conservation, Cemetery, Church, Charitable | 174 | 13,229.5 | — | — |
| Special: Farm, Forest, and Open Space* | 267 | 14,300 | — | — |

* Land enrolled in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Tax-Incentive Program does not include all lands used for agriculture or forestry.

SOURCE: EXETER ASSESSOR'S DATA

- **Residential land uses.** The majority of the rest of the land in Exeter is in residential uses. Residentially-zoned land also permits agriculture and a few other uses. During the decade 2010-2020, the number of housing units grew ten times faster (5.4%) than the number of people in the town (0.5%), a condition often viewed as an indicator of sprawl development, although this condition is mitigated in Exeter by the overall limited scale of development and addition of affordable housing.
- **Business land uses.** There are few commercial and industrial uses in Exeter, most located in small areas in the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors. Although some residents would like to see more small-scale, community-serving businesses, they also make it clear that they do not want suburban-style strip development or big box stores.

Current land use issues

Seven major land use issues are under discussion with significant potential effects in the 20-year future of this comprehensive plan.

- **Siting of solar farms and “dual solar” installations.** In January 2020, Rhode Island set a goal of meeting 100% of electricity demand with renewable energy by 2030. While sustainability principles promote siting solar on already disturbed land, market considerations have produced rural installations that sometimes result in clear cutting of woodlands. Solar farm siting is a controversial issue in rural areas throughout New England. In 2023, the state legislature passed a law that limits installation of ground-mounted solar in “core forest” areas, which are defined in the statute. Another aspect of renewable energy policy and land uses is the use of solar energy by farm enterprises (“dual solar”) to improve the financial viability of farming in high-cost New England environments. Article XI of the Exeter Zoning Ordinance regulates solar energy installations of different sizes in terms of location, design and construction, operation, and impacts on resources and character within the town.
- **Controlled Environment Agriculture.** The proposal for a large Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) greenhouse on the Schartner Farms property has been controversial. In 2023, the town amended the zoning ordinance to allow for CEA operations in limited locations and at different scales, with standards, environmental and lighting protections, and, for the largest operations, a program of annual payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) to go into a fund to benefit town improvements.
- **The future of agriculture and forestry.** Exeter still has a number of property-owners who practice some level of forestry or agriculture, though generally not as their major source of income. Although many residents like the idea of having farm and forestry enterprises in Exeter, they do not receive any income from them and are often unaware of the economic fragility of farming and forestry enterprises in Exeter.
- **The future destiny of large parcels of land.** There remain significant properties composed of hundreds of acres in Exeter. In many cases, a generational change in ownership is likely to occur in the next few decades. The comprehensive plan must give consideration to how these changes may affect the character of Exeter and how the Town can work with property owners to preserve the resources and landscapes valued by most people in Exeter.
- **Housing affordability.** As in the rest of Rhode Island, housing in Exeter has become increasingly expensive. Some residents are concerned that young families and senior citizens in particular are being priced out. HousingWorks RI estimates that it takes an annual household income of nearly \$123,000 to buy a median-priced home without spending more than 30% of income on housing. The few condominiums in town are priced similarly to single-family homes.

- **Potential development impacts.** The pace of development over the last decade has been slow, but residents still worry about development impacts on the environment and the character of the town. Between 2010 and 2020, 136 housing units were added in town, for a total of 2,647, while the population grew by only 35 residents (approximately 12 households, based on average household size).
- **New State policies intended to promote housing production, along with other statewide land-use policy changes.** The 2023 legislative session resulted in new laws on zoning, comprehensive planning, subdivisions, and affordable housing. Municipalities must make their zoning ordinances consistent with these State laws by January 1, 2024.

D. THE BIG PICTURE: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS (SWOT)

Strengths

Environmental resources

- Very high-quality natural resources: extensive forest lands, clean and protected surface water and groundwater resources, core habitat for wildlife, and nature recreation areas. One-third of the town's total land is conservation land belonging to the State or to high-capacity private conservation nonprofit organizations.

Rural characteristics

- Nearly 40% of total land area is private land enrolled in the state's FFOS tax-incentive program.
- The Town has functioning agriculture and forestry sectors, including some successful and innovative operators.
- Preservation of rural landscapes and vistas that are relatively rare in Rhode

Island because of these characteristics.

- Residents are strongly invested in the idea of Exeter's rural character, values, and identity.

Institutions

- Good public school system.
- The Public Library functions well as a center of community for those who use its services.
- Active volunteer fire departments.
- Active historical association.

Individual and household resources

- Residents tend to have strong resources and skills on the individual and household level, as the majority are well-educated and have good incomes in comparison to state averages.

Weaknesses

Reactive approach to change

- Small government with two-year election cycle; small, mostly part-time staff; and high dependence on volunteers.
- Limited municipal services, with most of tax revenue going to the school system.

Land use model

- Residential development model tends to be large-lot suburban-style small subdivisions that, over time, could reduce the open-space character of the town.
- No long-term proactive strategies for future land uses, changing conditions, and challenges.
- Dependence on the State for management of most of the protected land.
- Lack of open space/environmental strategy and conservation commission.

Weak sense of community and social bonds

- Lack of both official and unofficial community gathering spaces. Even the transfer station is only used by half of the town's households. Without villages or a town center, there are no "third places" (like

the former Blueberry Hill Country Store).

- Weak sense of community.
- Few effective communication vehicles exist to keep people informed.
- Inadequate Town website compared to similar communities.
- Low-density, geographically dispersed housing means that people are oriented to different neighboring towns depending on where they live.
- Newer residents say that the town is not welcoming and it's hard to get to know people.

Economy

- Very limited area and few commercial and light industrial businesses to serve community needs and to provide non-residential tax revenue.
- No areas with public services to attract business (except State water at the Ladd Center Area).
- No agreement on economic goals or implementation strategy.
- High land costs and economic insecurity of traditional agriculture and forestry.

Opportunities

Identity

- Focus identity on being a resilient and innovative rural community that contributes to state policy goals through conservation, agriculture, forestry, and other rural pursuits—rather than being more identified as a suburban bedroom community.
- Revive and create new community institutions and gathering places, inviting participation by younger and newer residents.
- Recruit people to be in charge of implementing strategies for high-priority goals, e.g., village/town center, Route 3 economic development, recruiting younger residents to become active in town affairs.

Village or town center

- Pursue and attract desired development through discussion with potential developers to find out what incentives are needed, e.g., grant-funded water and wastewater system design.

Housing diversity

- Pursuit of town center or village development to provide more housing diversity in type and cost.
- Pursue partnerships with nonprofit developers to achieve and maintain the 10% affordable housing goal.
- Include affordable and senior housing as part of the Ladd Center Area Master Plan.

Economy and non-residential development

- Create a plan and pursue/promote nonresidential development and redevelopment at the I-95 Exit 14 area and in the Route 3 corridor.
- Support viability of the agricultural and forestry economy.
- Pursue visitor attractions consistent with the innovative rural community identity.
- Recruit natural recreation and rural enterprises.

Ladd Center Area Master Plan in partnership with state government

- Work with state government to establish a master plan for the area that can ultimately benefit Exeter.

Threats

Fragmentation of large properties

- Land in the tax-incentive program for preserving Farm, Forest, and Open Space can easily be developed.
- Potential fragmentation of large farm and forest properties into house lots.

Economic viability of farm and forest enterprises

- Potential for decline in agriculture and forestry—with land replaced by house lots.

Generational transition

- In the next 20 years, Exeter will need new leadership. Town government is very dependent on volunteers, many of whom are aging. It has been increasingly difficult to attract volunteers to serve—for example, the Conservation Commission has been without members for years. New methods to invite volunteers are necessary.

- Town staff are dedicated but also aging, and the majority work part time. The Town has to prepare to find new staff.
- Over the next 20 years, there is likely to be a generational transition in the ownership of large parcels of rural land with base zoning that allows large-lot residential development.

Environment and climate change

- Climate change impacts will increasingly affect Exeter and its natural resources, from warming streams to wildfire risk.
- Potential continued deterioration of forest health through inadequate private and public management.

Capacity to manage change

- Small government and government resources may prove insufficient to achieve goals.

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Natural Resources & Conservation

Exeter has a wealth of natural resources with high ecological integrity, helping to provide safe drinking water supply to support the existing population and future growth. Exeter's groundwater and surface water is vulnerable to contamination by on-site waste water disposal, land uses that use or store hazardous materials, inappropriate development density, soil erosion and stormwater. Exeter must continue to establish and continually assess appropriate policies and regulations for land uses and densities to protect and maintain natural resources, particularly surface and ground water.

A. NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE EXETER 2044 VISION

...Residents cherish its forests, fields, and wildlife, streams and ponds, historic places, and the conservation lands and working lands—farms and forests—that anchor the town’s rural character...We protect environmentally sensitive places, wildlife corridors, and our clean water sources...We contribute to sustainability and climate-change resilience and a transition to renewable energy by fostering excellent ecosystem management, adapting to extreme weather events.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|--|--|
| 4.1 Exeter maintains the integrity of its ecological systems, including its surface and ground waters, wetlands, forests, fields, and wildlife habitat. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus conservation efforts to identify and protect areas of high ecological value, such as the most important forests and unique wildlife habitat (as defined by RI DEM and the RI Forest Commission), Conservation Opportunity Areas (as defined by the RI DEM Wildlife Action Plan), cold-water streams, groundwater aquifers/recharge areas, and the integrity of the Wood/Pawcatuck watershed, Rhode Island’s only federally-designated Wild and Scenic River. • Focus conservation efforts to prioritize connecting ecological systems, rather than preserving isolated resources. • Support conservation efforts by dedicating funding and administrative capacity toward conservation recommendations. • Promote best practices within local regulations in natural resource management by working with state and regional partners and coordinating efforts with neighboring municipalities to ensure large-scale, long-term results. • Guide and support the preservation of open space and key natural resources during the process of land subdivision and development by continuing to use conservation development and refining the use of transfer of development rights, which can be a source to match state and federal funds for land preservation • Maintain density and development to stay below an impervious-cover threshold of 10% townwide to avoid contamination of water quality—for example, clustering development using conservation and village development to reduce townwide impervious cover. |

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|---|---|
| 4.2 Exeter protects and stewards its groundwater resources and maintains the excellent quality of its water supply. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the implementation of policies to control erosion and sedimentation at development sites and to limit development in hydric and seasonal-high-water-table soils. • Encourage best practices in stormwater management, such as using green infrastructure and preserving as much open space as practical in new development to limit contamination of stormwater runoff. • Support additional performance standards in the zoning ordinance and land development regulations to protect potable groundwater resources. • Work in partnership with developers to guide growth away from sensitive areas. Assess existing town regulations to achieve state stormwater-permit mandates. • Support implementation of Exeter's Groundwater Protection Overlay District to limit or prohibit land uses that have potential to contaminate surface or groundwater and to limit the removal of outwash materials in aquifers. |
| 4.3 Exeter's residents and businesses support and participate in townwide efforts to protect the town's natural resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue public outreach and education that supports environmental protection. • Support and encourage active citizen involvement in care and maintenance of Exeter's natural resources. • Dedicate annual resources to matching open space grants for natural resources conservation. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Survey respondents highly valued Exeter's forests and wildlife as part of what makes the town unique and contributes to their quality of life. What respondents like most about living and working in Exeter included:

- *The peace and quiet, nature, wildlife, and privacy. Raw, undeveloped land around me houses so many species of plants and wildlife and I love being enveloped in the beauty and calmness that it is.*
- *Large undeveloped preserves; wildlife, woodlands, stars.*
- *My family enjoys the undisturbed environment.*
- *The nature is untouched.*
- *Woods, rural area, one of the last in the state*
- *Space! Wild animals. Bright stars at night.*
- *The unobstructed wilderness and privacy.*
- *The nature, wildlife, and farm life here in town allows you to focus on what truly matters in life.*

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

Exeter has a wealth of natural resources, including some of the most environmentally significant resources in Rhode Island:

- Unfragmented forest blocks greater than 500 acres make up about half of Exeter's land.¹
- Nearly 2,000 acres are designated as "Better" or "Best" for ecological diversity, according to the University of Rhode Island Environmental Data Center.
- Thirteen Natural Heritage areas in Exeter are believed to be good habitat for 24 animals and 48 plants that are of concern, threatened, or endangered in Rhode Island.

¹ Based on a visual assessment of RIDEM Conservation Opportunity Areas data.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

- Exeter's rocky hills and shallow river valleys are the result of geological activity over millions of years. The region's bedrock is primarily granite. Exposed bedrock and steep slopes along ridges can be found in the Arcadia State Management Area, and in other patches throughout town.
- Exeter's soil classifications show that almost 40% of the total land without water bodies has soils that constrain development, such as wetland (hydric) soils or areas with exposed bedrock; 61% are classified as moderately constrained, including lands suitable for farming.
- Approximately 14% of Exeter is composed of soil units that are non-hydric but have seasonal water tables between 19" and 42" from the surface.² The proximity of the water table to the surface increases susceptibility for groundwater pollution within these areas.
- About 14% of Exeter's soils are designated by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) as "Prime Farmland," meaning they



Exeter farmland [Source: Dodson & Flinker]

have adequate and dependable moisture; favorable temperature and growing season; acceptable pH; few rocks; and are available for agricultural land use. The SCS designates another 14% of Exeter soils as "Farmland of Statewide Importance." These areas, while not possessing the optimum characteristics of prime farmland, have physical and chemical properties that provide for agricultural use with some modifications. Prime Farmland is also highly compatible for other land use types and in much of Rhode Island has been converted for residential development.

² *Exeter Comprehensive Plan, 2004.*

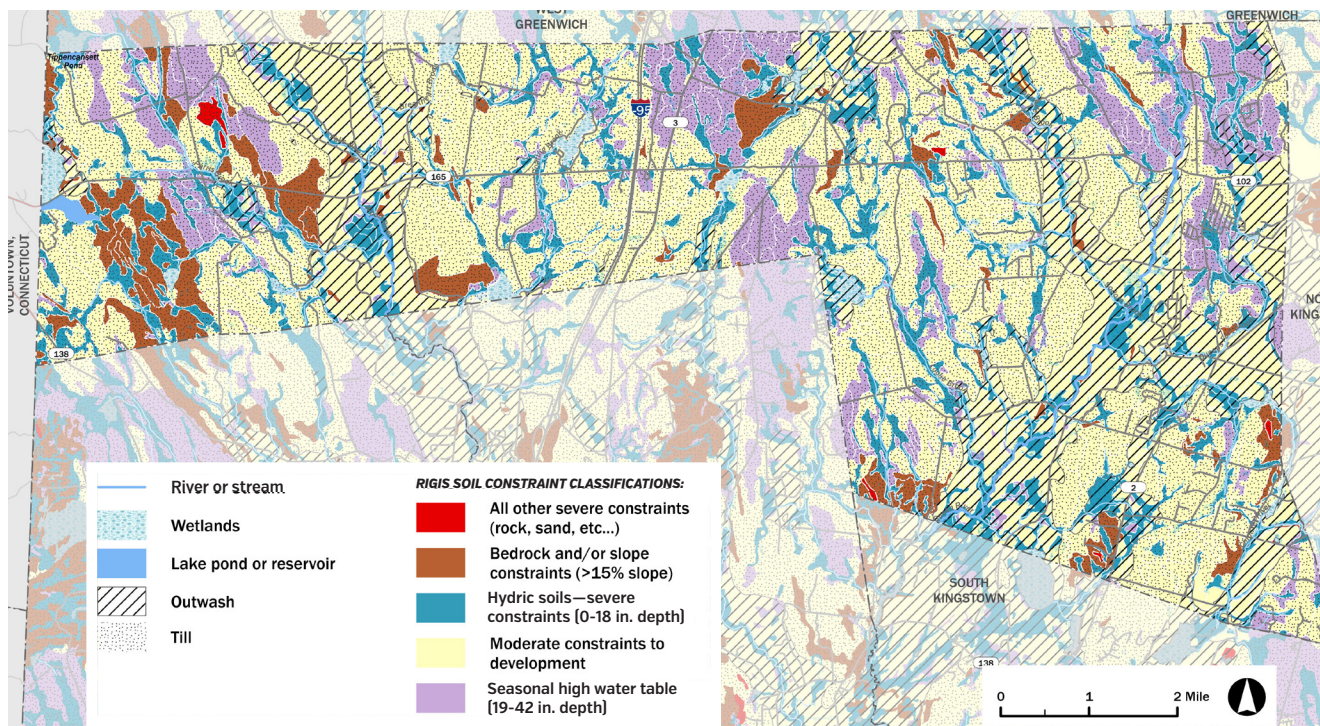


Fig. 4-1 Geology and Soils. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker]



The Queen River [Source: Dodson & Flinker]

WATER RESOURCES

- Exeter's surface water drains to six different watersheds. Exeter has 30 identified rivers and streams, 28 of which are within the Upper Pawcatuck or Wood River watersheds.
- Exeter has 12 state-identified lakes, ponds, or reservoirs, the largest of which extend into neighboring towns (Beach Pond, Yawgoo Pond, Tippencansett Pond and Breakheart Pond).
- Boone Lake is the largest water body entirely within Exeter, at 54 acres.
- Several water bodies in Exeter have received state and national recognition for their outstanding habitat, recreational, and scenic values.
 - > The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed is Rhode Island's only area federally-designated for the Wild and Scenic River Program, which makes it eligible for federal preservation funding.
 - > State-designated Special Resource Protection Waters with "significant ecological or recreational uses" in Exeter include the Wood River, the Queen River, Tippencansett Pond, and Beach Pond.
- Three-quarters of Exeter's state-identified water bodies qualify as Water Quality Standard Class A, indicating that they should be suitable for wildlife habitat, recreational activity, and agricultural and industrial use, and have excellent aesthetic value. All other water bodies are rated Class B, with slightly lower standards
- There is a dam at every state-identified pond or lake in Exeter, reflecting the town's industrial history of mill villages. Two dams in Exeter (Edward's Pond dam and Browning Mill dam) are rated as unsafe because of vegetation that limits access for inspection. Water bodies rated safe with dams that could be hazardous if they failed include Boone Lake, Slocum Reservoir, Yawgoo Mill Pond, and Metcalf Wildlife Marsh. (See the Appendix for additional details on water bodies and dams.)

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

- Wetlands provide a significant source of pollutant attenuation, flood storage, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat, along with opportunities for fishing, kayaking, and other forms of recreation. In Exeter, freshwater wetlands are located primarily in low-lying areas near streams and ponds. Many of these wetlands are forested, most commonly by deciduous trees, such as in red maple swamps, but coniferous wetlands are also common. Small low-lying ponds can also be found in forested areas. Swamps with smaller trees and shrubs, known as "scrub-shrub" swamps, and more open emergent wetlands with shrubs, grasses, and few trees, such as marshes and wet meadows, appear in areas between and around forests.³
- Floodplains are areas adjacent to water bodies and wetlands that are subject to flooding during heavy rain events. Although many areas along river and stream corridors show a likelihood of flooding, these areas tend to overlap with forested wetlands that may help absorb floodwater. The most recent flood maps for Exeter were approved in June 2022. Roads and developed areas near the Queen River and the Queen's Fort Brook in eastern Exeter present vulnerability to flood waters. In particular, the junction of South County Trail and Exeter Road shows a large area within

³ *RIGIS; Exeter Comprehensive Plan, 2004.*

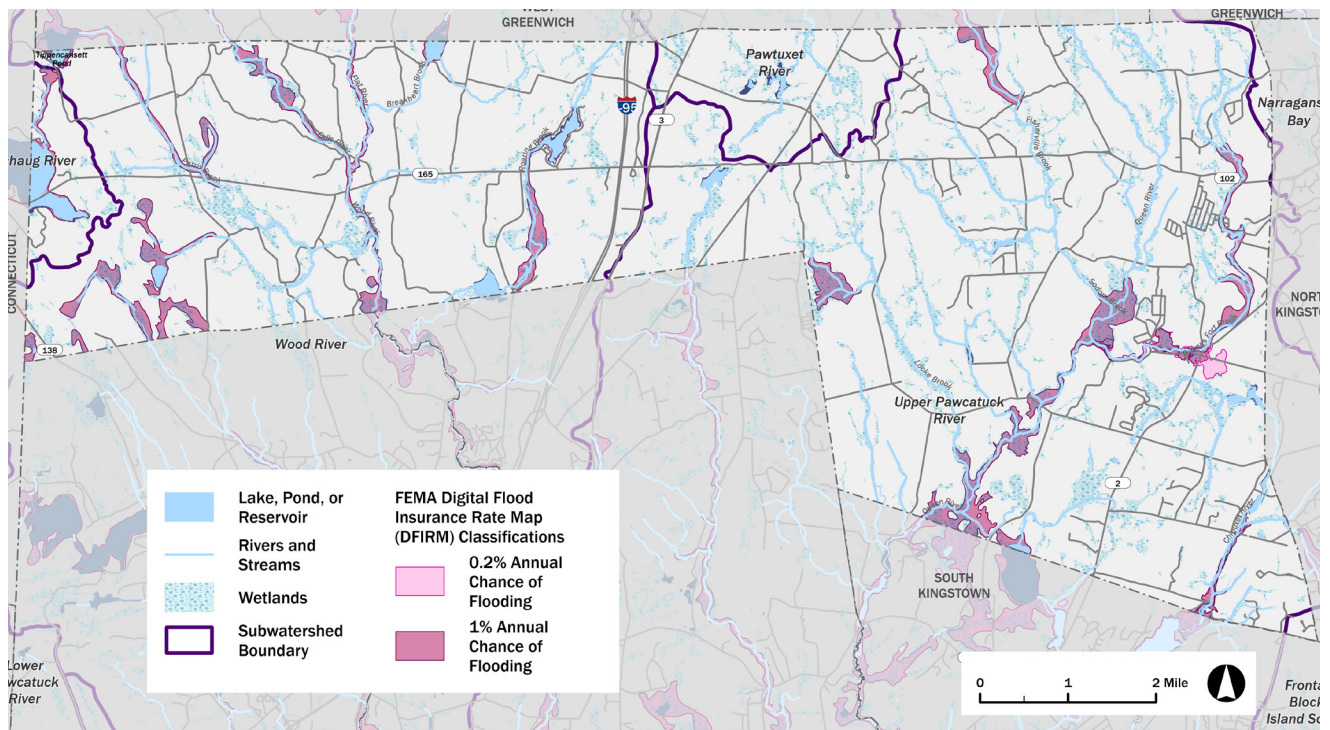


Fig. 4-2 Hydrology and Floodplains (Data sources: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

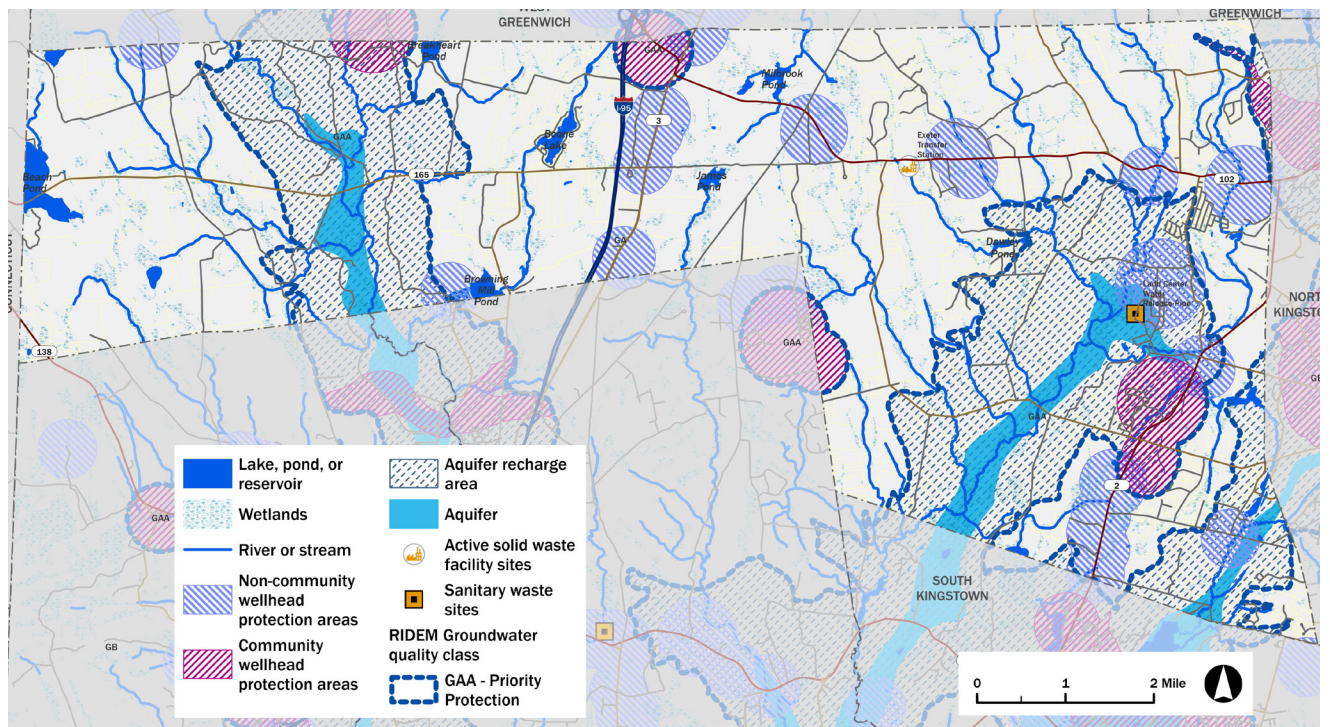


Fig. 4-3 Water Supply Resources. (Data sources: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

the 0.2% flood zone that could threaten local businesses, residents, and infrastructure in the case of a major flood.

Groundwater

- Exeter includes three groundwater reservoir recharge areas and four Community Wellhead Protection areas that are rated at the state's highest quality level, Class GAA. The rating denotes groundwater systems suitable for drinking water use without treatment. These areas can be found along the Wood River, the Queen River, and the Chipuxet River, where glacial outwash tends to facilitate water infiltration. While the prevalence of glacial outwash helps with groundwater recharge, soil permeability and shallow depth of reservoirs in these areas makes them vulnerable to contamination.

HABITAT AND BIODIVERSITY

Forests and vegetation

- Exeter's extensive undeveloped areas have an upland forest mix of deciduous hardwoods and less common softwood conifers. An understory layer of shrubs and small trees ranges from sparse to dense, with less understory among softwoods. Large tracts of unfragmented forest are found throughout the state-owned Arcadia Wildlife Management Area in Exeter's western half and in smaller conservation areas and on private land east of I-95. These forests are pocked with swamps and emergent wetlands and bordered by agricultural fields, particularly in the eastern half of town.
- According to the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, the upper Wood River supports the highest biodiversity of any river in New England, and the area features 75% of all animal species found in the state, and 63% of the state's rare species.⁴

⁴ University of Rhode Island, 2022.

- Thirteen Natural Heritage areas in Exeter are believed to be good habitat for 24 animals and 48 plants that are of concern, threatened, or endangered according to the Rhode Island Natural History Survey.⁵

Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA)

- Conservation Opportunity Areas are large, contiguous Core Natural Areas, corridors, and sites with one or more unique values deserving protection. These values collectively are critical to preserving wildlife species by providing enough room to move around suitable habitats.⁶ They include High Value/High Vulnerability Habitat with unique or essential specialized habitats for certain wildlife. In Exeter, these include floodplain forests, northern hardwood forests, and pitch pine barrens, among others.

TOWN RESOURCES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Exeter's Town Charter (Article VII) describes three boards or commissions dedicated to the protection of the town's natural resources. These bodies derive their authority from Rhode Island General Laws described in the side panel.

- Section 703 of Exeter's Town Charter allows the Town to create a **Conservation Commission** composed of seven appointed members, whose duty is to keep inventory of all open space and make recommendations for its preservation and use. Exeter does not currently maintain a Conservation Commission because there have been no volunteers to serve as members. As a result, there is no Town inventory of open space, nor an open space plan or set of recommendations for an open space network.
- Section 707 allows for a **Water Resources Advisory Board** composed of five appointed members, whose duty is to advise Town

⁵ <https://rinhs.org/species/rare-species>

⁶ <https://dem.ri.gov/natural-resources-bureau/fish-wildlife/wildlife-hunting/ri-state-wildlife-action-plan>

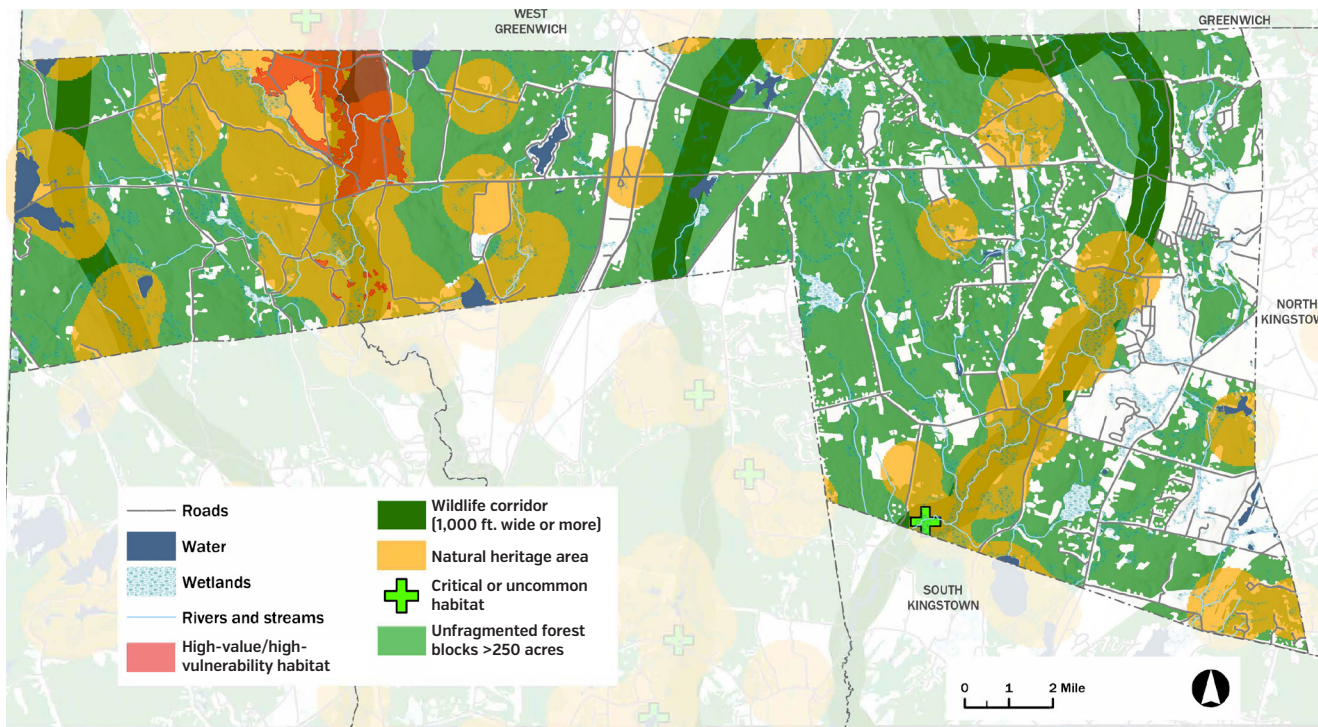


Fig. 4-4 Ecological Resources: State-Designated Conservation Opportunities. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

Council on “all matters concerning the protection of the Town’s water supply” by reviewing plans for public water distribution facilities. Exeter does not currently maintain a Water Resources Advisory Board because there is no public water supply except for the state-owned Ladd Center area.

- Finally, unlike the other two sections, which are optional, Section 709 requires a **Rural Land Preservation Trust**, which is “empowered to acquire, hold, and maintain interests in property” for open space preservation, natural resource protection, provision of public land for recreation, and “the maintenance of the rural character of the Town.”⁷ Exeter established the Rural Land Preservation Trust in 2017 and currently maintains a Rural Land Preservation Trust that is led by four board members.
- The Land Trust’s mission statement lists the trust’s goals as:
 - > Locating areas suitable for both conservation and passive recreational activities

⁷ Town of Exeter, 2022a.

- > Preserving working farmland
- > Protecting sensitive environmental areas from development
- > Providing collaborative opportunities with environmental organizations and other groups to foster natural resource awareness and education⁸

As outlined in its mission, the Land Trust’s board seeks to meet these goals by working with local landowners to protect private property, primarily through the use of conservation easements, which allow the landowner to retain ownership while restricting development rights or certain uses. These easements may be held either by local conservation groups or by the Town itself. Currently, the Land Trust does not hold any conservation easements or fee titles to protected land.

⁸ Town of Exeter, 2022b.

Local Authority for Environmental Protection Under Rhode Island General Laws

- Rhode Island General Laws, Title 45–Towns and Cities, grants authority to municipalities to acquire public land for conservation purposes, develop water-supply management plans, and create boards or commissions that guide the protection of natural resources. Of note, all of these provisions for towns are voluntary, and boards created under these laws are advisory only, and lack regulatory authority to enforce laws. Access to Rhode Island General Laws may be found at <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/>
- RIGL Ch. 45-35–Conservation Commissions grants local authority to create a conservation commission whose purpose is “to promote and develop the natural resources, protect the watershed resources, and preserve natural esthetic areas within municipalities.” The conservation commission does this primarily by coordinating the acquisition of public land and must also keep an inventory of open spaces and wetlands, provide recommendations for land use in these areas to governing authorities, and coordinate activities of non-governmental bodies.
- RIGL Ch. 45-36–Conservation of Open Spaces grants authority to towns to “acquire land and improvements on it, rights of way, water riparian and other rights, easements ... and interests of any kind or description in real property” to “limit the future use of or otherwise conserve open spaces” using public funds, with approval by town council and a financial town meeting.
- RIGL Ch. 45-36.1–Municipal Public Trust Dedication provides “a voluntary mechanism for cities and towns to use to dedicate a park, or other conservation land that it owns, as public trust land in perpetuity in order to ensure preservation of the natural environment and public access to the land for outdoor recreation” with approval by town council “or through any other legally sufficient municipal process.”
- RIGL Ch. 45-39.1–Municipal Water Supplies grants authority to towns to create councils that have power to plan for town water supplies to “provide for the adequacy, availability, and/or safety of water supply,” including the creation of a water supply system management plan, with approval from the State Water Resources Board.

CHALLENGES

Protecting forest resources

A Forest Conservation Act (2-27 RIGL) was adopted in 2021. The General Assembly recognized that forestland in the state has many important values, including, but not limited to, clean air, clean water, economic importance, climate change mitigation, habitat, and supporting human health and well-being. Forest land should be maintained to meet Rhode Island’s aggressive climate change goals through carbon sequestration and storage. Forest land and connecting natural areas should be conserved to prevent ongoing fragmentation of the state’s forests. Moreover, forest conservation is

necessary to protect and maintain water quality and important wildlife habitat. It is in the best interest of the people that the state identify and acquire the development rights to forests so as to maintain these important forest values for future generations.

- The 2023 update of the RI Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan recommended that RI adopt a no-net-forest-loss policy to comply with the carbon reduction mandates in the RI Act on Climate.
- The State’s 2020 Forest Action Plan lists five issues of concern as top priorities:
 - > 1. *Forest loss, fragmentation and parcelization*—wildlife habitat, landscape functionality and sustainability, interface and intermix, and invasive species.

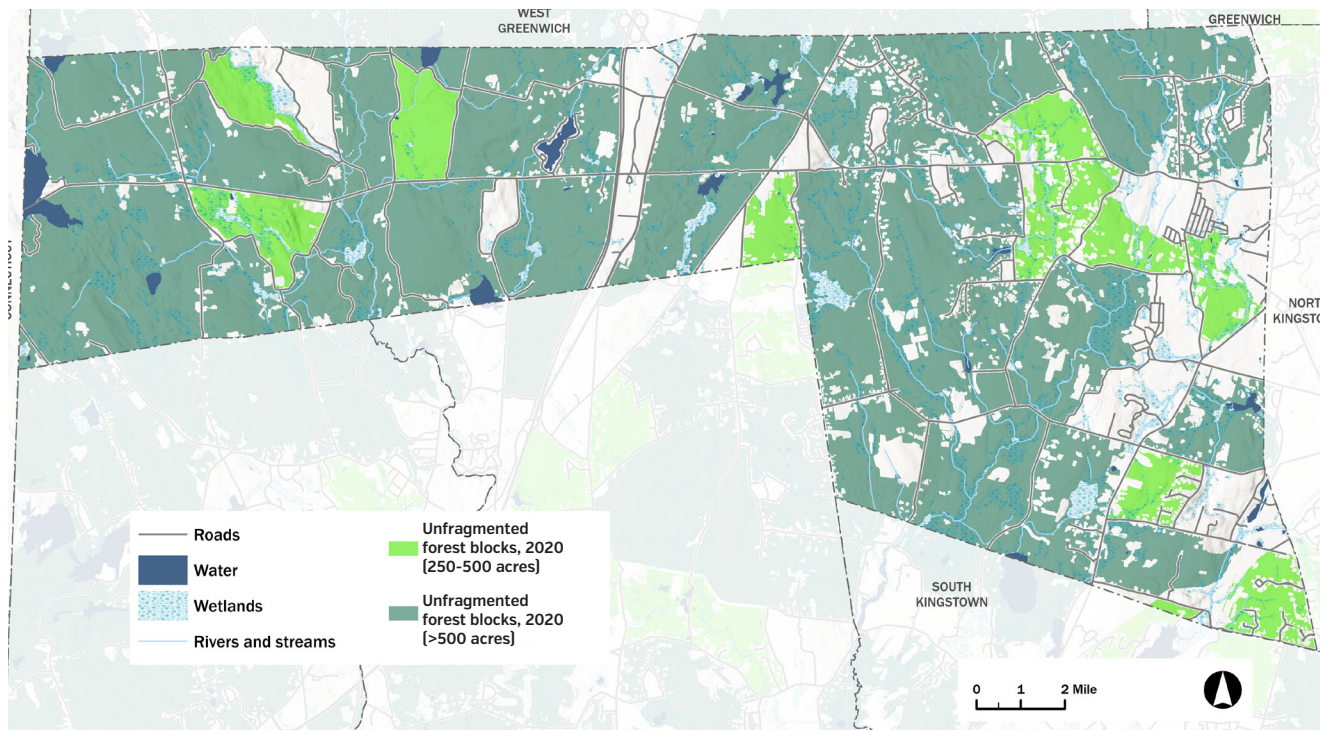


Fig. 4-5 Core Forest Areas. (Data sources: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

- > 2. *Forest health*—invasive plants, wildlife habitat, diversity and resiliency, pests and diseases.
- > 3. *Water*—stormwater, riverine/wetlands, water quality.
- > 4. *Fire*—increasing intermix and expanding interface combined with increasing fuel loading.
- > 5. *Climate change*—increasing disturbances, alterations in species distributions and relationships, and compounding forest health threats.⁹
- In June 2023, the Rhode Island House passed a resolution (H6342) to create a legislative study commission to evaluate and provide recommendations on forest management. The study commission was introduced after a wildfire burned 576 acres of Exeter forestland. Exeter was represented on this commission.

Exeter’s forest-protection priorities should focus on the “most important forest” land as defined in the Forest Conservation Act. In the future, state and federal funds to conserve and

manage forests will use the term “most important forest.” Currently, core forest has been mapped in RIGIS, with GIS layers for other forest types in development. It may not be possible to accurately map old-growth forests. The forest types in the act relevant to Exeter are forests of 10 acres or greater, unless otherwise noted, with these characteristics:

- *Core Forest*: unfragmented forest blocks of single or multiple parcels totaling two hundred and fifty (250) acres or greater unbroken by development and at least twenty-five (25) yards from mapped roads.
- *Old Growth Forest and Characteristics*: a tract of forest land at least 5 contiguous acres in size, meeting criteria in A and B below and exhibiting some, or all, of the features commonly called “old growth forest characteristics” as defined in Section 2.2, Old Growth Forest Characteristics.
 - > **A.** A tract with no evidence of previous forest conversion such as logging, cellar holes, stone walls, roads, or other post European settlement disturbance;

⁹ RIDEM, Division of Forest Environment, “RI Forest Action Plan,” June 2020, page 27.

- > **B.** A tract that has no evidence of stand-replacement events such as replacement fires, or other natural disasters
- *Most Productive Forest Soils:* Forests with soils of a USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service ordination number of 3 and 50% or more forest cover.
- *Forest To Protect Drinking Water Supplies:* Forest within 200 feet of class A waters and all forest within well-head-protection areas or groundwater classified as GAA.
- *RI Natural Heritage Rare Forest Types:*
 - > Pitch pine/scrub oak
 - > Mixed oak/ American holly,
 - > Floodplain forest: includes Silver Maple/ Sycamore and Red Maple/Pin Oak floodplain forests
 - > Atlantic white cedar swamp,
 - > Red maple/ash swamp
- *Southern New England mesic forest:* includes beech, sugar maple, red oak. State resources for forest management in Arcadia Management Area have declined in recent years, but efforts by RIDEM to partner with nonprofit organizations to improve management are underway.

Impervious cover, lot size and protection of water quality

- Exeter's geology, soils, and wetland conditions constrain development. Onsite wastewater systems cannot treat all potential pollution sources (including but not limited to sources such as household hazardous materials, PFAS, or pharmaceuticals) that threaten contamination of the groundwater supply. Development that exceeds an impervious cover of 10% townwide or greater will contaminate water quality and aquatic habitat by excessive stormwater runoff. Even impervious cover thresholds of 5% can impair sensitive aquatic habitat.
- Figure 4-6 shows data from the Environmental Protection Agency that supports Exeter's need for residential lot sizes of 3 acres or greater to stay below 10% impervious cover to protect water quality. The Center for Watershed Protection and many other researchers have documented that impervious cover of 10% or more of a parcel will cause water quality and habitat degradation. Impervious cover as low as 5% has been shown to impair sensitive aquatic habitats.

| LOT SIZE | DWELLING UNITS/ACRE | % IMPERVIOUS COVER |
|------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 10 acres | 0.1 | 2.4% |
| 5 acres | 0.2 | 5% |
| 3 acres | 0.333 | 8% |
| 2 acres | 0.5 | 12% |
| 1 acres | 1 | 20% |
| 0.5 acres | 2 | 25% |
| 0.25 acres | 4 | 38% |

Fig. 4-6 Impervious Cover and Lot Size (Source: US EPA, "Protecting Water Resources with Higher Density Development")

OPPORTUNITIES

- Several key areas with high ecological value, such as unfragmented forest blocks or river corridors, remain unprotected.
- The Town's Rural Land Preservation Trust, formed in 2017, focuses on procedures for identifying and evaluating land for potential conservation as requested by the Town. The Town has yet to acquire any land or development rights for conservation.
- The Town can actively recruit members for a revived Conservation Commission with a work plan focused on keeping an inventory of open space resources and providing resources to landowners about best ecological practices in landscape management.
- Exeter's membership in the Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council qualifies conservation projects in Exeter for funding and resources. (See <https://wpwildrivers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WandSStewardshipPlan-CH-6.pdf>)
- Exeter's large portion of land enrolled in the Rhode Island Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program includes areas with high ecological value and may be an important part of future protected land. Refinement of the Town's Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program can help balance development with preservation of open space lands for conservation.
- Exeter can limit impervious cover by using compact growth models for development. Figure 4-7 shows how impervious cover can be reduced to stay below the 10% threshold to protect water quality by clustering development and maintaining the same number of lots. Exeter has adopted this technique in the conservation development ordinance with the goal of reducing lot sizes to preserve more undeveloped open space and reduce impervious cover.

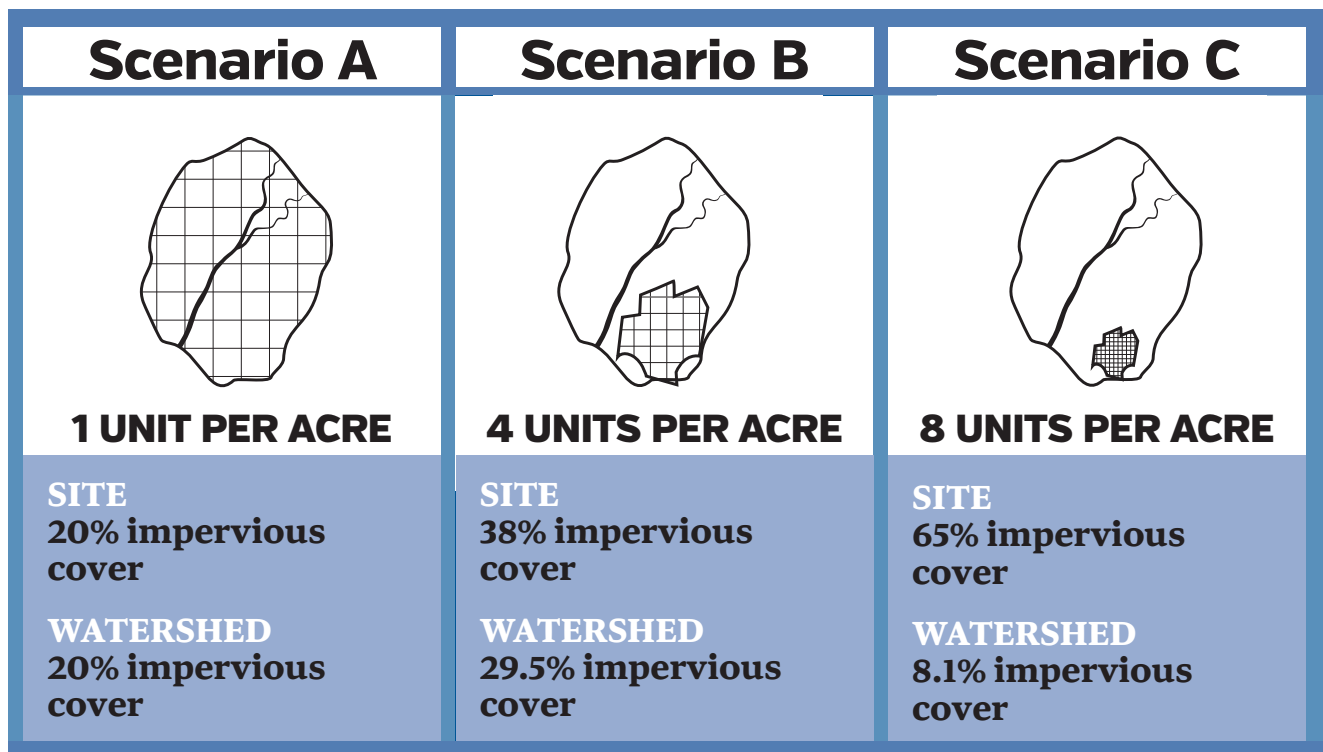


Fig. 4-7 Compact Growth Can Reduce Impervious Cover [Source: US EPA, "Protecting Water Resources with Higher Density Development"]

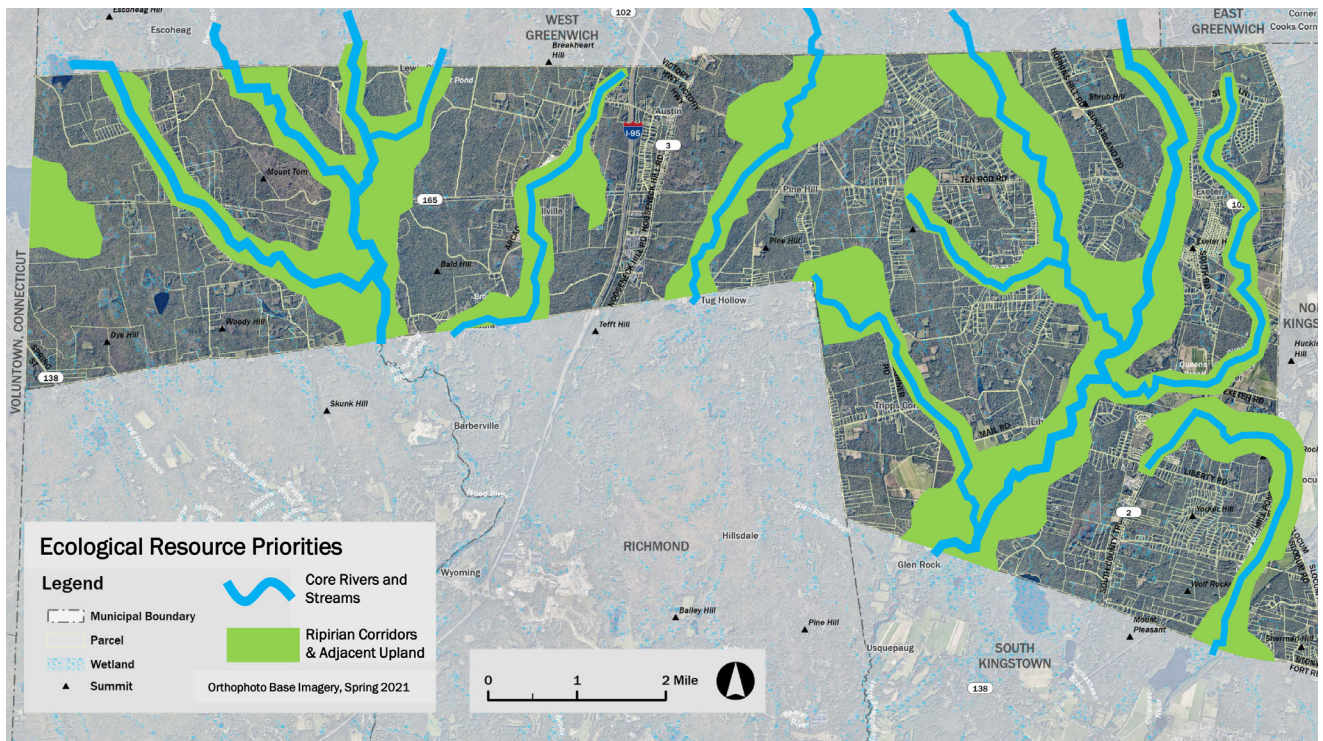


Fig. 4-8 Ecological Resource Priorities. [Source: Dodson & Flinker]

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 4-1

EXETER MAINTAINS THE INTEGRITY OF ITS ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS, INCLUDING ITS SURFACE WATERS, WETLANDS, FORESTS, FIELDS, AND WILDLIFE HABITAT.

POLICIES

- Focus conservation efforts to identify and protect areas of high ecological value, such as the most important forests and unique wildlife habitat (as defined by RIDEM and the RI Forest Commission), Conservation Opportunity Areas (as defined by the RIDEM Wildlife Action Plan), cold-water streams, groundwater aquifers/recharge areas, and the integrity of the Wood/Pawcatuck watershed (Rhode Island's only federally-designated Wild and Scenic River).
- Focus conservation efforts to prioritize connecting ecological systems, rather than preserving isolated resources.
- Support conservation efforts by dedicating funding and administrative capacity to conservation recommendations.
- Promote best practices within local regulations in natural resource management by working with state and regional partners and coordinating efforts with neighboring municipalities to ensure large-scale, long-term results.
- Guide and support the preservation of open space and key natural resources during the process of land subdivision and development by continuing to use conservation development and refining the use of transferring development rights, which can be a source to match state and federal funds for land preservation.
- Maintain density and development to stay below an impervious cover threshold of 10% townwide to avoid contamination of water quality—for example, clustering development using conservation and village development to reduce townwide impervious cover.

Goal 4-1 / Strategy A

Reestablish the Conservation Commission with a clear charge and set of tasks in support of the Planning Board and Planning Department.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- Recruit members and reestablish a Conservation Commission. Identify a member of Town Council to lead on natural resources/conservation issues and identify and invite potential Conservation Commission members. Provide information on what is involved and why it is important. Draw from Exeter's Code of Ordinances, Sec. 703, to define the Conservation Commission's role, including:**
 - **Duties: Conduct research, distribute information, inventory open space, make recommendations for open space preservation and utilization, and carry out additional responsibilities prescribed in state law or requested by the Town Council.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|--|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Rural Land Preservation Trust; Conservation Commission | Model conservation commissions from peer communities |

Goal 4-1 / Strategy B

Use administrative capacity and available resources to implement conservation priorities.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. In coordination with an open space and recreation plan (see Policy 5.1.a), identify, map, and prioritize key conservation gaps and associated parcels in areas with high ecological connectivity, such as stream corridors and contiguous forest blocks.**
- Examples could include James Pond and the headwaters of the Beaver River; areas around Locke Brook and Metcalf Wildlife Marsh; or lower Fisherville Brook.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|--|--|
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission; Rural Land Preservation Trust | Volunteers • 2044 Comprehensive Plan: maps, data, and analysis • goals, policies, and actions • nonprofit conservation organizations for easements • volunteer legal expertise • RIDEM • most current editions of RI Wildlife Action Plan, RI Forest Action Plan, The Value of Rhode Island Forests report, RI Species of Greatest Conservation Need lists, Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Reporting, RI Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, other state resources, such as RIGIS and URI • non-governmental conservation partners, such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI); the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, and the RI Woodland Partnership |

ACTIONS

- ii. Implement the Rural Land Preservation Trust's procedure for parcel review and recommendation.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Ongoing | Town Council; Conservation Commission | Rural Land Preservation Trust evaluation checklist and procedures; RI Land Trust Council assistance |

ACTIONS

- iii. Advise the Planning Board on the effects of proposed development on the quality and natural functions of water bodies and the natural integrity of adjacent land areas..**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Ongoing | Conservation Commission; Land Trust | RIDEM Freshwater Wetlands Rules; RIDEM Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Reporting; RI Rivers Council |

Goal 4-1 / **Strategy B** (continued)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|---|
| iv. Seek expertise to ensure that all conservation easements are legally adequate, monitored, and enforced to maintain their resource value. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| Ongoing | Conservation Commission Land Trust; Town Solicitor | Nonprofit conservation organization resources for easements; volunteer or hired legal expertise |

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|---|
| v. Identify and pursue funding strategies and political processes to support recommendations from the Rural Land Preservation Trust and the Conservation Commission. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include mechanisms for acquisition, purchase of development rights, or foreclosing right of redemption (tax sale properties). | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Town Council; Rural Land Preservation Trust; Conservation Commission | Volunteers; sample conservation policies from other Rhode Island municipalities; RIDEM; foundation grants |

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|--|
| vi. Adapt conservation goals and priorities to anticipate and respond to climate change impacts. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with RIDEM and nonprofits to identify climate change impacts and mitigation strategies on both a townwide level and for private property owners. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission; Rural Land Preservation Trust | Volunteers; 2044 Comprehensive Plan: maps, data, and analysis; goals, policies, and actions; RIDEM reports (see Action i); RI Climate Change Commission resources; Resilient Rhody 2018 report; RI Division of Statewide Planning climate change resource Web page; Resilient RI Act and the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4); NOAA Climate Rhode Island State Summary; NOAA and EPA climate change resources; resources from non-governmental organizations, such as TNC; ASRI; and the Adaptation Clearinghouse |

Goal 4-1 / Strategy C

Leverage partnerships with state, regional, and local actors to support conservation efforts.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|--|
| i. Coordinate land conservation efforts with state and non-governmental partners, such as The Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Refine and implement conservation goals, leverage town funding with partners, and administrative processes. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission; Town Council; Rural Land Preservation Trust | Volunteers; websites and contacts for RIDEM; The Nature Conservancy; and Audubon Society of Rhode Island |
| ACTIONS | | |
| ii. Work with local property-owners to establish communication channels, informational resources, and a shared understanding of land protection goals and policies. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Coordinate property-owner outreach with conservation priorities to support the protection of targeted areas. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission; Town Council; Rural Land Preservation Trust | Town website; informal communication networks and partnerships |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iii. Use maps developed for this plan to identify areas suitable for development and for conservation, and make this information available to landowners, developers, and town officials. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Update map information from RIGIS and other sources as feasible. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission; Rural Land Preservation Trust; Planning Board | Volunteers; 2044 Comprehensive Plan: RIDEM and other state resources, such as RIGIS and URI; non-governmental conservation partners, such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC); Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI); the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association; and the RI Woodland Partnership |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iv. Encourage the use of Exeter's Conservation Development Ordinance and refine the TDR ordinance to make it easier to use. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | Conservation Development Ordinance; other TDR ordinance examples |

Goal 4-2

EXETER PROTECTS AND STEWARDS ITS SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER RESOURCES AND MAINTAINS THE EXCELLENT QUALITY OF ITS WATER SUPPLY.

POLICIES

- Support the implementation of policies to control erosion and sedimentation at development sites and to limit development in hydric and seasonal high water table soils.
- Encourage best practices in stormwater management, such as by using green infrastructure, and preserving as much open space as practical in new development to limit stormwater runoff contamination.
- Support additional performance standards in the zoning ordinance and land development regulations to protect potable groundwater resources.
- Work in partnership with developers to guide growth away from sensitive areas. Assess existing town regulations to achieve state stormwater permit mandates.
- Support the implementation of Exeter's Groundwater Protection Overlay District to limit or prohibit land uses that have potential to contaminate surface or groundwater and to limit the removal of outwash materials in aquifers.

Goal 4-2 / Strategy A

Exeter protects and stewards its surface and groundwater resources and maintains the excellent quality of its water supply.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

i. Strengthen Exeter's Erosion and Sedimentation Control ordinance by adding performance measures to comply with State best management practices for stormwater and erosion control.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Town Council; Town Planner; Planning Board | Rhode Island Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook; DEM Stormwater manual; Sedimentation Control ordinance |

ACTIONS

ii. Strengthen Exeter's Earth Removal ordinance by adding performance measures. These could include.

- A minimum separation of finished grade to bedrock
- Appropriate site reclamation for all earth removal operations

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | Existing Earth Removal ordinance |

ACTIONS

iii. Require vegetative buffers from all surface water bodies and wetlands to protect water quality and wildlife habitat.

- Explore adoption of a low-impact development (LID) ordinance.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Town Council; Town Planner; Planning Board | RI Stormwater Design and Installation Standards Manual; RIDEM resources; model wetland regulations from peer communities; other resources for low-impact development design (e.g., EPA or Mass Audubon) |

Goal 4-3

EXETER’S RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATE IN TOWNWIDE EFFORTS TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES.

POLICIES

- Pursue public outreach and education that supports environmental protection.
- Support and encourage active citizen involvement in care and maintenance of Exeter’s natural resources.
- Dedicate annual resources to matching open-space grants for natural resources conservation.

Goal 4-3 / Strategy A

Build the Town’s administrative capacity and funding to develop best-management practices.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Adopt best practices in landscape management and maintaining environmental resources on both private and public land.

- *Many resources are available online. Best practices include:*
 - > *Appropriate use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers and management of invasive species.*
 - > *Reduction of impervious surfaces.*
 - > *Regular septic maintenance.*
 - > *Proper use and disposal of household hazardous materials*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| <i>FYIP #1 and ongoing</i> | <i>Town Council; Conservation Commission; DPW</i> | <i>RIDEM information and training; Model best management practices from peer communities and nonprofit organizations.</i> |

Goal 4-3 / Strategy B

Leverage partnerships with local organizations, educators, advocates, and the Exeter-West Greenwich School Districts.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Use resources and partnerships to publicize and share information on best forest management practices with residents, businesses, and institutions.

- *Make available management models such as the New England Forestry Foundation “Exemplary Forestry” model and resource guides for landowners.*
- *Promote collaboration between the town, RIDEM, and the New England Forestry Foundation on Rhode Island sustainable forest management. (The NEFF does not have a Rhode Island focus area at present.)*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|--|
| FYIP #2 | Town Council; Conservation Commission; Public Library | Local advocates; local businesses; RIDEM; New England Forestry Foundation resources |

ACTIONS

ii. Enhance environmental education and student involvement in the school system with a focus on Exeter’s natural resources.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|--|
| FYIP #2 | Exeter-West Greenwich School administrators and parent organizations | Curricular resources; parent organization networks |



Open Space & Recreation

Exeter's substantial protected open space, girded by Arcadia Management Area on the west and The Nature Conservancy and Audubon Society of Rhode Island properties on the east, provides a wealth of options for outdoor recreation. Nevertheless, many locally-conserved areas have limited public access, and Arcadia remains accessible mostly only by car, limiting options for bicycling and trail connections. The town's limited public recreational facilities provide few options and require further investment for increased accessibility for people of all abilities and interests. Increased civic engagement can help identify future stewardship of open space that addresses recreational priorities in tandem with ecological and cultural goals.

A. OUTDOOR RECREATION & OPEN SPACE IN THE EXETER 2044 VISION

...There are expanded opportunities for safe bicycling, walking, and hiking in Exeter. Greenways link wildlife habitat and recreation sites in a continuous network, preserving the health of the entire ecosystem and enhancing outdoor recreation.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISIONMAKERS |
|---|---|
| 5-1 Exeter maintains a system of protected open space that coordinates ecological, cultural, and recreational goals and values. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in an open space and recreation plan or policy to identify and protect areas with intersecting ecological, cultural, and recreational values, high connectivity, and landscape-scale significance. • Continue to promote private conservation of open space, farms, and forest through enrollment in the Rhode Island Farm, Forest, and Open Space program and other incentives. • Dedicate funding for matching funds for open space and recreation grants. |
| 5-2 Exeter's facilities and trails for walking, hiking, bicycling, boating, and other recreational activities are connected and distributed throughout town. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support expanded access to recreation land through investment in town-managed properties and strategic partnerships with the state and non-governmental organizations. • Support planning for safe and useful bicycling, walking, and hiking connections throughout town—particularly to areas of high interest and community use—and including connections with Arcadia Management Area. |
| 5-3 Exeter maintains the accessibility, safety, and visibility of its open space and recreation facilities for all residents. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of existing recreation land by people of all different ages, abilities, and backgrounds by improving access, including use of universal design standards, and increasing visibility and public awareness. • Encourage community stewardship of town-managed conservation lands, recreation areas and trail systems through Friends groups and other civic associations. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Open space and outdoor recreation emerged in the public opinion survey as central components of residents' sense of rural character and quality of life in Exeter. In response to what "rural" means in Exeter, the top selection was "Extensive open space and conservation lands."

- A question on priority town improvements ranked "Trails, paths or routes for safe hiking, walking, or biking" as number one, and "youth sports facilities" and "playgrounds for children" as numbers five and six.
- While some comments noted appreciation for "the youth sports programs available to the children," others noted dissatisfaction with a "lack of parks and rec for the children."

Comments about what respondents value most about living and working in Exeter further detailed appreciation for open space and outdoor recreation around a number of themes:

Trails, outdoor recreation, and access to conserved land

- *Access to public land/conservancies*
- *love the access to all hiking and biking areas i.e.. Cuttyhunk Brook Preserve, Arcadia*
- *Country living, farming, outdoor activities, hiking, boating*
- *Quiet and open rural areas for hiking!*
- *great places to walk in the woods*
- *My husband rides a bicycle for exercise and has easy access to wonderful riding routes right out our door.*

Scenic landscapes, dark skies, and general rural character:

- *Lots of lovely trees and landscapes.*
- *Lots of fields*
- *Rural charm, peace, and quiet, undeveloped open spaces*
- *Natural landscape / peace, quiet, and darkness at night*

- *The peaceful sounds. The stars at night. The wildlife passing through. Being in the country*
- *The rural, country aesthetic-lots of farmland, forest, and natural space*
- *Open space and working farms.*



Arcadia Wildlife Management Area [Source: LBA]

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

- Over one third of land in Exeter is permanently protected from development, of which three-quarters is State-managed, mostly in the Arcadia Management Area, and one-quarter is managed by nonprofit conservation organizations, primarily The Nature Conservancy, along the Queen River, and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, at Fisherville Brook Refuge and the Marion Eppley Wildlife Sanctuary. The Audubon Society of RI also holds conservation easements on two privately-owned parcels along the Queen

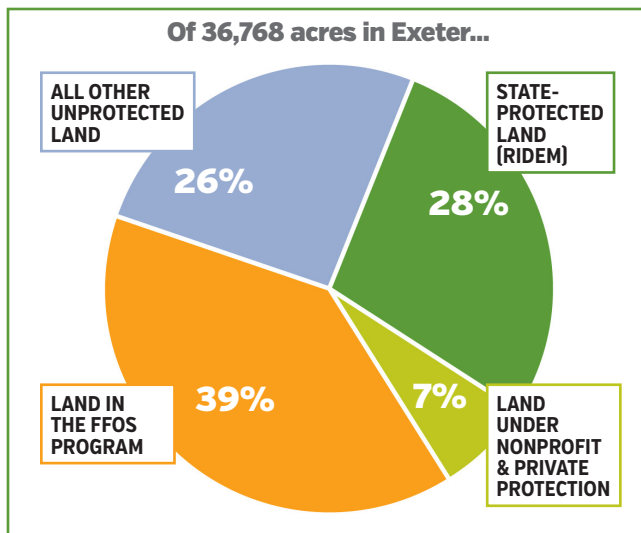


Fig. 5-1 Protection Level of Exeter Land. (Source: Exeter Assessor's data)

River. Adams Farm is owned by The Susan L. Adams Rev Trust, and a small piece of land within Arcadia WMA is owned by the Mount Tom Club Land Trust. Several of these locally-managed conservation areas have additional conservation easements held by the State.

- Another 39% of land is enrolled in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program. Within the FFOS Program, a piece of land that is set aside as open space, farmland, or for use in forestry, is

taxed for its current use, not for its development value. Eligible properties must meet conditions for size, use, and condition of the land in order to qualify, and farms and forestland require a stewardship plan. Exeter has 266 parcels enrolled in the program, totaling 14,283 acres, or 39% of the town's land. Acres of land enrolled in the FFOS Program in Exeter increased by 83% between 1998 and 2015. The specific amount and percent of land in the FFOS program can vary from year to year.

- The Town does not own any conservation land.
- Most of Exeter's more than 13,000 acres of protected open space is publicly accessible from a legal point of view, though maintenance levels may cause barriers in some areas, such as fire roads in State-owned land. The State-owned Arcadia Management Area land features many forms of outdoor recreation:
 - > About 95% of land allows hunting and fishing; many of the rivers and streams are stocked with trout.
 - > Hiking trails total about 60 miles, not including 6 miles along the North-South Trail; some trails allow mountain biking.
 - > Boating access is allowed along the Wood River and Roaring Brook Pond.

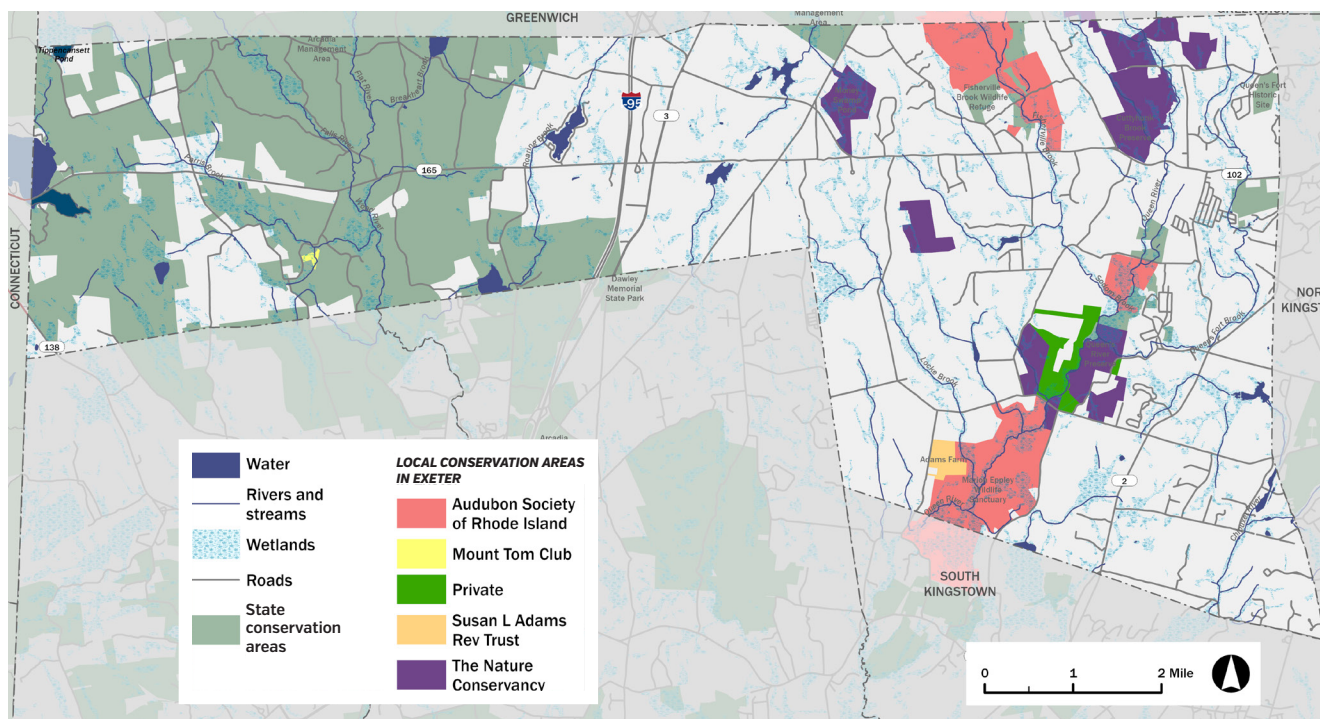


Fig. 5-2 Protected Open Space (Source: Dodson & Flinker)

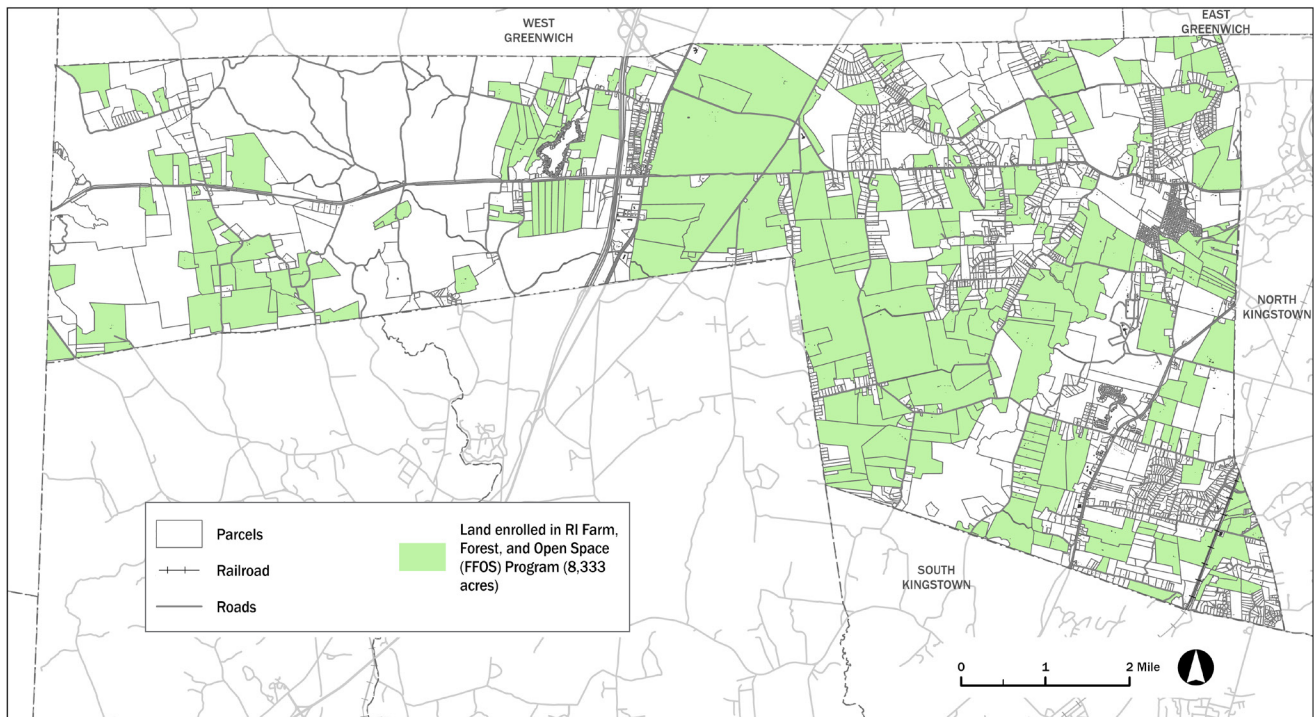


Fig. 5-3 Land Enrolled in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program (Source: Exeter Assessor's Office, Dodson & Flinker)



Trail access at TNC's Queen's River Reserve. (Source: Dodson & Flinker)

- Locally-managed conservation areas tend to provide less public access than State land:
 - > 39% of locally-conserved land is not publicly accessible; about half of the remaining 61% has limited public access, leaving less than one-third with full public access.
 - > Fisherville Brook Conservation Area and the Queen's River Preserve and Cuttyhunk Brook Preserve to provide public access and trails.
 - > The Queen's River and Cuttyhunk Brook Preserves also allow hunting (restricted to archery in some areas).



State-managed beach access at Beach Pond. (Source: Dodson & Flinker)

Town parks and athletic fields

- The Town maintains playing fields at Wawaloam Elementary School and Reynolds Field, and a playground at Chelsea Park near the Library.
- There is no recreation department in Exeter.
- In 2022, the Town applied for a \$400,000 State grant to use the entire library site for outdoor recreation. It did not receive the grant but expects apply for funding again.

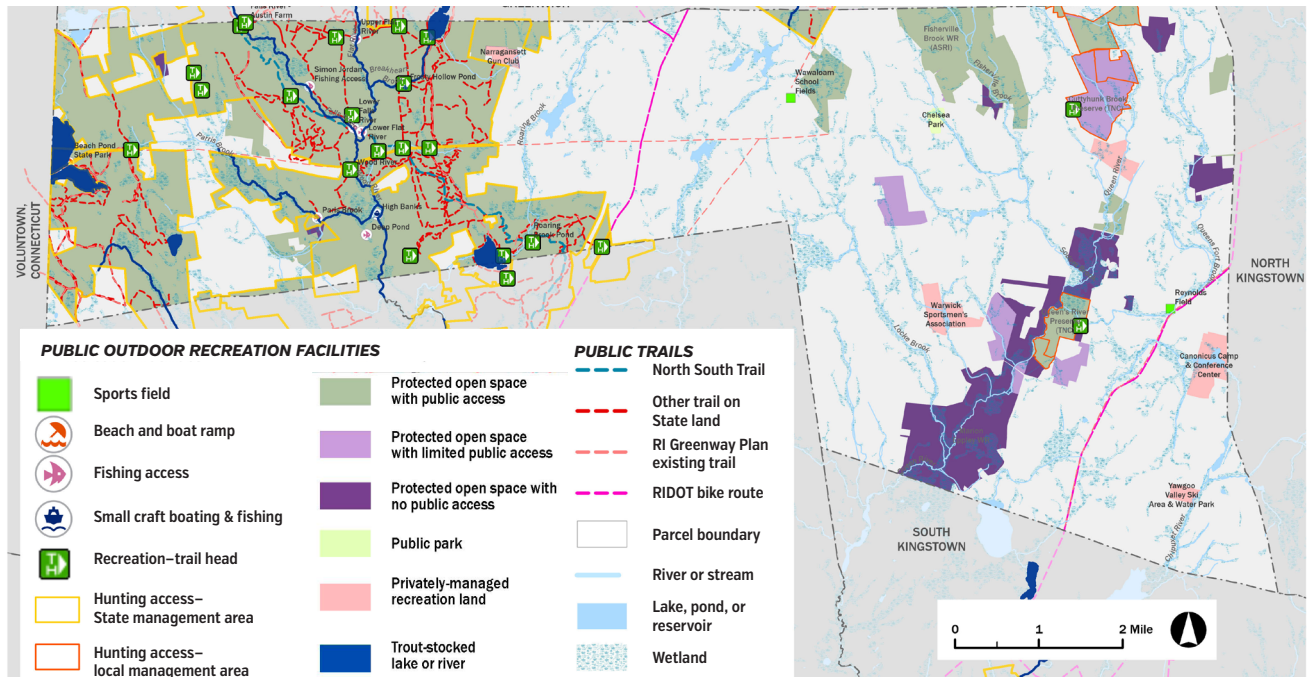


Fig. 5-4 Public Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Trails. [Source: Dodson and Flinker].



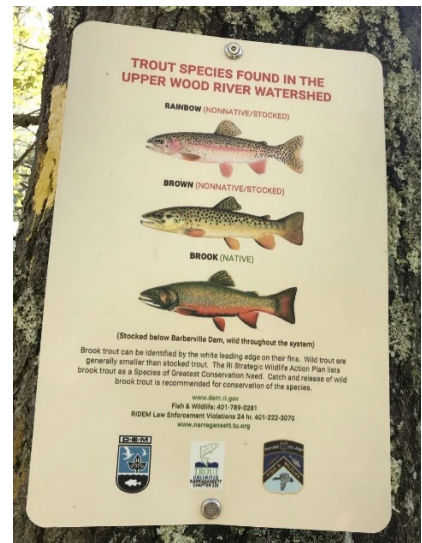
Little League at Wawaloam Elementary School
[Source: Dodson & Flinker]

- Town-owned public spaces are maintained by the Department of Public Works.

Private outdoor recreational resources

- Hunting clubs include the Warwick Sportsman's Association on Hog House Hill Road; the Narragansett Gun Club (a shooting range on Austin Farm Road); Nooseneck Hill Club, (a social, hunting and fishing club located at Falcon Ridge Drive); and Rhode Island Coonhunters Association on Stony Lane, a social, hunting and fishing club that mainly features social events.

- Canonius Camp & Conference Center
- Yawgoo Valley Ski Area and Water Park
- Exeter Country Club (open to the public for golf)
- Rhode Island Trials Club, a "moto-trial club" that holds motorcycle trials skill competitions for dirt bikes.
- Private recreational sports leagues that Exeter youth participate in with West Greenwich include the Exeter-West Greenwich Little League and Youth Soccer, and other private leagues and clubs.



[Source: kidfriendlynewengland.com]

CHALLENGES

- Publicly accessible open space is concentrated in the Arcadia Management Area.
- Eastern Exeter lacks dedicated areas for youth recreation, hiking, hunting, or fishing.
- Public trails are concentrated in the Arcadia Management Area. Funding constraints for management of the Arcadia Management Area means that trails and other opportunities may not be available in practice. According to reports on the trailforks.com website, individuals and volunteer groups, such as the Appalachian Mountain Club Narragansett Chapter, help clear some overgrown routes.
- The town lacks staff to program and manage recreation and public parks and facilities.
- The town has no open space and recreation plan to advance outdoor recreation goals and identify key remaining preservation opportunities because it does not have an active Conservation Commission, which typically prepares an open space and recreation plan.
- Town staff noted that a lack of outdoor facilities was a limitation for adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Public use of State and local conservation and recreation areas may be improved with better signage and accessibility.
- Several areas have overlapping qualities of ecological, cultural, and recreational value. Mapping and discussing these qualities together may help the town identify priorities for open space conservation and recreation.
- Publicly available maps and inventories of trails are primarily for State lands; the Town may wish to make and publicize an inventory of trails on non-State lands.
- The 1994 Rhode Island Greenspace and Greenways Plan includes a proposed bike route connecting the New London Turnpike with Route 102 running east and Arcadia Management Area running west along Route

165. Other RIDOT bike routes along Route 3 and Route 2 remain underbuilt. The Town may wish to pursue developing these routes and/or adopting other biking and trail connections eligible for State funding. The State Bicycle Plan includes a proposal to improve Route 3 with a “road diet” and better bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Exeter 2044’s elements on Economic Development and Land Use include a proposed Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan, with these transportation improvements intended to



*Reynolds Field has limited facilities and signage
(Source: Dodson & Flinker)*

create a gateway at the intersection of Routes 3 and 165 to nature recreation opportunities in the Arcadia Management Area.

- The expected State-Town joint master plan for the Ladd Center Area is expected to provide the opportunity to include open space elements that are currently underused.
- Efforts to secure State grant funding to expand Chelsea Park into a multi-use outdoor recreation center will be renewed.
- The owners of the Yawgoo Valley Ski Area and Water Park are developing a master plan for the future of this recreation area.

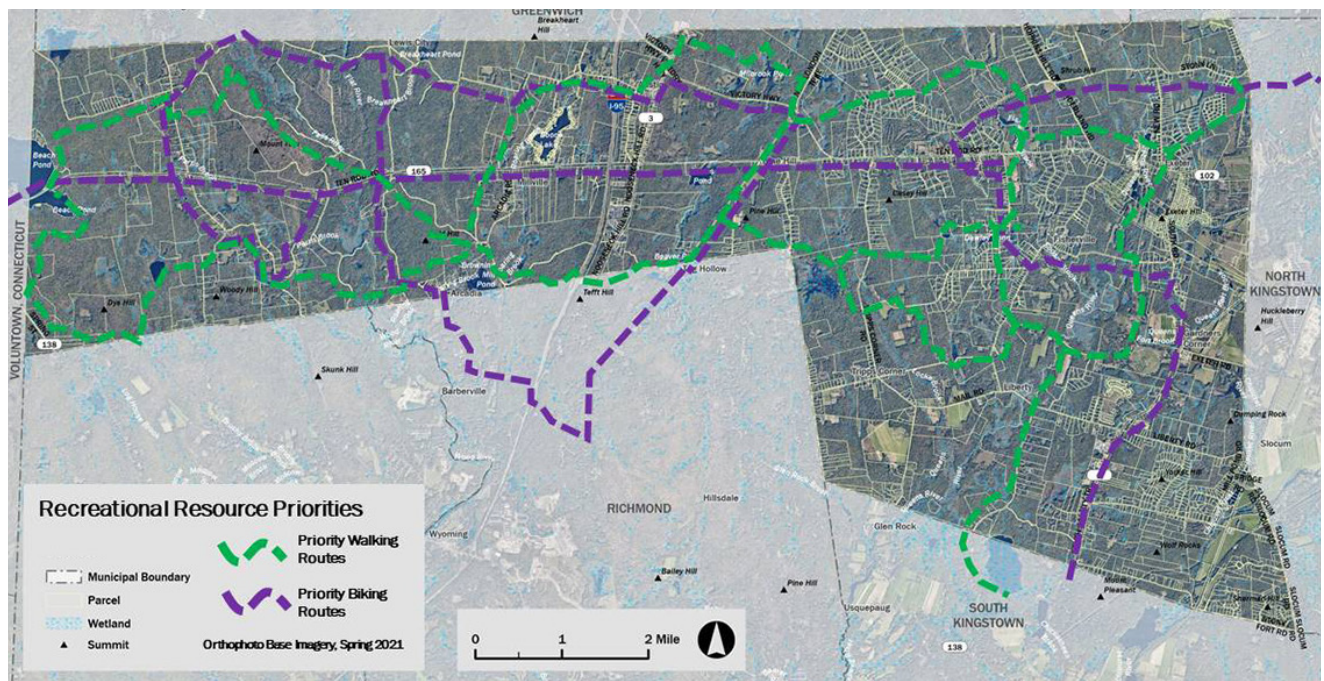


Fig. 5-5 Recreational Resource Priorities: Walking and Biking Routes. (Source: Dodson and Flinker).

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 5-1

EXETER MAINTAINS A SYSTEM OF PROTECTED OPEN SPACE THAT COORDINATES ECOLOGICAL, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL GOALS AND VALUES.

POLICIES

- Invest in an open space and recreation plan or policy to identify and protect areas with intersecting ecological, cultural, and recreational values, high connectivity, and landscape-scale significance.
- Continue to promote private efforts to keep land in open space, farms, and forest through enrollment in the Rhode Island Farm, Forest, and Open Space program and other incentives townwide to avoid contamination of water quality—for example, clustering development using conservation and village development to reduce townwide impervious cover.
- Dedicate funding for matching funds for open space and recreation grants.

Goal 5-1 / **Strategy A**

Coordinate groups with different goals and interests, including conservation groups, historical associations, and recreational groups, to create an open space and recreation plan or policy.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Recruit and designate a volunteer group to work with the Conservation Commission, DPW, the Town Planner, and partners to inventory, pursue, and implement a recreation program.**
- *Identify a member of Town Council or the Conservation Commission to identify and invite potential volunteers.*
 - *Provide information on what is involved and why it is important.*
 - *Partners can include the school district; public library; local clubs; Arcadia Management Area and users of AMA; and scouting groups.*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|--|
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Town Council; Town Planner; DPW; Conservation Commission | School district; public library; local clubs; Arcadia Management Area and users of AMA; scouting groups |

Goal 5-1 / **Strategy A** (continued)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>ii. Create an open space and recreation plan or policy that consolidates information, goals, and actions for land conservation and outdoor recreation. At the minimum, this plan or policy should meet the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update community goals for open space and recreation identified in the Comprehensive Plan. • Update the comprehensive plan's inventory of ecological, cultural, and recreation assets, including protected land, public parks, outdoor recreation facilities, trails, target areas of unprotected land, landscapes and sites with historic or cultural significance, community programs, and other assets. • Identify needs for maintenance and protection of these assets. • Establish priorities for open space acquisition and protection. • Establish priorities for park and recreation facility improvements. • Identify responsible parties and time frames. • Identify sources of funding, training, and other assistance to meet goals and priorities. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission | Volunteers; Arcadia Management Area; potential for RIDEM grants; 2044 Comprehensive Plan: maps, data, and analysis; goals, policies, and actions; RIDEM—most current editions of: RI Wildlife Action Plan; RI Forest Action Plan; The Value of Rhode Island Forests report; RI Species of Greatest Conservation Need lists; Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Reporting; RI State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP); other State resources, such as RIGIS and URI; non-governmental conservation partners, such as the Southern Rhode Island Conservation District; The Nature Conservancy (TNC); the Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI); the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association; and the RI Woodland Partnership |
| ACTIONS | | |
| <p>iii. Continue to implement outreach efforts with local property-owners to foster participation in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space (FFOS) Program.</p> | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| Ongoing | Conservation Commission; Town Tax Assessor | Town officials and staff |

Goal 5-2

EXETER'S FACILITIES AND TRAILS FOR WALKING, HIKING, BICYCLING, BOATING, AND OTHER RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES ARE CONNECTED AND DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT TOWN.

POLICIES

- Support expanded access to recreation land through investment in town-managed properties and strategic partnerships with the State and non-governmental organizations.
- Support planning for safe and useful bicycling, walking, and hiking connections throughout town—particularly to areas of high interest and community use—and including connections with Arcadia Management Area.

Goal 5-2 / Strategy A

Consolidate and share information to identify assets, needs, and solutions.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 1 (2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2 (2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Consolidate and update maps and databases showing public access to conservation areas, including trails for walking and biking, boating access, hunting and fishing access, parking areas, and related facilities.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|-------------------------|--|
| FYIP #1 | Conservation Commission | Maps and data within the 2044 Comprehensive Plan and available through RIDEM, RIGIS, and other State resources |

ACTIONS

- ii. Establish a volunteer committee to identify needed connections and improvements to facilities**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|-------------------------------------|--|
| FYIP #1 | Conservation Commission; volunteers | Maps and data within the 2044 Comprehensive Plan and available through RIDEM, RIGIS, and other State resources |

Goal 5-2 / Strategy B

Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN I (2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2 (2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|--|
| i. Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to increase funding and resources for multimodal transportation options throughout Exeter. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">These may include trails outlined in the 1994 Rhode Island Greenspace and Greenways Plan and RIDOT bike routes along Rt 3 and Rt 2. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission; Town Planner | A Greener Path: Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future (RI State Planning Council, 1994); RIDOT; RI State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP); Southern Rhode Island Conservation District |
| ACTIONS | | |
| ii. Contact owners of conservation lands to discuss opening the lands to the public for recreational purposes. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission | Maps and data within the 2044 Comprehensive Plan; list of property owners; detailed information about property conservation status, ecological value, and accessibility to roads |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iii. Continue to pursue funding for expanding recreational facilities at Chelsea Park. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1/ FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Town Council | RIDEM grant programs |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iv. Pursue partnerships and funding to expand Exeter's recreational sports leagues and facilities. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify local advocates to organize public interest. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | Town Planner; volunteers | Exeter-West Greenwich School District; West Greenwich Recreation Department; Annual town budget; RIDEM and other State funding sources |
| ACTIONS | | |
| v. If there is public interest, amend local ordinances to permit enclosed off-leash dog parks at strategic locations. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Land development regulations can be amended to designate land for designated trails to be connected to adjacent parcels, where applicable | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | Planning Board; Town Council | Exeter Code of Ordinances; Maps and data in the 2044 Comprehensive Plan; model ordinances permitting off-leash dog parks. |

Goal 5-3

EXETER MAINTAINS THE ACCESSIBILITY, SAFETY, AND VISIBILITY OF ITS OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION FACILITIES FOR ALL RESIDENTS.

POLICIES

- Promote the use of existing recreation land by people of all different ages, abilities, and backgrounds by improving access, including use of universal design standards, and increasing visibility and public awareness.
- Encourage community stewardship of town-managed conservation lands, recreation areas and trail systems through Friends groups and other civic associations.

Goal 5-3 / **Strategy A**

Consolidate and share information to identify assets, needs, and solutions.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 1 (2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2 (2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Conduct an assessment of existing conservation areas and recreational facilities to evaluate accessibility status and needed maintenance and capital improvements.

Examples could include:

- Improved signage and public facilities at existing conservation areas, parks, and historic sites
- Improved trail maintenance at State and local conservation areas
- Designated trails that meet ADA Standards for Accessible Design

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|--|
| FYIP #2 | DPW; Conservation Commission; Volunteer advocates | Maps and data within the 2044 Comprehensive Plan; American Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design; RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities; Accessible Rhode Island |

Goal 5-3 / Strategy B

Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 1 (2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2 (2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|---|
| i. Secure training, partnerships, and funding for accessibility improvements. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | DPW; Conservation Commission; Volunteer advocates | RI Governor’s Commission on Disabilities; RI Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Accessible Rhode Island. Partners could include The Nature Conservancy; Audubon Society of Rhode Island (ASRI); the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association; Southern Rhode Island Conservation District; the Student Conservation Association (SCA); and the Exeter Job Corps Center |
| ACTIONS | | |
| ii. Establish a volunteer committee to coordinate construction, maintenance, and signage for increasing accessibility. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 to long-term | DPW; Conservation Commission; Volunteer advocates | American Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design; Accessible Rhode Island |



Historic & Cultural Resources

Exeter's rural character is reflected in a landscape saturated with historic sites and scenic landscapes. Recognized by state and national inventories, many of Exeter's historic and scenic resources nevertheless lack permanent protection and are vulnerable to land use change. The Exeter Historical Association, a volunteer-based group, leads the town's historic preservation efforts with private resources. Furthermore, the gradual loss of village centers has drained public knowledge of community history, and current interest in gathering places is only partially met by the Public Library. Maintaining and improving Exeter's historic and cultural assets requires strengthening and refreshing the town's strategies and investments.

A. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES IN THE EXETER 2024 VISION

... Residents cherish its forests, fields, and wildlife, streams and ponds, historic places, ...that anchor the town's rural character...To strengthen our sense of community for new generations, we have... revived old community traditions, and created new ones to bring people together in community activities.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|---|--|
| 6-1 Exeter protects and celebrates the historic sites and structures that embody the town's history. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support historic-preservation planning and implementation through a non-regulatory program of partnerships with community members, groups, and property owners. • Promote the visibility and appreciation of historic and cultural sites representing Exeter's diverse historical and cultural heritage through signage and public programming. |
| 6-2 Exeter protects and celebrates its Heritage Landscapes—the network of historic roads, farms, mills, and historic centers that together create its rich rural character and sense of place. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and celebrate the working lands and people—farm and forest enterprises—that anchor the town's rural character. • Identify, protect, and interpret historic landscape features and systems that help tell the story of the town. |
| 6-3 Exeter fosters a shared sense of community by cultivating gathering places. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in and support public and private gathering places. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

In contrast to the frequent mention of open space and natural resources, survey responses less frequently noted Exeter's historic and cultural resources. A few responses highlighted appreciation of Exeter's "historic character," and, more specifically, its "macabre history—Mercy Brown @ Chestnut Hill Cemetery" as well as the town's "seasonal festivities, parades, and displays." One comment emphasized the importance of historic preservation at length:

Preserving a town's history, especially a town like Exeter is one of the most important things we can do as citizens, To live here is to be a part that history. When you respect and preserve the history of a town, you are preserving and respecting its personality, the very thing that gives it character; the thing that has brought an influx of new residents and new breath [...] Preserving our history has many benefits, from improving our economy to help lower taxes to becoming more environmentally conscious.

While some comments noted appreciation for the library, others lamented a lack of a community center and other cultural resources:

- *We take advantage of our public library and its many activities.*
- *Amazing Library programming and staff.*
- *Lack of social connectivity with town, lack of community events.*
- *No real town center, lack of cohesive local community.*
- *Lack of town center or community center.*

A lack of community was mentioned 28 times as what respondents like least about living in Exeter, and responses ranked a "community center for cultural, recreational, educational and social activities" as the number-two priority for town improvements.

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

Exeter has a substantial inventory of archaeological and historic resources with varying levels of recognition and states of repair. These resources and sites have been inventoried by the RI Historic Preservation Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), the RI Historic Cemetery Commission, and other entities.

National and State Registers of Historic Places

- Nine locations on the National Register of Historic Places and six additional sites on the State Register demonstrate the town's rich history of agriculture, indigenous Native American activity, and rural manufacturing of lumber, textiles, and other goods. Places can be listed as individual buildings or sites, or as districts that contain multiple resources. To qualify, properties must document a significant aspect of history and also be well-preserved. Benefits of being listed in the registers include recognition of the property's historic value, eligibility for historic preservation grants, loans, and other funding, and assurance that the property will not be altered or demolished by state or federal actions unless they serve a demonstrated public benefit. (See Figs. 6-1 and 6-2 on the next page.)
- It is important to note that listing on the registers does not require a private property owner to preserve or maintain the property and does not protect the property from local development or even demolition, which can only be regulated through local laws.¹

¹ RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission 2001.

Fig. 6-1 Places On Both The National And State Registers Of Historic Places

| NAME | LOCATION | TYPE OF RESOURCE | PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE | DATE ADDED TO NATIONAL REGISTER |
|---|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Austin Farm Road Historic District | Austin Farm Road, west of Route 95 | District | 1850-1899 | Architecture Agriculture | 8/16/77 |
| Chestnut Hill Baptist Church | Ten Rod Road | Building | 1825-1849 | Architecture– Greek Revival Religion | 11/21/78 |
| Fisherville Historic and Archaeological District | William Reynolds Road | District | 1825-1874 | Industry Historic | 12/5/80 |
| Hallville Historic and Archaeological District | Hallville Road | District | 1850-1899 | Industry Historic | 12/5/80 |
| Lawton's Mill | Ten Rod Road | Building | 1825-1924 | Industry | 6/27/80 |
| Lillibridge Farm | Summit Road | Building | 1800-1824 | Architecture Agriculture | 11/28/78 |
| Parris Brook Historic and Archaeological District | Mount Tom Road | District | 1750-1799 | Industry Prehistoric Historic | 12/5/80 |
| Queen's Fort | Stony Lane | Site | 1700-1899 | Historic | 11/26/80 |
| Sodom Mill Historic and Archaeological District | Sodom Trail off Hallville Road | District | 1800-1874 | Industry Historic | 11/24/80 |

(SOURCE: US NPS, 2022; RIHPHC, 2022)

Fig. 6-2 Additional Places On The Rhode Island Register Of Historic Places

| NAME | LOCATION | TYPE OF RESOURCE |
|---|--|---------------------|
| DISTRICT: AUSTIN FARM ROAD HISTORIC DISTRICT | | |
| Austin Farm / John Austin House | 199 Austin Farm Rd | District property |
| Austin Farm / Outbuildings | 199 Austin Farm Rd | District property |
| Site of Store / Post office / Lot | 199 Austin Farm Rd | District property |
| Lewis Place and Christian Union Chapel | 155 Austin Farm Rd | District property |
| Lewis Cemetery | 155 Austin Farm Rd | District property |
| DISTRICT: NONE (SINGLE PROPERTY) | | |
| Browning's Mill Bridge No. 038 | Old Nooseneck Hill Rd over Roaring Brook | Individual Property |

(SOURCE: RIHPHC 1976)

Historic cemeteries

- 192 cemeteries and burial grounds are recorded with the RI Historical Cemetery Commission, marking the graves of the farmers,

millworkers, Native Americans, enslaved and free African Americans, and others from Exeter's history. These range from small family plots to larger burial grounds, some of which are associated with a nearby church.

(See the Appendix for a list of historic cemeteries.) Exeter has not adopted a cemetery ordinance to protect historic cemeteries from construction and excavation activities, which is authorized under RIGL Title 23, Chapter 18. In the absence of a local ordinance, a standard set of regulations developed by RIHPHC applies. Additional recognition of Exeter's historic cemeteries may be sought through designation on the National Register of Historic Places,



provided they meet additional special standards. Exeter has no cemeteries on the State or National Registers of Historic Places but may wish to consider nominating any that meet these qualifications.

Archaeological sites

- Field surveys and research conducted by professional archaeologists with RIHPHC and other affiliations have recorded 39 archaeological sites in Exeter.

Scenic and historic landscapes

In 1990, RIDEM published an inventory of scenic landscapes that evaluated physical qualities, such as variation in topography and vegetation, along with cultural qualities, such as notable historical features, using field research, surveys, and examination of aerial photographs. Nine landscapes in the inventory fall within Exeter (Fig. 6-3). Several of these landscapes overlap with protected lands or sites on the National Register of Historic Places. A few notable areas that do not overlap are: New London Turnpike / Tug Hollow; large sections along Ten Rod Road, including Victory Highway / Hallville Road; Victory Highway / South County Trail; Philmoney Farm; and West Allentown Road around the junction of Exeter Road and South County Trail. These last two areas are classified as “Distinctive,” having the highest scenic value.

RIHPHC published a separate inventory of historic landscapes in 2001.² This inventory calls out two properties along Mail Road that overlap with the scenic landscape G. Slocum Turf Farm / Yawgoo Pond in the RIDEM inventory, noted for having well-maintained farm buildings, stone walls, and landscape design. The RIHPHC survey also notes the New London Turnpike as a road that maintains its 19th-century character, with undisturbed stone walls. (See the Appendix for a description.)

² RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, *Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island, 2001*, https://preservation.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur406/files/pdfs_zips_downloads/survey_pdfs/landscapes.pdf

Fig. 6-3 Scenic And Historic Landscapes

| NAME | CLASSIFICATION |
|--|--------------------|
| <i>Ten Rod Road / Beach Pond</i> | <i>Distinctive</i> |
| Description: Scenic road through Arcadia Management Area; views across pond | |
| <i>Old Nooseneck Road</i> | <i>Noteworthy</i> |
| Description: Interesting land form and land pattern; waterfalls (Shared with Richmond) | |
| <i>New London Turnpike / Tug Hollow</i> | <i>Noteworthy</i> |
| Description: Distinctive wetlands and topography (Shared with Richmond) | |
| <i>Victory Highway / Hallville Road</i> | <i>Noteworthy</i> |
| Description: Undulating topography; woodland and open farm fields | |
| <i>Victory Highway / South County Trail</i> | <i>Noteworthy</i> |
| Description: Undulating topography; woodland and open farm fields | |
| <i>Philmoney Farm</i> | <i>Distinctive</i> |
| Description: Distinctive historic farmstead (1870s); nice views | |
| <i>Slocum Turf Farms / Yawgoo Pond</i> | <i>Distinctive</i> |
| Description: Views across turf farms; interesting land pattern (Shared with S. Kingstown) | |
| <i>West Allentown Road Turf Farms</i> | <i>Distinctive</i> |
| Description: Excellent views across open turf farms to distance (Shared with N. Kingstown) | |
| <i>Shermantown Road</i> | <i>Noteworthy</i> |
| Description: Rural road with interesting land pattern and vegetation (Shared with N. Kingstown) | |

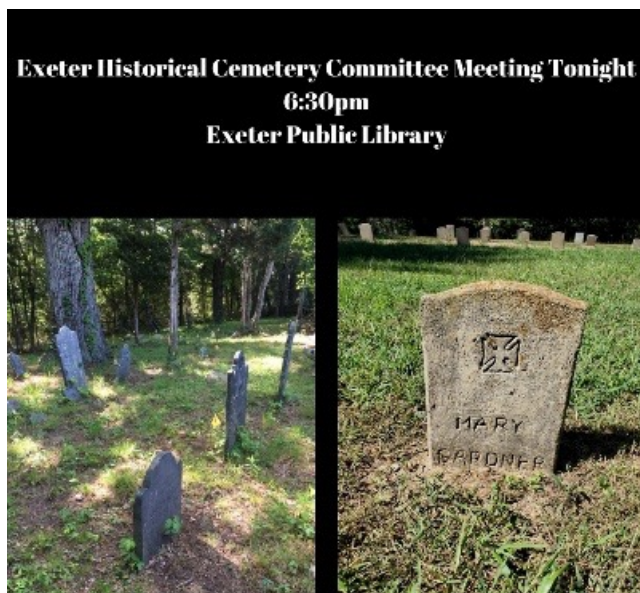
(SOURCE: RIHPHC 1976)

Also in 2001 RIDEM published an inventory of “heritage landscapes” in its *South County Design Manual*.³ The heritage landscape inventory identifies areas whose land features and patterns of development demonstrate historic rural character, fifteen of which are in Exeter, often overlapping with the Scenic Landscapes Inventory. (See Appendix for descriptions.)

Historic preservation activities

The Exeter Historical Association (EHA), a volunteer group unaffiliated with Town government, serves as the primary resource for historic preservation in Exeter.

³ RIDEM, *South County Design Manual*, <https://dem.ri.gov/south-county-design-manual-table-contents>



- The EHA partners with the Public Library and groups such as the Exeter Historical Cemetery Committee and historical associations of neighboring towns to host events and programs.
- The group has a web page and an active Facebook account with 1,400 followers and regular postings of events and resources.

Other cultural and historic resources

There are relatively few community gathering places or cultural institutions in Exeter. This includes “third places,” a widely used term for places, often privately-owned, where people spend time between home (“first” place) and work (“second” place); where people “hang out,” exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships. Exeter’s few commercial areas offer a handful of restaurants and pubs along Routes 3 and 2, such as in Oak Harbor Village Shopping Area and Exeter Pizza. Tilted Barn Brewery, along the border with North Kingstown, offers local beer and fare and hosts a weekly Farmers Market between June and October. However, no single place seems to have replaced the Blueberry Hill Farm Country Store, which many long-time residents say was a place that residents could go to find out what was going on in Exeter.

- After a hiatus during the pandemic, the Memorial Day Parade returned in 2023.
- The Exeter Public Library hosts community activities for children and adults, such as clubs, craft groups and movie nights, in addition to its library programming.
- The Tomaquag Museum, a national-award-winning museum and educational center

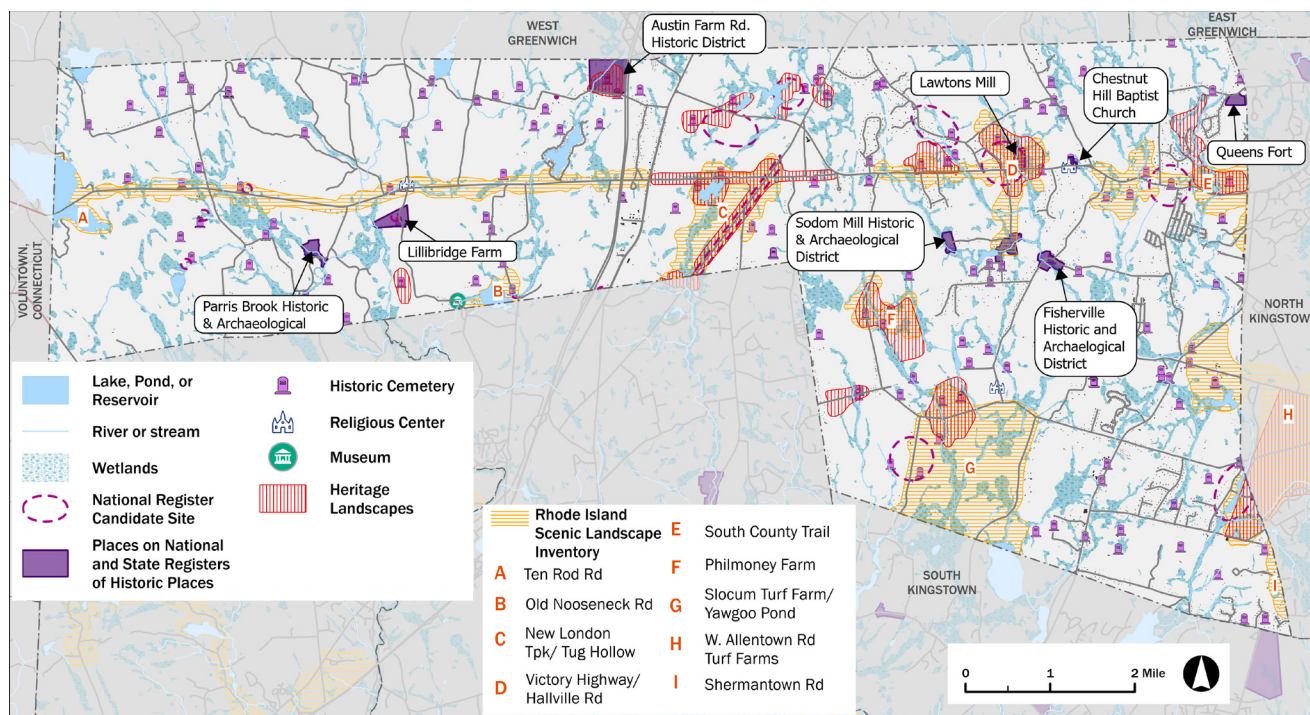


Fig 6-4 Historic & Cultural Resources. (Sources: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

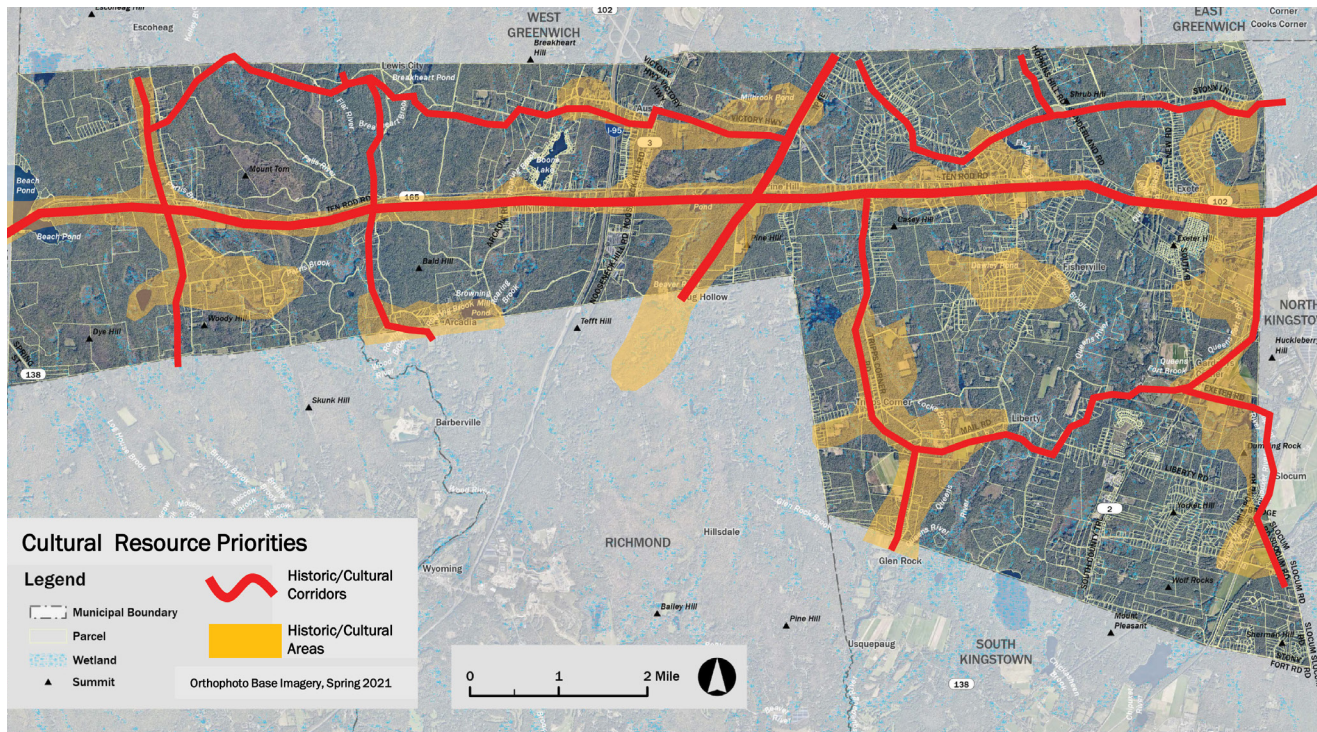


Fig. 6-5 Cultural Resource Priorities. This diagram shows priority corridors and historic/cultural areas that are unrecognized on the National or State Registers. (Map: Dodson & Flinker)

featuring local indigenous history, culture, arts, and current issues, is moving to a new location on the URI campus in 2024.

- The Exeter Fall Festival craft fair, an annual fundraiser for the Public Library has been active for seven years at Yawgoo Valley Ski Area and Water Park.



- Local farms sell directly from roadside stores or farmstands.
- Religious centers include the Exeter Chapel and Beacon Baptist Church, in addition to historic churches such as Chestnut Hill Baptist Church and Liberty Baptist Church.

CHALLENGES

- Exeter has no formal process for preserving or maintaining historic resources, but depends on dedicated volunteers. In response to a recommendation in the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, the Town declined to form an Historic Preservation Commission and a local Historic District.
- Many historic cemeteries and other sites have limited visibility or access.
- The gradual disappearance of village centers has resulted in a lack of historic community centers or community gathering places.
- Few commercial areas provide local gathering places. Previous gathering places, such as the Exeter Grange or the Blueberry Hill Farm Country Store, are underused or inactive.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Pursue opportunities with undergraduate and graduate programs and studios in historic preservation and planning to assist in preparing maps, materials for the public, and a historic and cultural action plan for Exeter.
- Identify historic sites, districts, and scenic landscapes that lack visibility and provide for places for public gathering and appreciation.
- Historic plaques and site markers, as well as amenities such as information kiosks, picnic tables, or parking, where appropriate, could improve access and appreciation. In many communities, historical associations offer historic research for building plaques to property owners for a fee and raise money for historic markers.
- Fifteen historic sites have been identified by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) as candidates for the National Register, of which only two have been reviewed by the State Review Board. Of the nine scenic landscapes identified by RIDEM, two with the highest classification lack any other historic recognition or open space protections and are vulnerable to land-use changes—Philmoney Farm, along Tripps Corner Road, and West Allentown Road Turf Farms, around the junction of Exeter Road and Rt 2/South County Trail.
- Community resources provided by the Public Library could be further developed and

recognized through townwide communication channels on the town website or social media.

- Town buildings, like the Old Town Hall and the Clerk's Office and de facto Town Hall, need rehabilitation and/or expansion.
- The Exeter Grange could regain a role as a community center. It participates in the Washington County Fair and hosts fundraisers, but the building's kitchen no



The Exeter Grange [Source: Flickr user "Matt," via Creative Commons N-C 2.0 license]

longer meets code, and funds are lacking to upgrade it.

- The public opinion survey results showing strong interest in creation of a community center were echoed by the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee, with initial discussion about the potential for a site near the Library.

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 6-1

EXETER PROTECTS AND CELEBRATES THE HISTORIC SITES AND STRUCTURES THAT EMBODY THE TOWN'S HISTORY.

POLICIES

- Support historic preservation planning and implementation through a non-regulatory program of partnerships with community members, groups, and property-owners.
- Promote the visibility and appreciation of historic and cultural sites representing Exeter's diverse historical and cultural heritage through signage and public programming.

Goal 6-1 / **Strategy A**

Designate the Exeter Historical Association to lead a historic resources program.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Designate and contract with the Exeter Historical Association to create and implement a non-regulatory historic resources program.

- *Continue the long-term process of inventory and assessment for historic sites, structures, and landscapes, including an updated map and GIS database.*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| <i>FYIP #1 and ongoing</i> | <i>Town Council; Exeter Historical Association</i> | <i>External grants (e.g., RI Foundation); possible program receipts (plaques and markers); other fund raising; collaborate with South County History Center.</i> |

Goal 6-1 / Strategy B

Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|---|---|
| i. Secure training, partnerships, and funding to support the Exeter Historical Association's work in documenting historic resources, running programs and events, and providing interpretation through signage and on-line documentation. Tasks could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and maintain an accessible on-line database of local historic features.• Provide space to display historic collections.• Partner with local historians and artists, including Indigenous historians and artists, to create a program for historic plaques and markers.• Partner with private property owners who may be willing to pay the EHA to provide research [in collaboration with the state historic commission] for plaques and markers for modest fees. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 and ongoing | Town Council; Exeter Historical Assoc. | External grants (e.g., RI Foundation); possible program receipts (plaques and markers). Potential partners for developing historical plaques and resources: South County History Center; Tomaquag Museum; the Narragansett Indian Tribe and tribal senior center; Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS); Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RSICA); academic programs in planning and historic preservation. |
| ACTIONS | | |
| ii. Reach out to owners of historic properties to build awareness and share strategies for protecting historic assets. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate with the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) to identify options and resources, such as historic tax credits for adaptive reuse, for assisting owners of historic buildings in making improvements while preserving the historic integrity of the property and district. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | Planning Board; Exeter Historical Association; Tax Assessor | Developers; 2044 Comprehensive Plan: Historic sites and districts inventory; RIHPHC resources for historic tax credits |

Goal 6-2

EXETER PROTECTS AND CELEBRATES ITS HERITAGE LANDSCAPES—THE NETWORK OF HISTORIC ROADS, FARMS, MILLS, AND HISTORIC CENTERS THAT TOGETHER CREATE ITS RICH RURAL CHARACTER AND SENSE OF PLACE.

POLICIES

- Support and celebrate the working lands and people—farm and forest enterprises—that anchor the town’s rural character.
- Identify, protect, and interpret historic landscape features and systems that help tell the story of the town.

Goal 6-2 / Strategy A

Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Work with farmers and other land owners to identify, protect and maintain historic walls, trees, views, and other aspects of the historic landscape.**
- Recognize owners of farm and forest parcels that work to maintain historic landscape features.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|--|
| FYIP #2 and ongoing | Exeter Historical Association; Planning Board | 2044 Comprehensive Plan: Historic sites and districts inventory and maps; RIHPHC resources for historic preservation |

Goal 6-2 / Strategy B

Consolidate and share information to identify assets, needs, and solutions.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Share maps and interpretive materials online to disseminate the story of Exeter’s heritage landscapes.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|--|
| FYIP #2 | Exeter Historical Association; Student interns from RI colleges | 2044 Comprehensive Plan: Historic sites and districts inventory and maps; Exeter web page; ESRI StoryMaps; graduate students and programs in planning, landscape architecture, and historic preservation |

Goal 6-3

EXETER FOSTERS A SHARED SENSE OF COMMUNITY BY CULTIVATING GATHERING PLACES.

POLICIES

- Invest in and support public and private gathering places.

Goal 6-3 / Strategy A

Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Continue to seek opportunities to create a dedicated space for Exeter's Old Town Hall and for displaying artifacts and preserving historic documents.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|-------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| FYIP #1 / FYIP #2 | Town Council | Town budget; funding opportunities |

ACTIONS

ii. Continue to invest in the Public Library's programs and assets.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Ongoing | Town Council; Public Library | Town budget; funding opportunities |

ACTIONS

iii. Work with businesses, farms, schools, and community members to identify opportunities to promote and expand community events and activities.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board | Local business leaders; farmers; community advocates; Southern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce |



Housing & Affordable Housing Plan

Most people in Exeter live in single-family homes (84%) on large lots, are homeowners (86%), and depend on private water and wastewater systems. Eighty percent of Exeter’s housing stock was built since 1960. After consistent population and housing growth between the 1960s and the early 2000s, the pace of development has slowed. However, as in the rest of Rhode Island, housing prices have increased substantially. The median price of a single-family home increased 55% between 2016 and 2021 and reached half a million dollars at the end of 2022.

State guidelines require that this comprehensive plan element include an affordable housing program or plan focused on strategies and actions to meet the State requirement that a minimum of 10% of total housing units be subsidized affordable housing units by the 20-year horizon of this plan—that is, 2044.

In 2005 Exeter adopted an Affordable Housing Plan as part of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan and subsequently integrated affordable housing actions into the zoning ordinance, including:

- Formal commitment by the Town to meeting the State’s 10% affordable housing requirement.
- Enabling of an Affordable Housing Advisory Commission and an Affordable Housing Trust.
- Inclusion of zoning tools to promote affordable housing, such as inclusionary zoning.
- Exemption of affordable housing from a growth-management ordinance and impact fees.

The Town cooperated with a nonprofit developer who proposed the first 100% affordable rental development, which opened in 2022. Rhode Island Housing issued a 2023 inventory of affordable housing and percentage based on the 2020 federal census of year-round housing units. Exeter has reached 7.28% affordable housing with 187 units. This inventory includes 101 group-home beds, a category that can fluctuate from year to year.

In addition to State Planning Office guidelines that require affordable housing planning over the next 20 years, the Town is required to make its zoning ordinance consistent with 2023 State legislation that affects housing within eighteen months of the law’s effectiveness. The changes affecting housing are indicated in this element of the comprehensive plan, and a full discussion appears in Element 12—*Land Use*.

A. HOUSING IN THE EXETER 2044 VISION

...To help preserve our open space tradition, new residential development within the landscape is focused in hamlets or villages.... We are a family-friendly and aging-friendly community, supporting young families with attainable housing, an excellent school system, and youth activities, while seniors can find services and housing choices that allow them to remain in town as they get older.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|--|--|
| 1. New residential development is managed to protect drinking water and promote preservation of environmental connectivity and rural character. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate a Town official, board, or commission to monitor and report annually on the number and type of new housing units, including accessory dwelling units, major renovations (50% and more in value), and residential development issues. • Ensure that new subdivisions of 10 or more units (major subdivisions/developments under 2023 legislation) result in preservation of environmental connectivity through appropriate siting and design. • Support creation of a natural resources and open space plan as a guide to connectivity of resources preferably preserved from development. • Create a vehicle for communication between large landowners and the Town about plans and options that can help balance preservation of rural character and environmental connectivity with potential development. |
| 2. Exeter has a range of quality housing choices to meet the needs of households at all income levels and stages of the life cycle. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support affordable housing development to meet the State's 10% goal and provide housing opportunities for income-eligible and elderly residents. • Connect residents with agencies that provide assistance for housing rehabilitation. • Promote variety in housing types to meet the needs of diverse populations. • Charge the Affordable Housing Advisory Commission to be proactive in identifying potential locations and seeking developers for affordable housing and housing for seniors. • Provide for multi-family and affordable housing in area master plans for the Ladd Center Area (joint State-Town plan) and the Route 3 corridor. • Update zoning to be consistent with 2023 changes in State law that affect housing choice and affordability. |
| 3. Exeter takes proactive measures to advance efforts to create a mixed-use village or town center. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support efforts to explore the potential for a mixed-use village center with developers. • Support efforts to seek grant funding for predevelopment work, such as wastewater and drinking water availability. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

In the town-wide survey, most mentions of housing were positive references to low-density living with access to nature and open space. Affordable housing was a theme that elicited differing responses in answer to the question, “What do you like least about Exeter?” Some respondents said that Exeter needs affordable housing for young families and seniors, while others do not support affordable housing. When asked to name the biggest challenges facing Exeter, themes relevant to housing and affordability included balancing growth and development with preservation of open space and farms; providing opportunities for young families and seniors; potential negative effects of affordable housing; and making it possible for people to age in place. Comments included:

- “Relying on a predominantly residential tax base and affordable housing.”
- “Impossible for new young families to move to town currently.”
- “Population growth.”
- “Aging population and lack of senior services.”
- “Balancing growth with the desire to remain more rural.”
- “Balance growth with small town charm. Harder to do than you would think.”
- “Land is not cheap anymore....the world has changed and we need to be planning based on the world that we live in, not the world that we want....I’m not pro-development and think I want the same thing as everyone else that’s pro-rural, but I’m also pro-reality.”
- “Population is getting old.”
- “We need more services that serve needy.”
- “Managing change! Including changes in demographics, economic conditions, and the expense of staying rural.”
- “Much of the ‘open’ land is owned by a few. That isn’t inherently an issue but if they decide to divide

and cash out, the money isn’t with widely spaced-out single-family homes and that will drastically change the feel of Exeter.”

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

Total housing units

- In 2020, the census found that Exeter had 2,647 total housing units, of which 2,454 (92.7%) were occupied and 193 (7.3%) were vacant. (The 2004 affordable housing plan estimated that there would be 2,598 housing units in Exeter in 2020.)
- The RI Housing inventory of affordable housing units is based on the 2020 census of total housing units.

Housing types

- **Limited housing diversity.** Among single-family houses there is a range of housing, from modest cottages to historic homesteads and suburban-style large houses. However, there are few apartments and other options in Exeter. Mobile homes can be found in two mobile home parks and scattered lots. There are two conservation subdivisions, in which single-family houses were permitted to be built closer together in exchange for permanent preservation of the rest of the site. Older households who may wish to downsize to single-floor, 600- to 1,500-square-foot housing will not find much suitable housing in Exeter. In Article IV, Sec. 4.3, Accessory Dwelling

Fig. 7-1 Exeter Housing Stock

| HOUSING UNITS | NUMBER |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Total housing units in 2020 | 2,647 |
| Occupied units in 2020 | 2,454 |
| Owner-occupied (estimated, 2017–21) | 1,951 (85.6%) |
| Renter-occupied (estimated, 2017–21) | 327 (14.4%) |

SOURCES: US CENSUS 2020; AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 2017-2021 ESTIMATES.

Units (ADUs) are permitted but with limiting conditions. (Exeter ADU regulations need to be amended to comply with new State regulations on ADUs passed in 2022.)

Development constraints

- **No public sewer and almost no drinking water systems.** Providing drinking water and onsite septic systems for conservation subdivisions, village-style developments, rural compounds, small apartment developments, and similar housing models adds to development costs.

The pace of housing development

- **Housing development has slowed in Exeter in recent decades.** This appears consistent with the fact that Exeter is one of the few Rhode Island towns whose population did not attain or exceed the level projected for 2020 by the State Planning Office in 2013. As of late 2023, there are indications that Exeter will see an uptick in housing proposals in 2024. However, it is too early to know if the overall pace of housing development will increase significantly.
- **In 2002, the Town adopted a Growth Management Ordinance** (extended twice) to keep the number of building permits allowed for single family homes consistent with school capacity (with exceptions for affordable and elderly housing), but Town officials report that permit applications have never been higher than the allowed number.
- **Since the Great Recession, no new major subdivisions have been proposed in Exeter.** Instead, new housing has been limited to road frontage “minor subdivisions” (5 or fewer units until 2023, when legislation changed the definition to 9 or fewer units) and individual lots.
- **Housing still grew faster than population in the last decade.** Despite the development slowdown, between 2010 and 2020, 136 housing units were added in town, for a total



Top and middle: two single-family houses. Bottom: one of the few apartment buildings in Exeter. [Sources: Realtor.com; Coldwell Banker Homes; Apartments.com]

of 2,647, an average of 13.6 units a year, while the population of the Town grew by only 35 residents (approximately 12 households based on average household size).

- **Possible additional reasons for the reduced pace of housing development,** in addition to the impact of the Great Recession on the housing market, could be greater market demand for housing in communities with more amenities, such as walkability, with historic town centers, or coastal access; costs of providing water, wastewater, and road infrastructure in larger subdivisions; or developers’ reluctance to provide inclusionary zoning units.

Planning efforts to create a mixed-use town or village center.

- The Vision Plan concept to direct development to a growth center. Exeter completed a two-phase, three-year community-based visioning project in 2011 (A Vision for Exeter) focused on creating a mixed-use village center with a greater variety of housing density and types than in base zoning.
- This was combined with a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program intended to balance preservation of rural lands with higher density residential development.

A Vision for Exeter: Implementing the Game Plan for Our Future



Phase II Final Report
December, 2011

- The plan envisioned connecting the village center to the State's public water supply at the Ladd Center.
- No proposal has been advanced for the village center. There has been no agreement with the State on water supply assistance, and, as noted above, the overall pace of development in Exeter has slowed in recent years.

Fig. 7-2 Residential Building Permits by Year, 1990–2021

| | TOTAL UNITS | SINGLE-FAMILY | MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS | MULTI-FAMILY UNITS |
|------|-------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1990 | 53 | 53 | – | – |
| 1991 | 45 | 45 | – | – |
| 1992 | 39 | 39 | – | – |
| 1993 | 36 | 36 | – | – |
| 1994 | 41 | 41 | – | – |
| 1995 | 30 | 30 | – | – |
| 1996 | 40 | 40 | – | – |
| 1997 | 30 | 30 | – | – |
| 1998 | 43 | 43 | – | – |
| 1999 | 39 | 39 | – | – |
| 2000 | 32 | 32 | – | – |
| 2001 | 31 | 31 | – | – |
| 2002 | 18 | 18 | – | – |
| 2003 | 23 | 23 | – | – |
| 2004 | 27 | 27 | – | – |
| 2005 | 26 | 26 | – | – |
| 2006 | 17 | 17 | – | – |
| 2007 | 40 | 36 | 1 | 4 |
| 2008 | 35 | 35 | – | – |
| 2009 | 42 | 38 | 2 | 4 |
| 2010 | 37 | 27 | 5 | 10 |
| 2011 | 45 | 9 | 18 | 36 |
| 2012 | 23 | 7 | 8 | 16 |
| 2013 | 32 | 10 | 11 | 22 |
| 2014 | 6 | 6 | – | – |
| 2015 | 6 | 6 | – | – |
| 2016 | 10 | 10 | – | – |
| 2017 | 12 | 12 | – | – |
| 2018 | 12 | 12 | – | – |
| 2019 | 24 | 16 | 4 | 8 |
| 2020 | 52 | 14 | 19 | 38 |
| 2021 | 50 | 10 | 10 | 40 |

SUMMARY OF PERMITS ISSUED

- 1990–99: 396 single-family houses
- 2000–13: 428 units (92 in multifamily structures)
- 2014–18: 46 single-family houses
- 2019–21: 126 units, (86 in multifamily structures, including 40 Pine View affordable units)

(SOURCE: US CENSUS, BUILDING PERMITS SURVEY)

Residential building permits and construction trends

Residential growth in the 1990s and 2000s was substantial, continuing the upward trend of previous decades. Since 2013 (and the impact of the housing recession), the number of building permits for single-family houses has decreased significantly. However, more multi-family permits were issued because of growth management exemptions for affordable housing. Exeter staff report that since adoption of the growth management ordinance in 2002, building permit activity for renovations, additions, and improvements such as swimming pools, has become more frequent relative to new construction compared to earlier years.

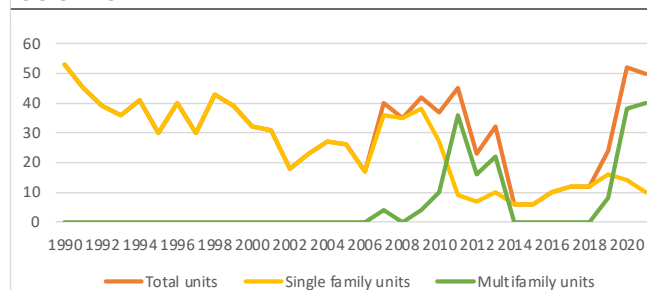
New State legislation in 2023

The 2023 legislative session focused on a package of legislation designed to promote production of market rate and affordable housing in Rhode

2023 STATE LEGISLATION RELEVANT TO HOUSING

- **H 6058 and S 1051:**
changes to the inclusionary zoning statute
- **H 6081 and S 1037:**
reducing the number of phases required to approve affordable housing
- **H 6086 and S 1038:**
standardizing notification procedures for permitting
- **H 6061 and S 1034:**
standardizing subdivision and land development permits
- **H 6085 and S 1033:**
requiring municipalities to update their comprehensive plans every five years and stating that any plan older than 12 years cannot be used to deny a zoning change
- **H 6059 and S 1032:**
changing zoning standards
- **H 6060 and S 1053:**
creating a housing and land use court calendar

Fig. 7-3 Exeter Residential Building Permits, 1990–2021



SOURCE: US CENSUS BUILDING PERMIT SURVEY

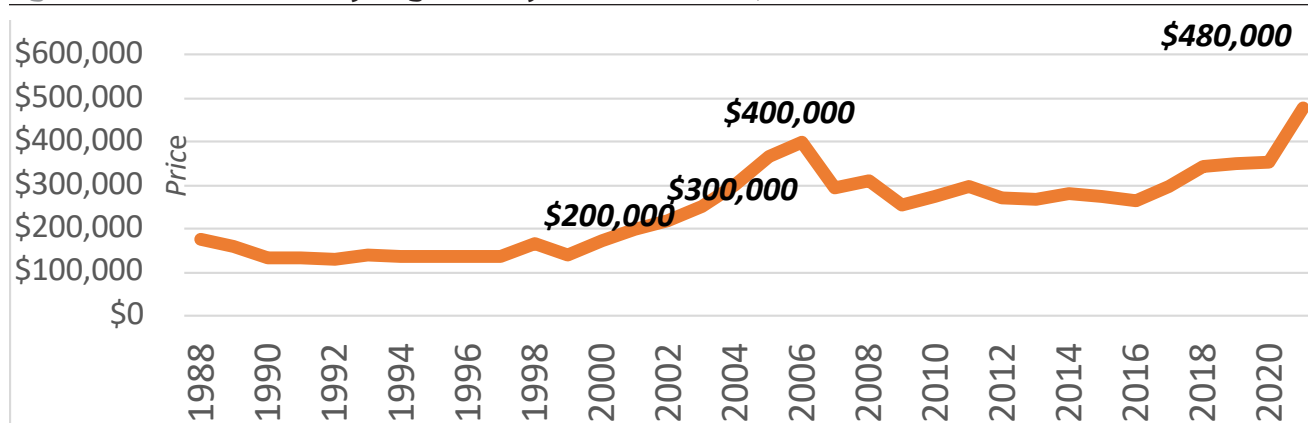
Island. Exeter will need to revise its ordinances by January 1, 2024, with any changes to the Future Land Use Map completed within 18 months to comply with relevant statutes. Much of this legislation focuses on amending and streamlining processes to initiate new housing starts and affordable housing. Aspects of the legislation may affect the production of both market-rate and affordable housing in Exeter.

CHALLENGES

Cost of housing

- While the median income of Exeter residents is higher than the state median and the poverty rate is lower than statewide, the high cost of housing and lack of diversity in housing types limits housing opportunities for households with modest incomes.
- **Housing in Exeter is expensive.** The median price of a single-family home reached \$505,000 in November 2022, compared to \$411,000 in the state as a whole. An estimated 33% percent (107) of the 327 renter households in town during 2017-2021 paid over \$1,500 monthly rent and 41% paid under \$1,000 monthly rent during the same period
- **Income needed to buy a median-priced home.** Using 2021 data, HousingWorks RI estimated that an annual household salary of nearly \$123,000 was needed to buy a median-priced home in Exeter without spending more

Fig. 7-4 Median Sale Price of Single-Family Houses in Exeter, 1988–2021



than 30% of income on housing (the threshold of affordability). Before the pandemic in 2019, an estimated 26% of Exeter households (approximately 600 households) received \$50,000 or less in annual income.

- **First-time homebuyer and renter opportunities.**

There is little entry-level ownership housing in Exeter. While condos are entry-level housing for first-time homebuyers in many communities, that is not the case in Exeter, where the median price of condos meets or exceeds the median price of single-family homes. In addition, there are relatively few rental apartments in Exeter. The number of mobile homes has declined over the last two decades from 293 to 93. While mobile homes typically provide less-expensive housing, they do not count toward the 10% affordable housing inventory unless they are subsidized and have deed-restricted affordability for at least 30 years, which is uncommon. Similarly, Accessory Dwelling Units must be subsidized and deed-restricted to count toward the 10% affordable housing inventory.

- **Cost-burdened households in Exeter.**

Households are considered “cost burdened” if they must spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs (including rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and other fees). Households considered “severely cost-burdened” spend more than 50% of income on housing costs. According to the RI Department of Housing’s 2022 *Integrated Housing Report*, 612 households (27% of total households) in Exeter are cost-burdened. Moreover, 9% (205) of total households were severely cost-burdened.

- **Renters are more likely to be cost-burdened than owners.**

Seventy-three percent (224 households) of Exeter renter households, while 20% (388 households) of Exeter owner households pay over 30% of income for housing costs.

- **Exeter population eligible for subsidized housing.**

Approximately 600 Exeter households have incomes below 80% of the HUD designated Area Median Income, which makes them eligible for many subsidized



Three Exeter single-family houses for sale in late 2022 at approximately the median sales price. [Sources: Zillow, Redfin]

Fig. 7-5 Median Sale Price for a House in Exeter, 1990–2022

| YEAR | PERIOD | 1-FAMILY | CONDO | ALL |
|------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 2022 | Jan–Nov | \$505,000 | \$529,950 | \$487,500 |
| 2021 | Jan–Dec | \$480,000 | \$476,500 | \$425,000 |
| 2020 | Jan–Dec | \$355,000 | \$447,500 | \$320,000 |
| 2019 | Jan–Dec | \$350,000 | \$415,000 | \$320,000 |
| 2018 | Jan–Dec | \$343,400 | \$416,000 | \$285,000 |
| 2017 | Jan–Dec | \$299,000 | \$397,250 | \$285,000 |
| 2016 | Jan–Dec | \$266,400 | \$396,000 | \$266,400 |
| 2015 | Jan–Dec | \$273,700 | \$375,000 | \$275,000 |
| 2014 | Jan–Dec | \$281,750 | \$357,000 | \$260,000 |
| 2013 | Jan–Dec | \$267,500 | \$344,900 | \$307,000 |
| 2012 | Jan–Dec | \$271,500 | \$359,900 | \$285,000 |
| 2011 | Jan–Dec | \$297,450 | \$344,900 | \$314,900 |
| 2010 | Jan–Dec | \$275,000 | \$345,000 | \$310,450 |
| 2009 | Jan–Dec | \$255,000 | \$335,000 | \$268,750 |
| 2008 | Jan–Dec | \$310,000 | \$335,000 | \$305,000 |
| 2007 | Jan–Dec | \$296,000 | \$194,125 | \$271,500 |
| 2006 | Jan–Dec | \$400,000 | – | \$374,875 |
| 2005 | Jan–Dec | \$367,375 | – | \$328,500 |
| 2004 | Jan–Dec | \$300,000 | – | \$283,500 |
| 2003 | Jan–Dec | \$252,500 | \$52,000 | \$227,000 |
| 2002 | Jan–Dec | \$220,000 | – | \$182,750 |
| 2001 | Jan–Dec | \$200,000 | – | \$159,500 |
| 2000 | Jan–Dec | \$173,000 | – | \$150,000 |
| 1999 | Jan–Dec | \$140,000 | – | \$120,000 |
| 1998 | Jan–Dec | \$165,000 | – | \$114,000 |
| 1997 | Jan–Dec | \$138,000 | – | \$121,750 |
| 1996 | Jan–Dec | \$137,000 | – | \$92,250 |
| 1995 | Jan–Dec | \$136,000 | – | \$96,750 |
| 1994 | Jan–Dec | \$136,750 | – | \$101,000 |
| 1993 | Jan–Dec | \$140,000 | – | \$116,250 |
| 1992 | Jan–Dec | \$130,000 | – | \$107,500 |
| 1991 | Jan–Dec | \$135,000 | – | \$106,000 |
| 1990 | Jan–Dec | \$133,500 | – | \$79,000 |
| 1989 | Jan–Dec | \$158,500 | \$60,500 | \$85,000 |
| 1988 | Jan–Dec | \$177,500 | – | \$75,000 |

SOURCE: THE WARREN GROUP

housing programs. Anecdotal reports suggest that there are Exeter residents who cannot afford their own housing and stay with friends or relatives in order to live in town.

Housing need

The need for affordable housing is typically based on the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which in turn is based on American Community Survey (ACS) sample data from the Census Bureau. As noted on pages 1-2 to 1-3 of this comprehensive plan, sample data for communities with small populations like Exeter must be viewed with caution because of large margins of error.¹ The most recent CHAS published by HUD is based on the 2016–2020 five-year estimates. The RI Department of Housing and Community Development has published two housing reports with 2021 and 2022 affordable housing data based on the 2017–2021 ACS and the 2018–2022 ACS, respectively.²

- **Cost burden.** The concept of “cost burden” is used to define affordability. Households are considered “cost burdened” if they must spend more than 30% of income on housing costs (including rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and other fees). Households considered “severely cost-burdened” spend more than 50% of income on housing costs. The most recent CHAS (based on the 2016–2020 ACS) for Exeter found that 390 households had a cost burden from 30% to 50%, and 109 households were severely cost-burdened (spending 50% or more of income on housing), yielding a total of 409 total households.³ The State’s 2022 *Integrated*

¹ HUD Program Analyst Greg Miller in a webinar on affordable housing noted that “data quality is always an issue, particularly in small areas. You need to be careful about using the data in rural areas.” (“Using Data to Identify Affordable Housing Need,” July 12, 2023, 54:53–55:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPJIZy4v52k>.)

² 2022 *Integrated Housing Report*, ohcd.ri.gov; 2023 *Rhode Island Annual Integrated Housing Report*, <https://ohcd.ri.gov/online-resources/2023-rhode-island-annual-integrated-housing-report>

³ CHAS Summary Data for Exeter, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html#query_2006-2020

Figure 7-6 Cost-Burdened Households in Exeter
(based on 2018-2022 ACS Estimates)

| RENTER HOUSEHOLDS | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| TOTAL COST-BURDENED | % COST-BURDENED | |
| 204 | 76% | |
| OWNER HOUSEHOLDS | | |
| TOTAL COST-BURDENED | % COST-BURDENED | |
| 418 | 23% | |
| TOWNWIDE TOTALS | | |
| TOTAL COST-BURDENED | % COST-BURDENED | TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS |
| 622 | 30% | 2,082 |

SOURCE: 2022 INTEGRATED HOUSING REPORT, OHCD. RI.GOV; 2023 RHODE ISLAND ANNUAL INTEGRATED HOUSING REPORT, [HTTPS://OHCD.RI.GOV/ONLINE-RESOURCES/2023-RHODE-ISLAND-ANNUAL-INTEGRATED-HOUSING-REPORT](https://ohcd.ri.gov/online-resources/2023-rhode-island-annual-integrated-housing-report)

Housing Report, using the 2017-2021 ACS estimates, found that 612 Exeter households (27% of total households) were cost-burdened, (224 renters and 388 homeowners), and that 205 (9% of total households) were severely cost-burdened.⁴ Totals from the 2023 *Integrated Housing Report*, based on 2018-2022 ACS estimates, appear in Figure 7.6. Although the details of this information vary somewhat depending on the data source, they provide insight into the need for affordable housing in Exeter.

- Renters are more likely to be cost-burdened than owners. According to the 2022 Housing Study, 76% of Exeter renter households (204) are cost-burdened, while 23% of owner households (418) pay more than 30% of income for housing costs.
- About 30% of Exeter households are eligible for subsidized housing. Approximately 600 households have incomes below 80% of the HUD-designated Area Median Income, which makes them eligible for many subsidized housing programs. This is also the “ballpark” figure for total cost-burdened households. Anecdotal reports suggest that some residents who cannot afford their own housing, stay with friends or relatives in order to live in town.

Affordable housing in Exeter

- In July 2024, RI Housing issued a new affordable-housing inventory, counting a total of 187 units that meet the requirements of the Rhode Island Low and Moderate-Income Housing Act. This brought the percentage of affordable units in Exeter, now based on the 2020 census of housing units, to 7.28%. Households must have incomes below 80% of Area Median Income (AMI) to live in these units. (According to Rhode Island Housing reporting standards—which reflect completion of a unit for occupancy at the time of assessment—four units at the Pine View affordable-housing development will be included in the 2024 notice of the affordable housing inventory).
- Affordable housing is defined as units subsidized from federal, state, or local sources that have an affordability restriction for at least 30 years. For multi-family rental housing developments, RIGL 45-53.1 provides a formula by which some market-rate units can be counted for the purposes of the 10% inventory if there are income- and deed-restricted units in the multifamily development that meet certain criteria.
- If a housing proposal includes at least 25% low- or moderate-income housing, the proponent can file a single permit application—known as a comprehensive permit—to encompass applications to all municipal boards (RIGL 45-53-4). If a comprehensive permit is denied or granted with conditions that make the project infeasible in the view of the applicant, the applicant formerly was able to appeal to the State Housing Appeals Board (SHAB) and the Appeals Board decision could be appealed to the superior court for review. The 2023 housing legislation eliminated the SHAB, so the appeal goes directly to Superior Court.
- The State counts group home beds for persons with special needs as part of the affordable housing inventory. In Exeter, 54% of affordable housing units are group-home beds. This

⁴ 2022 *Integrated Housing Report*, Pp. 16-17.

number varies from year to year. The 2023 inventory has 83 fewer group home units than the 2022 inventory. Units for elderly persons account for 2% of the affordable inventory, and 13% of the affordable inventory (made up of the new Pine View Apartments) are rental. This distribution of affordable housing means that most of the town's units counted as affordable housing do not necessarily provide housing opportunities to income-eligible households that exist in Exeter.

- As total housing units increase over time,

so does the number of affordable (known as LMI—Low- and Moderate-Income) units needed to meet the 10% threshold. Even if market-rate residential development in Exeter continues at a modest pace, the total number of affordable housing units in the town will need to increase incrementally in the 20 years of this comprehensive plan to maintain the 10% goal. After the 2030 and 2040 census enumerations of the number of housing units in Exeter, those numbers will become the base numbers for calculating the 10% requirement.

What Is “Affordable Housing?”

For legal purposes, the definition of housing affordability is based on three statistics: median household income, the percentage of household income spent on housing, and the median cost of housing. Under most subsidy programs, housing produced with government financial assistance is targeted to people whose household income equals 80 percent or less of the Area Median Income (AMI), set annually by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in relation to household size.

FY22 income limits for low- and moderate-income housing for households of one

to four people (in Exeter and some other towns) are:

- 30% AMI: \$20,300–\$29,000
- 50% AMI: \$33,850–\$48,350
- 60% AMI: \$40,620–\$58,020
- 80% AMI: \$54,150–\$77,350

As of 2023, 10.45% of Exeter housing units (266 units, including 184 group-home beds) meet the State goal for most municipalities of 10% subsidized housing units affordable for at least 30 years as defined by the RI Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act (RIGL, section 45-53-2). The percentage is based on the 2020 census count of 2,647 total housing units).

Fig. 7-7 Exeter's 2023 State-Listed Affordable Housing Units

| DEVELOPMENT | TYPE | TENURE | UNITS |
|-------------------------|---------------|--------|------------|
| Whispering Pines | Elderly | Own | 4 |
| Deer Brook I & II | Family | Own | 27 |
| Exeter Mobile | Family | Own | 1 |
| Highland Court | Family | Own | 2 |
| Pinecrest Drive Habitat | Family | Own | 2 |
| Silas Hill | Family | Own | 7 |
| Yawgoo Valley Road | Family | Own | 2 |
| Gardiner Road | Family | Own | 1 |
| Group Home Beds | Special Needs | N/A | 101 |
| Pine View | Family | Rent | 40 |
| TOTAL | | | 187 |

Fig. 7-8 Exeter LMI Units by Category in 2023

| CATEGORY | 2023 LIST |
|---------------|-----------|
| Special needs | 54% |
| Family | 44% |
| Elderly | 2% |
| Homeowner | 22% |
| Rental | 21% |

‘Affordable Housing’ *versus* ‘Public Housing’

| SUBSIDIZED AFFORDABLE HOUSING | PUBLIC HOUSING |
|---|--|
| Privately-owned and typically for owner or tenant households with incomes at or below 80% of AMI. | Federally-funded, owned and run by a local public housing authority (PHA) for very-low-income, elderly, and disabled persons. |
| Subsidized single-family home, condo, or rental. | No new public housing developments have been funded since the mid-1990s. |
| Subsidized rental housing owned by a private landlord or corporation that has received government subsidies to provide affordable housing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHAs annually receive a set number of Housing Choice Vouchers (“Section 8”) for income-eligible tenants who then pay no more than 30% of income in rent. • Vouchers can be assigned to specific affordable units (“project-based”) or distributed to income-eligible tenants to seek housing in the private market. |
| Example subsidy programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State programs (bonds) • Federal (HOME, CDBG, FHLB) • Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (federal/private) • Private philanthropy • Developer capital (cross-subsidy) • Local housing trusts | PHAs can form associated non-profits to access non-governmental funding for improvements. |

How Affordable Housing Works

Pine View Apartments: Structure and Development Process

Affordable housing development, particularly for rental housing, is often complex. Pine View—40 rental apartments for income-eligible tenants in ten two-story buildings—is the first multifamily 100% affordable rental development in Exeter. Set on 7.6 acres off Route 2, it was developed by Women’s Development Corporation (WDC), a nonprofit affordable-housing developer, and like many affordable developments, it involved a variety of funding sources and governmental agencies. An affiliate of the nonprofit developer manages it.

The project began with a for-profit land developer’s proposal for 75% market-rate and 25% affordable condominiums (in compliance with Exeter’s inclusionary zoning ordinance). The WDC subsequently acquired the property and received Town approval for a 100% affordable rental project. Funding sources included a grant from LISC (the Local Initiatives Support Corporation) for predevelopment expenses, such as site design and geotechnical evaluation; Building Homes Rhode Island (a State program); 4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits (federal tax

credits); HOME funds (a federal program); the Housing Trust Fund (a State program); and the Capital Magnet Fund (a State program).

Cost to Tenants

- Rent is \$1,067 for 32 of the 40 apartments, which are two-bedroom units for households earning up to 60% of Area Median Income.
- Rent for the remaining eight apartments is 30% of household income. These eight apartments are funded by “project-based” housing vouchers, meaning that federal Housing Choice Vouchers (formerly known as “Section 8”) attach to specific housing units rather than to a tenant. Because Exeter has no public housing authority with an allocation of housing vouchers, these project-based vouchers came to Pine View through an agreement with the City of Newport Housing Authority. Five apartments (three one-bedroom and two two-bedroom) are available to tenants earning up to 50% AMI, and three others (two one-bedroom and one two-bedroom) are available to households earning up to 30% AMI.



SOURCE: WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT CORP.

Exeter Affordable Housing Zoning Ordinance Tools and Incentives

Commitment to affordable housing

- **Article IX Affordable Housing Sec. 9.1.A** states that “It is a public purpose of the Town of Exeter to achieve and maintain a diverse and balanced community with housing opportunities for residents of all income levels. Through its affordable housing plan, the Town has formally committed itself to meeting the 10 percent affordable housing goal established by the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (G.L. ch. 45-53)....To encourage the development and availability of housing that qualifies as low or moderate income housing as mandated by G.L. ch. 45-53, the Rhode Island Low and Moderate Income Act, and the Rhode Island Comprehensive Housing Production and Rehabilitation Act of 2004, as amended; and...To maintain and enhance the socio-economic diversity of the community through the development of housing for all populations within the Town, including, but not limited to, housing for the resident workforce and housing for special needs populations.”
- **Article X–Planned Village Development** includes providing affordable housing in its purpose statement.
- **Article IV–Sec. 4.6 Mixed-use Commercial Development** states that multifamily residential development in B and LB/R zones is permitted by special use for the purpose of creating diverse housing, especially affordable housing, and the use of this regulation constitutes a municipal subsidy for the purpose of creating affordable housing. *The 2023 State legislative amendments require that all special-permit zoning must be on the basis of objective criteria.*
- **Comprehensive permit procedures (Sec.4.E).** Comprehensive permit procedures for affordable housing are authorized in this section, designating the planning board as the local review board with authority to issue a comprehensive permit that includes all

approvals or permits from any local board or Town official, including the power to attach conditions and requirements. *As noted earlier, the new State legislation eliminates the Special Housing Appeals Board in favor of direct appeal to Superior Court.*

Inclusionary zoning considerations

- **Exeter has previously committed to inclusionary zoning in Section 9.4 of the zoning ordinance.** This section applied to all subdivisions with four or more lots or dwelling units, requiring that 20% of the market-rate lots or dwelling units be affordable, with income eligibility requirements varying based on whether the project is an ownership or rental project. Municipal contributions are available in the form of possible density bonuses, dimensional regulation adjustments, exemptions from the growth management ordinance and impact fees. If the Planning Board found that on-site inclusionary units were infeasible, payment of a fee in lieu of on-site units was permissible to a Town affordable housing account.
- This section was also affected by 2023 State legislation: minor subdivisions are now defined as nine or fewer lots. The new law governing inclusionary zoning changes the percentage of affordable housing from 10% to 25%, and also requires towns to allow the developer to add two market-rate units for every affordable unit they provide. The new law will apply to all subdivisions and land development projects with ten or more dwelling units.
- On July 11, 2023, the Exeter Planning Board recommended that the Town Council consider repealing Section 9.4 of the zoning ordinance, arguing for an abundance of caution in order to allow for consideration of alternate legislation. On August 23, 2023, the Town Council voted unanimously to repeal the Inclusionary Zoning policy in order to allow more time to study inclusionary alternatives that can achieve balanced results for the town.

Town entities enabled to advance affordable housing

- **The Affordable Housing Advisory Commission (Article III Div. 3)** was established with five members representing Town boards (Town Council president; Planning Board chair; Zoning Board chair; Economic Development Commission Chair; or their designees) plus an at-large member appointed by the Town Council. The Commission tasks are:
 - > Act as a clearinghouse on affordable housing issues in town
 - > Meet and monitor achievement of affordable housing goals on a quarterly basis
 - > Make recommendations on the Commission's mission and scope to the Town Council
 - > Request fiscal or staff resources as may be necessary
 - > Keep records of meetings and actions and file an annual report with the Town clerk and operate in compliance with the open meetings law.
 - > Like some other entities enabled by ordinance, the Commission does not appear to be active as this plan is being written.
- Article III Division 4 establishes an **Affordable Housing Trust**, with the Planning Board as an interim trust to be followed by five trustees appointed by the Town Council (two councilors, two members of the Planning Board, and one member at large). The Trust has authority to acquire real property, receive state or federal grants, employ personnel, and manage land and interests in a manner which allows for affordable housing. The Trust may set up a revolving fund. No Affordable Housing Trust appears to have been established

Market-rate and affordable housing overall conditions

- The slowdown in housing development as a whole in the last two decades, especially subdivisions, has made market-rate housing growth less of a concern among residents in

general. However, large landholdings could be developed under existing base residential zoning to create approximately 2,300 to 3,000 new single-family housing units. While a complete buildout is unlikely to happen, the State requires that the comprehensive plan take into account potential housing development over the plan's 20-year time horizon, both for market-rate and for affordable, below-market-rate housing. (See *Element 12—Land Use* for buildout information.)

- The populations most in need of affordable housing in Exeter continue to be the 30% of all households that are cost-burdened, renters (76% cost-burdened) in a context of limited rental housing, and elderly households.
- Although the Town did amend the zoning ordinance to provide tools and incentives for affordable housing, it is not clear that there have been any active implementation efforts for affordable-housing production. The Town cooperated with the developers of Pine View Apartments, for example, but was not actively involved in pursuing this affordable project.
- The Town plays no role in adding group-home or special-needs beds unless approval is needed for expansion of facilities. The Town is not informed by the State agency in charge of special-needs housing issues about the number or location of these facilities except through the RI Housing affordable housing inventory. Experience has shown that the number of special needs units counted as LMI units can vary from year to year.

Assessment of previous strategies in the Exeter Housing Plan (2005 Amendment to the 2004 Comprehensive Plan)

At the time the 2005 plan was adopted, RI Housing reported that Exeter had 29 subsidized units constituting 1.34 % of all Exeter housing units. To reach 10% in 20 years, the plan proposed five main strategies to produce 252 additional units for a total of 275 (based on a projected total of 2,598 housing units).

- **Incentives/subsidies for mobile homes:** The plan depended on a strategy to create 43% of the new affordable homes by transforming 110 existing mobile homes. The Town would use an Affordable Housing Advisory Board “to develop the human and financial resources to replace existing mobile home units with manufactured or stick built housing that meets codes and provides safe and affordable housing, both within the two mobile home parks, and at scattered sites around town” using state and federal subsidies “depending on availability.” According to the plan, the Town was meeting with the owners of the mobile home parks to discuss options. This strategy was not successful, and only one mobile home is currently on the affordable housing list.
- **Second-floor units above commercial buildings:** Sixteen percent (40) of the new affordable units were expected to result from mixed-use development at Oak Harbor Village and in planned village centers. Oak Harbor at that time expected to create second floor units and on adjacent land, of which 15 or 16 units would be affordable. One affordable unit was created but withdrawn from the most recent inventory, but the adjacent land is now the 40-unit, 100% affordable Pine View Apartments.
- **Deer Brook Consent Order:** Twelve percent (31 units) of the 252 new units were projected to result from this order; 27 units were actually produced.
- **Work with others to develop senior housing:** Another 16 percent (40) of the new affordable housing inventory was expected to be created by Town assistance to and collaboration with nonprofit and for-profit developers to develop senior housing. This has not occurred. The current inventory stands at four elderly housing affordable units.
- **Affordable Housing Advisory Board:** The plan included formation of a “dedicated, long-term Affordable Housing Advisory Board.” The zoning ordinance now includes an

enabling ordinance for an Affordable Housing Advisory Commission. Though there were some activities at the time of the 2005 plan, it does not appear to have been active for many years.

- **Affordable Housing Trust Fund:** As recommended in the plan, an affordable housing trust fund with proposed resources from donations, impact fees, grants, state and federal funding was proposed.
- **Establish a community housing land trust to provide affordable housing while preserving open space:** While this has not been established, the village center TDR ordinance has a similar purpose but has not produced any housing or development-rights transfers.
- **Other zoning amendments:** The plan proposed other changes to the zoning ordinance to meet Exeter’s housing needs, including affordable housing needs. These changes enabled a conservation-development ordinance, exemption of affordable units from impact fees and growth-management limits, village-center zoning, density bonuses, and senior housing in village centers.

Overall performance assessment of affordable housing strategies from the 2005 Affordable Housing amendment to the 2004 Comprehensive Plan

Exeter has been successful in amending its zoning ordinance as recommended in the 2005 Affordable Housing Plan. This is consistent with its performance on other topics and goals in the last Comprehensive Plan. While aligning land-use regulations with comprehensive plan goals is very important, by itself it depends on actions and interest by others to actually result in affordable housing. To activate the regulations, the Town depended on interest from market-rate or nonprofit developers. Development activity has declined since the Great Recession, so the land-use regulations that affect subdivisions, rather than single-lot or road-frontage development, did not result in significant production of affordable

housing except for the Pine View Apartments. After what appears to be a burst of activity at the time of the Affordable Housing Plan, there have not been continuing active efforts by the Town to increase affordable housing. Except for Pine View, the increase in affordable housing is almost entirely the result of an expansion of special-needs beds rather than any Town efforts.

OPPORTUNITIES

Affordable Housing Planning Scenarios for the 20-year time horizon of this comprehensive plan:

- Between 2011 and 2021, Exeter averaged 11 new single-family houses per year and 8 multifamily units (including LMI units) for a total of 19 units. Moreover, over the last two decades with few exceptions, housing development in Exeter has been limited to road frontage minor subdivisions (five or fewer units before 2023) or individual lots.
- If the Town continues to average that many new units per year, total housing units added between 2020 and 2030 would be 190, raising the number of census housing units in Exeter from 2,647 to 2,837. That means the 10% LMI requirement in 2030 would be 284 units. Exeter would need to add 97 affordable units to attain a 10% level of affordable housing between 2023 and 2030.
- Adding another 190 units in the decade 2030–2040, without any more affordable housing since 2024, would result in 3,027 total units in Exeter, leaving an LMI gap of 19 units for the 2030–2040 decade.
- In this scenario of continuing modest growth, Exeter will need to add 116 new units of affordable housing during the 20-year time period of this comprehensive plan to attain and maintain 10% affordable housing.

Challenges can be overcome.

- It is currently difficult to judge whether the pace of development in Exeter will become more robust by 2044. However, there are some indications that large properties may be undergoing a generational transition as owners prepare for sale (and possible subdivision) due to estate planning or retirement. To include the possibility of a higher average level of housing production in the next 20 years, the Affordable Housing Plan at the end of this Element doubles the potential affordability gap and minimum production to 232 units in order to meet the 10% goal.
- As a small community with rural characteristics, Exeter faces a variety of challenges to the production of affordable housing: lack of infrastructure combined with hydrological and geological constraints, a high proportion of conservation land, and a small government and Town budget. By developing a proactive housing strategy that employs a variety of mechanisms to increase choices for housing type and affordability and creating relationships with potential partners, ranging from State agencies and developers to landowners and Exeter residents as a whole, Exeter can promote creation of a sufficient number of affordable housing units to attain and maintain the 10% goal and meet the housing needs of low-income local residents and employees.

Town-wide mix of affordability options

- To enhance the opportunity to create affordable housing to serve Exeter residents in the context of rural character and limited infrastructure services, the Town can establish a strategy that offers a mix of options for different land use conditions. This mix would include options such as a percent of village housing development; 100% affordable housing developments like Pine View in areas identified in this comprehensive plan for Area Master Plans (such as for the Ladd Center and Route 3 and Route 2 corridors); a “housing offset”

option for subdivisions of five to nine units; and a new inclusionary zoning ordinance.

- As an example, the new “housing offset” ordinance for small conventional or conservation subdivisions, responding to the change in State legislation that defines minor subdivisions as fewer than 10 units, could provide a 20% density bonus for a minimum of two LMI housing units:
 - > Applicable to subdivisions of five to nine units within a parcel that could be reduced in size in terms of dimensions and area.
 - > Implementation of flexible zoning and design standards (affecting required frontage, area, setbacks, infrastructure development, and design).
- The area master plan efforts described in other elements of this plan, such as a joint State-Town Ladd Center Area Master Plan and a Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan (see Element 8—*Economic Development* and Element 12—*Land Use*), can enable affordable housing production, helping the town to attain and maintain 10% LMI housing. For example, as described in Element 8, the Site Readiness Study completed simultaneously with this comprehensive plan for undeveloped land at the I-95 Exit 14 cloverleaf identifies a potential affordable housing development opportunity in the northern portion of the site on Route 102.
- A proactive strategy will also need to generate more capacity and information for residents and leadership, as well as develop consistent relationships. The current ordinances as written add affordable housing leadership responsibilities to the work of existing elected and appointed officials. They are important decision makers, but other knowledgeable people—residents or possibly consultants for specific roles, such as finding an early action project that might benefit from the State’s new housing-financing opportunities—who are committed to affordable housing should be recruited to help Exeter move toward attaining and maintaining the 10% affordable goal.

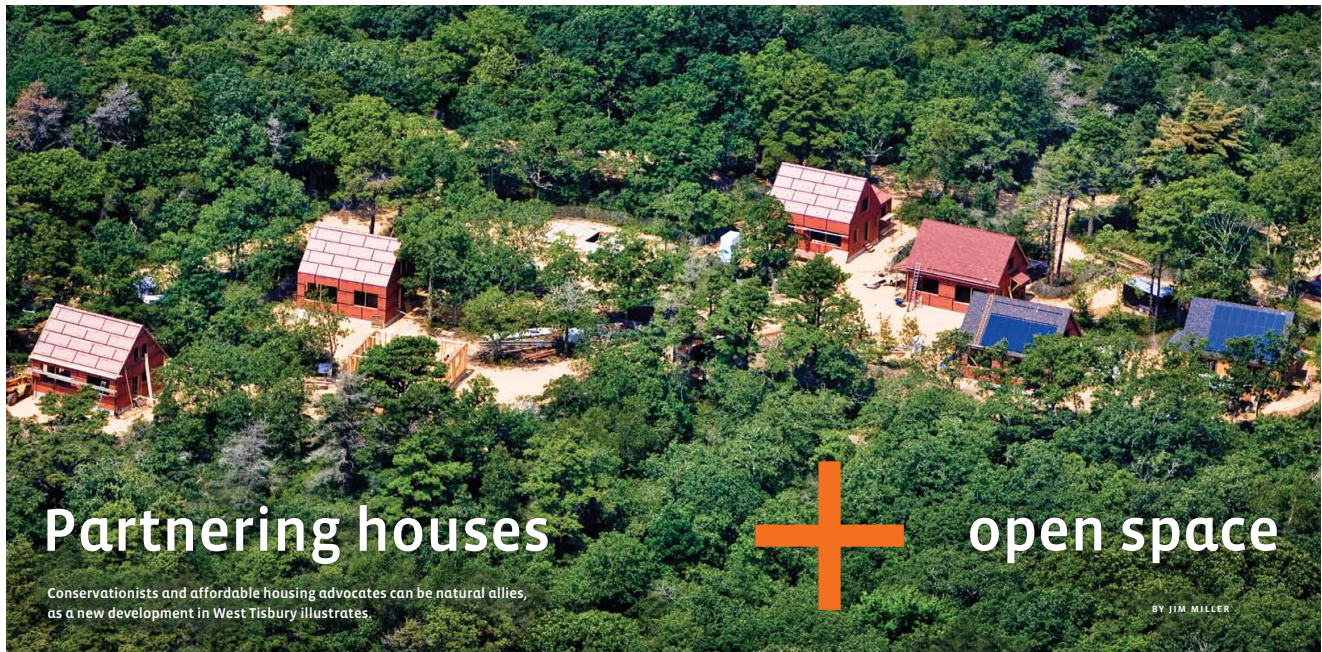
Alternative housing models

Community land trust

- The community land trust (CLT) model of affordable housing could work well in Exeter as a way to provide affordable housing within the context of a conservation-development type of subdivision and potentially expanding the mission of the Exeter Rural Land Preservation Trust. It would combine affordable housing development with conservation.
- A community land trust is a nonprofit organization formed to hold title to land to preserve its long-term availability for affordable housing and other community uses. A CLT typically receives public or private donations of land or funds or uses government subsidies to purchase land on which housing can be built. The homes are sold to low- and moderate-income families, but the CLT retains ownership of the land and provides long-term ground leases to home buyers. The CLT also retains a long-term option to repurchase the homes at a formula-determined price when homeowners later decide to move, in order to preserve permanent affordability. Community land trusts can be used for homeowner single-family housing, multifamily rental developments, for condos, and for cooperatives. They can also serve scattered-site housing.¹ Unless Town-owned or donated land is used, high real estate costs in Exeter may continue to be an issue. However, there are examples of CLTs in high-cost locations. The Church Community Housing Corporation Community Land Trust in Newport has more than 100 homes in its community land trust² and the Aquidneck Land Trust expects to partner with the CLT. Another example is the Island Housing Trust on Martha’s Vineyard,

¹ See www.lincolnst.edu/pubs/dl/1395_712_City-CLT-Policy-Report.pdf.

² See <https://www.cchcnewport.org/>



SOURCE: MARTHA'S VINEYARD MAGAZINE, 1 NOVEMBER 2011. RANDI BAIRD PHOTO

which developed a joint conservation and affordable-housing ground-lease project. A 26-acre parcel includes 22 acres in conservation and four acres with eight single-family houses.³

Cottage communities

- Cottage communities, also called “pocket neighborhoods,” are developments designed in a cottage style compatible with Exeter housing types but modest in scale—approximately 1,000–1,200 sf, though occasionally larger. Although this type of development is usually found in more suburban or urbanized contexts than Exeter, the cottage community model could be modified to fit in some Exeter locations. This housing is especially suitable for singles, couples, retirees, and single parents. Most cottage communities are market-rate developments that may be less expensive than single-family homes because of size, but they can also include subsidized units. East Greenwich has an award-winning market-rate cottage community called Castle Street Cottages. South Kingstown has enabled cottage communities in its zoning ordinance.

³ See <https://www.ihmtv.org/portfolio/eliakims-way/>

The Island Housing Trust on Martha's Vineyard has developed several affordable cottage communities.

- Design characteristics include:
 - > Developments are built in clusters of 4-12 units.
 - > Integrated design provides shared functional open space, off-street parking, external and internal site access, and consistent landscaping.
 - > The units may be separately platted or developed as condominiums.
 - > The design includes a transition from public to private space—such as from the street through a low gate to a common open space to a small yard for each unit surrounded by a low fence or hedge—giving each residence a defined private space. Active spaces in the house look out on the common area, providing “eyes on the street.”
 - > Houses are sited to promote privacy by matching the side of a house with more windows to the more closed side of the neighboring house.
- Individual units are marked by variety in design, color, materials, and other aspects to

provide visual interest, while retaining a general cottage character (elements such as porches, dormers, bay windows, and visible trim).

- Off-street parking for the development is screened and located away from the street.

The originator of the pocket neighborhood concept, Ross Chapin Architects, has made available on his web site a variety of plans for small cottages and houses, ADUs, apartments above garages and similar houses. These examples could help develop design ideas for affordable housing models suitable for affordable-housing opportunities in Exeter. For example, he has extended the concept for special situations, such as a "4-Micro-Unit House" based on the idea of "tiny houses," of about 350 square feet per unit that could be suitable for "20-somethings, Active (Older) Singles, and even our Elders."⁴

⁴ <https://rosschapin.com/category/pocket-neighborhoods-blog/>

"Agrihoods"—Village centers in conjunction with agriculture

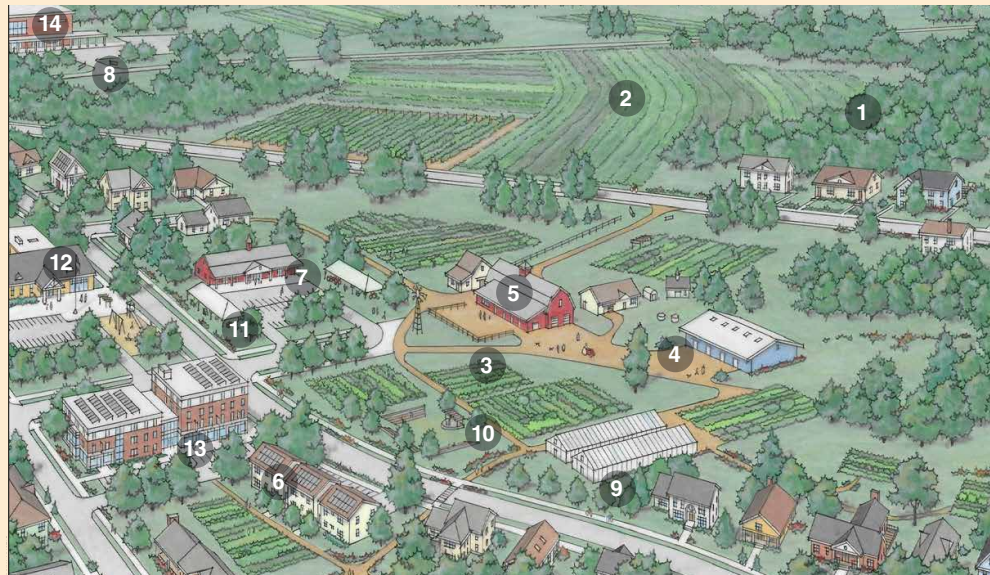
New development types have emerged in recent years that combine agriculture with a mixed-use walkable community. This could be a way of combining Exeter's Village Center concept with the Town's interest in supporting agriculture. As of 2018, there were projects of this type in at least 27 US states and Canadian provinces. Examples include South Village in South Burlington, VT; Prairie Crossing in Grayslake, IL; Bellefield in Hyde Park, NY; and Willowford in Ashburn, VA. Discussions with developers of these or other developments of this type could illuminate whether this could provide a way to pursue Exeter's Village Center concept.⁵

⁵ *Urban Land Institute Center for Sustainability and Economic Performance, Agrihoods: Cultivating Best Practices, Washington, DC, 2018, <https://americas.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Agrihoods-Final.pdf>*

Agrihood Features

KEY

1. Conservation area
2. Protected farmland
3. Food-production space
4. Farm service-corridor
5. Event space
6. Clustered houses
7. Farm stand and market area
8. Grid pattern and connection to streets outside of development
9. Active transportation features
10. Trails
11. Edible landscaping
12. Clubhouse or community center
13. Shops and restaurants
14. Proximity to schools and other important community features



SOURCE: ULI-AGRIHOODS, PAGE 7

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN 2024-2044: PROJECTED PRODUCTION

This table shows projected low- and moderate-income housing units that realistically could be produced during the twenty-year time frame of this comprehensive plan, with a proactive program to bring affordable housing to Exeter. If residential growth continues at the same modest pace as in the 2011–2021

decade, the 10% target would require producing an additional 116 LMI housing units by 2044. Should there be a more robust housing market, doubling average annual production, 232 LMI would be required to attain 10% LMI units in twenty years.

Strategies and Actions with Projected Low- and Moderate-Income Units

[PROJECTED MINIMUM: 116 UNITS; PROJECTED IN A MORE ROBUST MARKET: 232 UNITS]

| STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS | PROJECTED UNITS | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|------------------|
| | 2024-2034 (FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLANS #1 & #2) | 2034-2044 (LONG TERM) | TOTAL UNITS |
| <i>Activate a housing policy and implementation program within Town government: Affordable Housing Advisory Commission; Affordable Housing Trust</i> | Y | Y | N/A |
| <i>Actively pursue strategies to attract affordable- and elderly-housing development</i> | Y | Y | N/A |
| <i>Identify locations and reach out to developers, agencies, and property owners for affordable and senior housing</i> | Y | Y | N/A |
| <i>Elderly housing (ideally in a walkable village center or Ladd Center Area Master Plan, or Municipal Center Area Master Plan)</i> | 5 [20] | 10 [25] | 20 [45] |
| <i>Amend zoning to encourage “housing offset” subdivision production and appropriately scaled multifamily rental housing in the Route 3 and Route 2 corridors</i> | 10 [40] | 15 [40] | 30 [80] |
| <i>Mobile-home transformation as part of the Route 3 and/or Route 2 Corridor Area Master Plans</i> | 10 [20] | 20 [30] | 30 [50] |
| <i>Ladd Center Area</i> | 25 [40] | 25 [20] | 40 [60] |
| TOTAL | 50 (120) | 70 (115) | 120 (235) |

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 7-1

NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IS MANAGED TO PROMOTE PRESERVATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONNECTIVITY AND RURAL CHARACTER.

POLICIES

- Designate a Town official, board, or commission to monitor and report annually on the number and type of housing units and housing development issues.
- Ensure that new subdivisions of ten or more units (major subdivisions/developments under 2023 State legislation) result in preservation of open space and environmental connectivity through appropriate siting and design. Also encourage minor subdivisions to preserve open space where possible.
- Support creation of a natural resources and open space plan as a guide to connectivity of resources preferably preserved from development.
- Create a vehicle for communication between large landowners and the Town about plans and options that can help balance preservation of rural character and environmental connectivity with potential development.

Goal 7-1 / Strategy A

Review and modify regulations to guide residential development to preserve environmental connectivity.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Create a guidance document, using existing resources, for property owners and developers on how to preserve environmental connectivity and resources. Make this guidance available to assist in siting new housing development of 9 or fewer single-family units, significant additions (more than 25% of the existing unit), and Accessory Dwelling Units. While not regulatory, the guidance can be written in the context of how environmental connectivity preserves rural character.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Conservation Commission; Planning Board | Open space strategy created by Conservation Commission; maps and data from RIDEM |

ACTIONS

- ii. Encourage new subdivisions of 10 or more units (major developments) to use zoning tools that result in preservation of environmental resources and connectivity, such as conservation subdivision, village zoning, or rural compound zoning. Review the existing tools to make any needed adjustments, such as an explanation of how the proposed development meets the criteria in the environmental-connectivity guidance document.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Counsel | Existing ordinances; RIDEM policy documents |

Goal 7-2

EXETER HAS A RANGE OF QUALITY HOUSING CHOICES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF HOUSEHOLDS AT ALL INCOME LEVELS AND STAGES OF THE LIFE CYCLE.

POLICIES

- Continue to support affordable housing development to maintain the State's 10% goal and provide housing opportunities for income-eligible and elderly residents.
- Connect residents with agencies that provide assistance for housing rehabilitation.
- Promote variety in housing types to meet the needs of diverse populations.
- Provide for multifamily and affordable housing in area master plans for the Ladd Center Area [joint State-Town plan] and the Route 3 Corridor.
- Charge the Affordable Housing Advisory Commission to work actively to identify potential locations and seeking developers for affordable housing and housing for seniors.
- Update Accessory Dwelling Unit zoning to be consistent with 2022 changes in State law.

Goal 7-2 / Strategy A

Activate a housing policy and implementation program within Town government.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

i. Reactivate the Affordable Housing Advisory Commission as a proactive entity and review the membership and activities to add new members or subcommittees.

- The AHAC would focus on monitoring Exeter housing and needs and on building relationships with affordable housing agencies, nonprofit developers, landowners, and advocates.
- Recognizing that Town board members have many responsibilities, the AHAC could benefit from more assistance from other knowledgeable persons, such as the Director of Social Services and the Town Planner, as well as volunteers.
- The timing and reporting on tasks in the zoning ordinance could be modified as necessary.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Town Planner; Department of Social Services; volunteers | Town departments; regional housing agencies, nonprofit affordable-housing developers |

ACTIONS

ii. Explore creating a local public housing authority (PHA). Rhode Island has 14 PHAs, independent agencies governed by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- An Exeter PHA would receive an allotment of federal Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) to make available to income-eligible households in Exeter as tenant-based vouchers or to provide project-based vouchers to help finance affordable rental housing.
- PHAs can also create associated nonprofits with the power to receive grant funding. (No federal funds have been provided to build new public housing since the mid-1990s.)

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------|
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Council; Affordable Housing Advisory Commission; Town Planner | RI Housing |

Goal 7-2 / Strategy A (continued)

Activate a housing policy and implementation program within Town government.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|--|
| iii. Activate the Affordable Housing Trust. Open the trust in an interest-bearing account, with a deposit that could be from private donations, a small Town budget contribution, a contribution from CEA payments in lieu of taxes, and so on. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Affordable Housing Advisory Commission | General Fund; create a fundraising campaign with volunteers. |

Goal 7-2 / Strategy B

Actively pursue strategies to attract affordable housing and elderly housing development.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| i. Identify potential locations for affordable housing and elderly housing. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Affordable Housing Advisory Commission, Rural Land Preservation Trust | Maps; Assessor's data |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|-------------|
| ii. Establish “housing offset” zoning for minor subdivisions of 5 to 9 units to provide a 20% density bonus for LMI units. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Develop supportive flexible zoning and design standards. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | Consultant |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|
| iii. Study and amend zoning, if needed, to promote LMI housing through the Ladd Center Area Master Plan and Route 3 and Route 2 Area Master Plans in the Route 3 and Route 2 corridors. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Affordable Housing Advisory Commission; Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | State funding; General Fund |

Goal 7-2 / **Strategy B** (continued)

Actively pursue strategies to attract affordable housing and elderly housing development.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

iv. Enter into discussions with State agencies, nonprofit and for-profit housing developers.

- These could include the Women's Development Corporation and other nonprofit developers, South County Habitat for Humanity, RI Housing, RI Infrastructure Bank,

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Affordable Housing Advisory Commission subcommittee; Town Planner | Volunteer committee members |

ACTIONS

v. Revive efforts to transform mobile housing parks into affordable housing, on site or in other locations.

- Should a mobile home park be sold for another development purpose, the Town should work to provide affordable housing for any displaced tenants/occupants.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|-------------------|---|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | AHAC subcommittee | Volunteer committee members; State funding; Affordable Housing Trust Fund |

ACTIONS

vi. Explore enabling a variety of development types for housing choice and affordability levels in Exeter.

- Consider appropriate ordinances to enable community land trusts, cottage communities, and other alternative development types.
- Consider a "housing offset" affordable housing option for minor subdivisions (9 or fewer units).
- Consider a new inclusionary zoning ordinance.
- Seek discussions with large landowners in generational transition who may have an interest in combining conservation and affordable housing development.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|--|
| FYIP #2 | Affordable Housing Advisory Commission subcommittee | Church Street Land Trust (Newport); Exeter landowners in generational transition |

Goal 7-3

EXETER TAKES PROACTIVE MEASURES TO ADVANCE EFFORTS TO CREATE A MIXED-USE VILLAGE OR TOWN CENTER.

POLICIES

- Support efforts to explore the potential for a mixed-use village with developers.
- Support efforts to seek grant funding for predevelopment work, such as wastewater and drinking water availability.

Goal 7-3 / Strategy A

Market the Exeter Village Center idea.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Create a subcommittee to research and meet with developers from New England and elsewhere to discuss the opportunities and barriers to bringing the village concept to fruition.**
- Identify developers of innovative new communities, such as “agrihoods,” master-planned communities built with farms.¹
 - Find out what incentives or modifications could attract investment.
 - Develop the elements for a marketing program and prospectus.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|---|
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Affordable Housing Advisory Commission subcommittee | Volunteers; State agencies; Urban Land Institute; university real estate, architecture/planning departments. Possible grants from funders such as the Rhode Island Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies |

ACTIONS

- ii. Secure an agreement with the State for access to drinking water from the Ladd Center public water supply through a joint State-Town master plan and subject to PFAS pollution remediation.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Planning Board; Town Planner | Quonset Development Corp (water system operators) |

ACTIONS

- iii. Create and implement a professional marketing strategy and prospectus.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|--------------|
| FYIP #2 | AHAC subcommittee; consultant–marketer or grant writer | General Fund |

ACTIONS

- iv. Seek funding and prepare a site plan for water and wastewater infrastructure.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|--|
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Council; Affordable Housing Advisory Commission subcommittee; grant writer | Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank; engineering consultant |

¹ Urban Land Institute, “Agrihoods: Cultivating Best Practices,” 2018. <https://americas.uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/Agrihoods-Final.pdf>. Also see <https://www.forbes.com/sites/allyale/2019/09/12/meet-the-farm-based-neighborhoods-changing-the-face-of-master-planned-communities/?sh=58896bc03baa>



Economic Development

Ever since Exeter’s expansion as an exurban bedroom community in the last third of the twentieth century, three ideas have ruled the Town’s approach to economic development:

- **Preservation of “rural character.”** The idea of rural character means an open-space landscape aesthetic that encompasses traditional agriculture and forestry, land conservation, preservation of environmentally-sensitive resources, including water, and limits on suburban-style commercial or industrial development.
- **Reduction of the residential tax burden.** With limited business development in Exeter, residential taxpayers are responsible for the majority of the municipal budget, which is dominated by public school spending.
- **Limits on potential negative quality-of-life impacts from nonresidential development.** This category includes truck and car traffic (including speed), negative environmental impacts, and suburban-style commercial models such as strip malls and big box stores.

The search for a “balanced” economic strategy to add more non-residential tax revenue has gone on since at least the 1990s but without a truly satisfactory

result. The overall approach in the economic development element of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan called for:

- Economic diversification
- Expanded retail and services for town residents
- Supporting development that is consistent with the historic and rural nature of the economy
- Support for the agricultural and home industries that exist in the community

Much of the economic development element in the 2004 plan focused on creating planned development districts by zoning for a mixed-use village center and for industrial/commercial uses, including special-use districts for the Ladd Center area and for Dorset Mill. Implementation of the plan was zoning-focused. As noted elsewhere in this plan, the village center district has not attracted development. Other action items in the 2004 plan's economic development element included development of an Economic Strategy Plan, encouraging home occupations and industries, developing incubator space (an industrial incubator at Dorset Mill and an agriculture incubator), establishing a farmer's market, and developing tourism potential. While some zoning changes were implemented, other recommendations have not been consistently pursued.

This economic development element includes some of these same features but with an emphasis on how to create long-term capacity and implement a strategy to make sustainable rural character a driver of economic development—particularly agriculture and outdoor recreation—as well as attract appropriate businesses to provide additional nonresidential tax revenue.

This element also includes a summary of a site-readiness study funded by Rhode Island Commerce for potential nonresidential development at the intersection of Routes 3 and 102 and the I-95 ramp (Exit 14). The study was completed in tandem with this comprehensive plan.

A. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE EXETER 2044 VISION

We are committed to pursuing balanced economic growth policies that strengthen the town's tax base, build on our assets, and enhance small scale businesses that serve residents. We promote the economic viability of our farm and forest enterprises, recognizing their importance as both heritage and continuing assets.... In the transition to new generations of leadership in Exeter, the town is committed to preserving the essential elements of our community's unique heritage by managing the impacts of changing environmental, economic, and social conditions while seeking innovative solutions.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|---|---|
| 1. Creation of a permanent Economic Development Commission and an economic-development coordination role in Town government provides data, information and guidance for strengthening Exeter's economy, including reducing the residential tax burden. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support a permanent role for economic development coordination and guidance in town government.• Establish a regular inventory of businesses and commercial real estate opportunities in Exeter.• Develop a program of communication to and engagement with local businesses.• Continue to support Career Pathways workforce education in the Exeter-West Greenwich school system and workforce education at the Job Corps Center. |
| 2. Exeter's economy supports rural character. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and support a long-term economic strategy that promotes rural assets.• Promote the economic viability and sustainability of agriculture and forestry, access to outdoor recreation, and tourism focused on rural assets.• Support opportunities for community-serving small business retail and services consistent with rural character, including in a possible village center. |
| 3. Commercial and light-industrial development contributes to town financial resources in appropriate locations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep most commercial and light industrial development focused on state Routes 2 and 3.• Support improvements to the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors to attract higher value and mixed-use development.• Pursue on-line and innovative businesses with limited impacts on the residential areas. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Townwide survey

Several themes relevant to economic development appeared throughout the public survey.

1. A positive response to the limited business presence in Exeter:

- [Most liked]
 - > *Open space, farms, access to locally raised meat, vegetables, and other food...*
 - > *Love how there's no major businesses. It's mainly residential and woods.*
 - > *Agriculture. Limited retail.*
 - > *No large attractions or shopping centers*
 - > *Limited industry. Ample farm land. Limited traffic.*
- *We should proactively and strategically look to use our Rt 95 interchange to keep taxes low and keep Exeter rural. Keep Exeter a no-frills town. I do not want more public services!*

2. Perceived high residential tax burden and a need for more business to balance residential taxes:

- *There is very little business life. I'm sure there's a way we can keep the small town feel while promoting business growth.*
- *Letting land owners develop solar to produce a modest income and generate more tax revenue for the town without bringing in more people, therefore lowering the tax burden of the residents.*
- *...be future oriented first and listen to what the opportunities might be for Exeter to grow yet retain the country life many folks move here for.*

3. Moderate support for more community-serving small businesses (retail and services):

- About a quarter of survey respondents said there was no need for more of this type of development (23%), while the majority (77%) said that the town does lack sufficient small-scale businesses of this type. However, of those,

about half said they were willing to drive for these goods and services.

- *I'd like to see more small, truly local businesses. I have no problem with things like the small mall on Rt 2 (gas station, Celestial Cafe, etc.) as long as located in appropriate places.*
- *Exeter has many small businesses that operate in the town, often below the radar. The town is so bent on keeping residential and business separate in its zoning code that it forces businesses to go underground. Rectifying this discrepancy would benefit both the town tax wise and the businesses as well as bring the community together if businesses could operate in plain sight instead of hiding in a garage. If Exeter wants to maintain any semblance of "Rural Character," it needs to figure out how to keep its current businesses viable.*

4. Lack of consensus:

- [Liked least] *"The friction between residents trying to earn a living in Town and those that earn their living outside of town that want the town to be a 'scenic vista' only without the activity and noise that is part of maintaining/creating that scenic vista.*
- *Economy and business development to reduce residential tax burden but keep rural character and taxes "reasonable."*
- *Throwing up more businesses here is NOT the answer to keeping taxes lower. Limit building and housing. Keep lot sizes large. Rural and quiet are why we're here!*
- *Get business to come in to contribute to taxes not houses that increase taxes.*
- *I understand the desire to reduce tax burdens by expanding the tax base, however, I consider higher property taxes as the cost of living in a town like Exeter. I think it would be a poor choice to trade Exeter's rural character in the pursuit of commerce.*
- *With the increased cost of housing and increasing value of land (in general, not just in Exeter) we shouldn't expect small scale agriculture will be a sustainable endeavor. Rural was rural because the land was cheap. Land is not cheap anymore. The challenge is getting people to recognize that the*

world has changed, and we need to be planning based on the world that we live in, not the world that we want, and that there are circumstances beyond the control of the town that our plan needs to account for. I'm not pro-development and think I want the same thing as everyone else that's pro-rural, but I'm also pro-reality.

- *Keep the farms to prevent developing.*
- *Agriculture, let our farmers farm. They don't need more rules. They need to be able to work and afford to keep their family property in their family. Many of these families have been in Exeter since it was founded. Let's keep it that way.*
- *Exeter needs to embrace sustainable CHANGE! My definition of rural includes farms but unfortunately, Exeter does not embrace change in farming techniques and practices in a way that will keep farming a viable occupation. The only option permitted by right on farm land is residential development.*

Community Open House

Participants in the Community Open House showed the highest level of agreement with two priorities for the town:

- Preservation of environmental and ecological systems and rural character
- Pursuit of economic development in the Route 3 corridor to provide more nonresidential tax revenue

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

1. The big picture: Economic trends in Rhode Island

The Rhode Island economy is predominantly made up of small businesses with relatively few employees. In March 2021, 92 percent of all employers in Rhode Island had fewer than 20 employees and employed nearly 27% of

the workforce.¹ The 2023 overview of the state economy noted a “significant rebound” from the pandemic economy, including very low unemployment, with future concerns focused on inflation and the potential for recession. A long-term concern is the aging of the population, with 40% of the state population made up of people 65 years and older and below 20 years old. In addition to potential impacts on economic growth and the labor force, an aging population also tends to have a negative impact on income tax and sales tax revenue per capita. The ultimate impact of remote work models is still to be seen. The state is also experiencing an affordable housing crisis, as discussed in the Housing Element.²

State economic development strategy

A new state Long-Term Economic Development Vision and Policy, *Ocean State Accelerates*, was published in December 2023 and approved as the 2022-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy by the federal Economic Development Administration in 2024.

Municipal comprehensive plan economic strategies are required to contribute to implementation of state economic strategies. The state plan is organized into three themes—*Strong Communities, Increased Prosperity, and Sustainable Growth*—and rooted in economic resilience, climate adaptability, workforce development, and a commitment to equity. Each theme includes a set of State goals:

- **Strong Communities**—incorporating workforce development, affordable housing, and placemaking. Exeter’s comprehensive plan goals and policies consistent with these topics are incorporated in Elements 7—*Housing*, 8—*Economic Development*, and 12—*Land Use*.
 - > Expand linkages between K-12, postsecondary education, and industry, and strengthen on-ramps into selected industry sectors.

¹ RIDLT, “*Rhode Island Employment Trends and Workforce Issues 2020-2021 (May 2022)*, p. 2

² Executive Office of Commerce, “*2023 Overview of the Rhode Island Economy*,” pp. 16-17, 22, 27.

- > Address family-care issues that present barriers to education and employment for many.
- > Invest in young professionals, change makers, and rising leaders.
- > Invest resources into affordable housing and development, integrating housing, transportation, and employment centers.
- > Take a holistic approach to placemaking, amenity-rich, mixed-used development and tourism.
- **Increased Prosperity**—incorporating business growth, optimized government functions for economic growth opportunities, and business collaboration in workforce and education systems. Exeter’s comprehensive plan goals and policies consistent with these topics are incorporated in the present Element 8—*Economic Development*.
 - > Improve the reach, vibrancy, and resilience of Rhode Island’s entrepreneurial and small business ecosystem.
 - > Increase productivity, competitiveness, and growth of existing businesses and leverage the opportunities and advantages of the State’s selected industries.
 - > Improve government functions to optimize economic growth opportunities.
 - > Expand industry collaboration in the workforce and education system.
- **Sustainable Growth**—incorporating resilience and natural resource protection, infrastructure and facilities for emerging business, and support for renewable energy and climate resilience. Exeter comprehensive plan goals and policies consistent with these topics are incorporated in Elements 4—*Natural Resources*, 9—*Transportation*, 10—*Public Facilities, Services and Infrastructure*, 11—*Sustainability, Climate Resilience, and Energy*, and Element 12—*Land Use*.
 - > Embed climate resilience, natural resource protection, and a sustainability mindset and practice into all statewide economic, land use, and transportation initiatives.
 - > Develop infrastructure and facilities to support businesses, emerging, and selected industries.
 - > Support the State’s goal for 100% renewable energy by 2033 and support initiatives that address sustainability goals and impacts of climate change.

Ocean State Accelerates built on the 2014 State economic development plan, *Rhode Island Rising: A Plan for People, Places, and Prosperity*, which established six goals for 2035:

- Provide educational training opportunities to activate a 21st-century workforce.
- Foster an inclusive economy that targets opportunity to typically underserved populations.
- Support industries and investments that play to Rhode Island’s strengths.
- Create great places by coordinating economic, housing, and transportation investments.
- Create a stronger, more resilient Rhode Island.
- Make Rhode Island a state where companies, our workers, and the state as a whole can develop a competitive advantage.

State agriculture and food policy

The Rhode Island Food Strategy, *Relish Rhody*, is the state’s contribution to a New England regional food system goal that 50% of the food eaten in New England be produced there in 2060. Exeter is well-positioned to contribute to meeting the state’s food policy goals in these focus areas:

Preserve and Grow Agriculture, Fisheries Industries

- “Retain and expand land in agriculture: Rhode Island is the second most densely populated state in the country. Competing potential land use drives up the cost of agricultural land in Rhode Island, creating the highest farmland prices in the nation.... [E]nsure current farmland remains in agriculture, expand the land in active production, and support farmers in accessing, retaining, and expanding their businesses.”

- “Expand preservation of active farmland: Invest in land conservation programs that would retain land in agriculture, ensure aging farmers can sell their land in a way that allows them to retire, and allow existing and new farmers to purchase and lease land at affordable rates.”

Sustain and Create Markets for Rhode Island Food, Beverage Products

- “Expand on-farm opportunities: To increase farm viability, farmers need more opportunities to generate income throughout the year. Rhode Island must continue to invest in year-round growing opportunities.... Many farmers rely on non-farm income to retain their land in agriculture. This has been true throughout history, with farmers involved in farm-adjacent employment opportunities....Rhode Island must support appropriate, revenue-generating activities, such as appropriately sized and sited clean energy systems (solar, wind, anaerobic digesters), farm stands, on-farm food processing, among others.”

Enhance technical assistance and improve coordination and communication about existing resources

- “Farms are businesses. ...Rhode Island must ensure that its farming community has access to the same business technical assistance as other small businesses in the state. Farmers also need access to other forms of technical assistance specific to agriculture. This includes legal assistance, regulatory assistance, and farming/agriculture technical assistance. Further, expand and support programs that help farmers with retirement and succession planning,”

Development pressures and agricultural land

The 2014 state economic development plan, *Rhode Island Rising*, recognized how the pressures on agricultural and forestry lands in the state work against the desire to protect rural character:

- “The vast majority of land in rural Rhode Island is zoned for residential use—even if the current use is in fact agriculture or forestry. While farmers can generate revenue from selling their crops, profits can be modest in the best of years—and when the only other option is to sell the land for residential development it is no wonder that so many farms have been subdivided. On forested land, the available cash flow from the sale of timber products is even less likely to sustain landowners. For many landowners, splitting off a few house lots from time to time becomes the only way to keep up with expenses. The economic pressures on landowners, combined with the limited opportunities of traditional zoning, contribute to a haphazard, sprawling pattern of development. Interestingly, when reading many local Comprehensive Plans, this pattern of development is at odds with a town’s goals to protect rural character and quality of life while encouraging appropriate economic development. It also works against elements of the State Guide Plan, including Land Use 2025, and the desire for more concentrated growth center development.”

In the years since the 2014 plan, additional pressures affecting rural land uses have included solar farms on agricultural or forest lands, rather than on previously developed land. In 2023, new legislation provided some protection for designated core forest areas.

The outdoor economy in Rhode Island

With significant conservation and outdoor recreation resources, Exeter has potential assets for a robust outdoor recreation economy.

- Outdoor recreation activities such as camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, bicycling, ATV use, boating, RV use, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and wildlife viewing contribute \$1.4 billion to Rhode Island’s economy, according to a 2021 report by the

Outdoor Industry Association.³ This is not only spent on “direct” costs, such as park fees and camping gear: it is also distributed among lodging places, eating and drinking establishments, service stations, and purchases of food and other services, many of them provided by small, local businesses. Outdoor recreation supports 16,962 jobs in Rhode Island, generating \$0.7 billion in wages and salaries.

- Wildlife-related recreation is important to Rhode Island’s forest-based economy, with an estimated 503,000 residents and nonresidents participating each year, bringing \$348 million to the state from fishing, hunting, and wildlife watching. Approximately 308,000 Rhode Islanders report participating in wildlife watching alone, bringing \$200 million to the state, according to a 2019 study.⁴

2. The local picture: The Exeter economy

Exeter today is primarily a bedroom community with a small commercial/industrial business sector and agriculture/forestry economy. While the town is rural in the Rhode Island context, Exeter is part of a metropolitan economy and the labor, housing, trade and production markets within that economy (Providence-Warwick, RI-MA Metropolitan Statistical Area). There is limited community-serving retail, entertainment, or services. Approximately 1,000 acres are zoned for commercial/industrial uses (3% of all town acreage) and the assessor’s list shows 21 vacant and developable commercial/industrial parcels encompassing 168.1 acres. Routes 2 and 3 have a few small restaurants or retail outlets to serve the community, but residents travel to adjacent communities for household shopping and services—and many are happy to do so.

The numbers

- About 1,500 jobs are located in Exeter and are mostly held by people who live outside the town.
- There are 237 business establishments in Exeter and 6 government employers.
- Fewer than 200 people both live in Exeter and work at private-sector jobs in Exeter.
- About 2,400 Exeter residents work in the private sector in jobs located outside the town.
- Although almost a quarter of jobs located in Exeter are in professional/ technical services, most of the remaining private-sector jobs are in lower-paying sectors. The average wage is modest.
- While the number of jobs in Exeter grew from 2010 to 2019, the average wage of Exeter jobs in the same period declined slightly (unlike Washington County or the state as a whole).
- Like the rest of the state, Exeter unemployment is very low in 2022.
- The town labor force numbers 3,999, the labor force participation rate is 82.2% and unemployment stands at 2.8%.
- The labor force has grown since 2004, when it numbered 3,777. Since then, the highest year was 2018, with 4,041 in the labor force. Since 2008, the total has fluctuated between 3,800 to 4,041.
- Exeter’s labor force is well-educated. Half of the town’s residents ages 25-54 have a bachelor’s degree or higher, 24% have some college, and 21% have a high school diploma.

³ Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account 2021 Rhode Island, <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ORSA-Rhode-Island.pdf>.

⁴ RI Forest Conservation Advisory Committee and Rhode Island Tree Council, The Value of Rhode Island Forests, August 2019.

Business data

The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training compiles quarterly data based on federal Bureau of Labor Statistics quarterly data. The most recent available data showing the number of establishments by town and sector comes from the third quarter of 2021. This data is derived from

Fig. 8-1 Exeter Business Enterprises (3rd Q 2022)

| SECTORS | NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES | AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT | TOTAL WAGES (\$) |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting | 8 | 51 | 572,232 |
| Mining | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Utilities | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Construction | 44 | 121 | 1,611,370 |
| Manufacturing | 10 | 59 | 1,312,708 |
| Wholesale trade | 19 | 63 | 1,044,755 |
| Retail trade | 14 | 73 | 616,146 |
| Transportation & warehousing | 5 | 53 | 545,461 |
| Information | 5 | 7 | 46,838 |
| Finance & insurance | 6 | 31 | 731,043 |
| Real estate & rental & leasing | 7 | 9 | 306,763 |
| Professional & technical services | 39 | 310 | 6,598,170 |
| Management of companies & enterprises | 1 | * | * |
| Administrative support & waste management | 27 | 149 | 2,148,978 |
| Educational services | 4 | * | * |
| Health care & social assistance | 16 | 211 | 2,305,406 |
| Arts, entertainment, & recreation | 3 | * | * |
| Accommodation & food services | 18 | 190 | 1,217,993 |
| Other services (except public admin.) | 11 | 39 | 406,496 |
| Unclassified establishments | — | 0 | 0 |
| Government | 6 | 105 | 1,407,260 |
| TOTAL PRIVATE + GOVERNMENT | 243 | 1,548 | 21,351,284 |
| TOTAL PRIVATE ONLY | 237 | 1,443 | 19,944,024 |

*Data not shown because of unavailable employer information.

Source: <https://dlt.ri.gov/labor-market-information/data-center/employment-wages-industry-qcew>

quarterly tax reports submitted by employers subject to the state's unemployment insurance law—meaning that very small businesses without employees are not represented in this list. The town may have additional home businesses that have not registered for taxation.

The Town's list of taxable business/personal property on the 2022 Tax Roll included 254 taxpayers of which 129 had Exeter addresses (other businesses on the tax roll included owners of leased property). Most home-based businesses are supposed to be included if they own taxable property—such as furniture, fixtures, equipment, leased equipment, and leasehold improvements—although some home-based businesses are tax-exempt or have no taxable equipment.

The largest number of establishments are in these sectors: construction; professional and technical services; administrative support and waste management; wholesale trade; and accommodation and food services. Sectors with the most employees are professional and technical services; health care and social assistance; accommodation and food services; administrative support and waste management; construction; and government.

Fig. 8-2 Place of Residence for People Who Work in Exeter

| GEOGRAPHY | % OF JOBS |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Live/Work in Exeter | 11.9% |
| Rest of Washington County | 14.6% |
| Providence County | 15.6% |
| Kent County | 26.5% |
| Newport County | 4.1% |
| Connecticut | 4.8% |
| Massachusetts | 3.7% |
| Rest of US | 3.5% |

Most people who live in Exeter work outside the town and:

- Commute less than 20 miles: 36%
- Commute 10-25 miles: 51%
- Commute 25-50 miles: 7%
- Commute more than 50 miles: 6%.

Fig. 8-3 Place of Work (Private Sector) for People Who Live in Exeter

| GEOGRAPHY | % OF JOBS |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Live/Work in Exeter | 6.8% |
| Rest of Washington County | 29.7% |
| Providence County | 24% |
| Kent County | 21.7% |
| Newport County | 5.4 % |
| Connecticut | 4.9% |
| Massachusetts | 4.8% |
| Rest of US | 2.7% |

Exeter's total of 134 parcels zoned for commercial and industrial uses (1,120.4 acres) constitute 4.2% of all parcels and 3% of all acres. Only 168.1 acres are currently vacant and developable (although many of the commercial/industrial properties could benefit from redevelopment if market conditions warrant).

These commercial/industrial properties constitute less than ten percent of Exeter's assessed value. Exeter is similar to Richmond in that respect, while, in contrast, nonresidential properties constitute 25% of West Greenwich's assessed value. Both neighboring communities have higher tax rates but both also have total assessed value somewhat lower than Exeter.

3. Commercial and industrial development

Zoning focuses nonresidential development in the Route 3 and Route 2 corridors, but this type of development is often found mixed with residential development. For example, although the Route 3 corridor is predominantly commercial, it also includes residential buildings;

Fig. 8-4 Properties Zoned for Commercial and Industrial Use in the Exeter Property Tax Base

| USE | TOTAL PARCELS | TOTAL ACRES | VACANT DEVELOPABLE PARCELS | VACANT DEVELOPABLE ACRES |
|---|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| All Uses | 3,199 | 36,455.7 | 358 | 1,689.0 |
| Residential | 2,625 | 7,822.5 | 337 | 1,520.9 |
| Commercial | 109 | 855.0 | 15 | 104.6 |
| Industrial | 25 | 265.4 | 6 | 63.5 |
| Exempt | 174 | 13,229.5 | — | — |
| Special—Farm, Forest, and Open Space | 266 | 14,283.4 | — | — |

SOURCE: TOWN OF EXETER ASSESSOR

2022 TAX RATES

- Exeter: 13.94
- Richmond: 20.58
- West Greenwich:
 - > 24.52 residential/commercial property
 - > 34.80 personal property

SOURCE: RI DIVISION OF MUNICIPAL FINANCE

Black Plain Road, located between Interstate 95 and Route 3, is zoned residential and contains predominantly small-lot residential with a smattering of businesses. Similarly, the southern end of Route 2 in Exeter has a mixture of business types at different scales of development, including a few office buildings and retail at Oak Harbor Village. Most commercial and light industrial development in Exeter is relatively low value and most businesses are small, with few employees.

The top commercial/industrial real estate taxpayers in Exeter are located in the Route 3 or Route 2 corridors, as shown in Figure 8-5 on the next page. Some properties are owned by the users, many of whom have real estate holdings for rent. The town's top nonresidential taxpayer is Copart, an online vehicle-auction site off Route 3 with a building and a large expanse of impermeable pavement for the vehicles.

Fig. 8-5 Properties Zoned for Commercial and Industrial Use in the Exeter Property Tax Base

| RANK | TOTAL OWNER ANNUAL TAXES (2022 TAX RATE) | OWNER NAME | OWNER MAILING LOCATION | ANNUAL TAXES BY PROPERTY (2022 TAX RATE) | PARCEL LOCATION |
|-------------|---|---|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | 80,120.150 | COPART OF CONNECTICUT, INC. (online auto auctions) | Dallas TX | 80,120.150 | 10 Industrial Dr |
| 2 | 69,404.472 | OAK HARBOR VILLAGE LLC (part of shopping center) | Westerly, RI | 69,404.472 | 567 South County Tr |
| 3 | 59,926.666 | SPIRIT REALTY, L.P. (NWN Carousel) | Dallas TX | 5,9926.666 | 659 South County Tr |
| 4 | 56,030.436 | CUBESMART LP (Self Storage) | Alexandria, VA | 38,534.342 17,496.094 | 525 South County Tr 513 South County Tr |
| 5 | 27,275.004 | Dowlatshahi Gashy (Commercial Condo) | Cranston, RI | 99,29.462 17,345.542 0 | 560d South County Tr 560a South County Tr 560 South County Tr |
| 6 | 22,772.384 | BAIRD PROPERTIES LLC (Retail) | Coventry, RI | 13,781.084 6,309.244 2,682.056 | 20 Austin Farm Rd 171 Nooseneck Hill Rd 0 Austin Farm Rd |
| 7 | 22,338.850 | KULSIC LAURA ANN REVOC TRUST and KULSIC LAURA (mobile home park and vacant land) | Exeter | 15,324.242 6,961.636 52.972 | 0 Victory Hwy 0 Nooseneck Hill Rd 0 Victory Hwy |
| 8 | 20,285.488 | BESTRID REALTY LLC (retail) | Taunton, MA | 11,347.16 8,938.328 | 561 South County Tr 260 Nooseneck Hill Rd |
| 9 | 20,222,758 | SANTILLI ENTERPRISES LLC (warehouses) | Cranston, RI | 10,259.84 99,62.918 | 25-27 Industrial Dr 17-19 Industrial Dr |
| 10 | 19,681.886 | ALLSOURCE POWER LLC (Twisted Throttle online motorcycle parts) | Hope Valley RI | 19,681.886 | 570a-B Nooseneck Hill Rd |
| 11 | 17,932.416 | DAAR BISHOP LLC (retail) | Warwick, RI | 17,932.416 | 435 Nooseneck Hill Rd |
| 12 | 16,789.336 | PERSIA LLC (Gas Mart at Oak Harbor) | W. Greenwich, RI | 16789.336 | 561a South County Tr |
| 13 | 13,053.416 | DW LLC (Exeter Scrap Metal) | N. Franklin, CT | 13,053.416 | 405 Nooseneck Hill Rd |
| 14 | 11,241.216 | MOODY INVESTMENTS LLC (Special Vehicles Ltd) | Exeter | 11,241.216 | 716 South County Tr |
| 15 | 11,156.182 | DMSM LLC (Garages) | Hope Valley RI | 11,156.182 | 9 & 13 Industrial Dr |
| 16 | 10,605.552 | BESSON PROPERTIES LLC (garage) | Exeter | 10,605.552 | 337 Nooseneck Hill Rd |

SOURCE: TOWN OF EXETER ASSESSOR

The second- and third-ranked nonresidential taxpayers are Oak Harbor Village LLC, and Spirit Realty, which recently purchased the building on Route 2 occupied by the cloud communications company NWN Carousel. All but two of the top 15 nonresidential taxpayers have mailing addresses outside of Exeter—most in Rhode Island, but both Copart and Spirit Realty are located in Dallas, TX. There are a few major nonresidential taxpayers outside of the business and light industry zones, notably Yawgoo Valley Ski and Water Park under the name Ski Pro, with a tax bill of approximately \$24,000.



Oak Harbor Village (Source: LBA)

Route 2 Corridor

- The intersection of Route 2 and Route 102 (located in North Kingstown) is the gateway to Exeter from the east. The Route 2 corridor in Exeter has a mixture of uses.
- The northern part of the corridor is located in North Kingstown along Route 2 to the RI Veteran's Memorial Cemetery near Exeter Road. Just west of the town boundary, off Route 2, are the Tilted Barn Brewery, the RI Grows greenhouse development at Schartner Farms, Hallene Farm, and the Exeter Animal Shelter. The Canonicus Camp and Conference Center is located east of Route 2 on Exeter Road.
- More businesses are located between Exeter Road and the Richmond line, many of them consumer-facing, including restaurants, service businesses, self-storage, a dual-

use (medical and recreational) marijuana dispensary, and the Oak Harbor Village shopping center.

- Oak Harbor Village was originally conceived as a mixed-used development that would include residential as well as commercial development (now somewhat come to fruition with the development of the adjacent Pine View apartments). The shopping area has space for about 30 tenants but does not appear fully occupied. Its businesses include a gas station, several eating places and cafes, Dunkin Donuts, a childcare center, dog training, and office areas. Oak Harbor Village describes itself to potential tenants as “the only game in town [that] attracts the majority of shoppers in the trade area.”
- Nearby, the South Trail Commerce Center, a 1.25-acre parcel next to Pine View Apartments, is being developed for trades and other businesses, with a build-to-suit 5,000-square-foot building being marketed for \$1.05 million.
- Liberty Hill Office Park off Route 2 is a two-story, class B building with 14,004 square feet of professional and office suites.
- There is at least one technology company in Exeter, NWN Carousel, a cloud-communications service provider, whose headquarters are located on Route 2 near the intersection with Yawgoo Valley Road in a one-story office building (57,570 square feet) on a 7-acre parcel. The building recently sold for \$9 million.

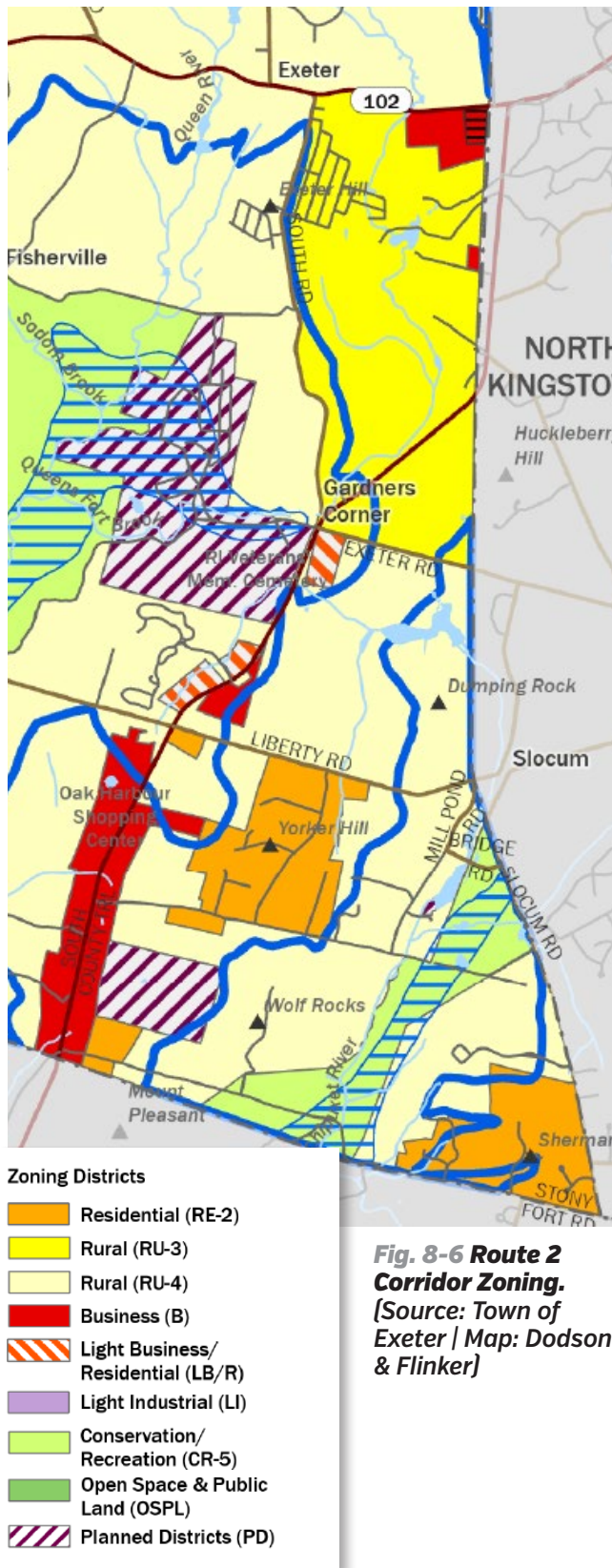


Fig. 8-6 Route 2 Corridor Zoning.
(Source: Town of Exeter | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

Yawgoo Valley Road Area

- The Yawgoo Valley Ski Area and Water Park is located at the eastern end of Yawgoo Valley Road. With climate change in mind, the business is currently working on redevelopment concepts for year-round economic viability, including a possible vineyard.
- The Dorset Mill business cluster includes complementary businesses. Dorset Mill began as a mid-nineteenth-century woolen mill along Yorker Mill Pond on Dorset Mill Road. The mill burned in 1861 and was rebuilt with twentieth-century additions. Today the mill houses artist and artisan workshops.
- Tourism is not a major activity in town. The Yawgoo Valley Ski and Water Park Area, the major local attraction, has begun working on concepts to continue viability in light of climate-change impacts. The Canonicus Center is a modest conference center and camp. State- and nonprofit-owned conservation lands attract visitors for nature recreation and trails, but no businesses appear to focus on serving them. There do not appear to be many seasonal or short-term rentals or lodging to accommodate visitors. Farm-based attractions, such as the brewery and seasonal farmers' market, a pick-your-own tulip farm, and farm stands attract visitors from out of town individually but without coordination or collaboration. In general, because Exeter has very limited retail and services, it does not enjoy significant economic benefit from the visitors who do come to town for events or other activities.

Route 3 Corridor

- Businesses in this corridor between Route 102 and Route 165 tend to be consumer-facing on smaller parcels, including restaurants and cafes, retail and services, and a few home businesses and residences. By contrast, parcels located between Route 165 and the town boundary run larger and tend to be more business-to-

business or industrial in character, though there are several auto-related and consumer-facing businesses. Two in this section of Route 3 conduct most of their business online: a large auto-auction business and an online motorcycle-parts store. Fire Station 2 is also located on Route 3. Located at Exeter's northern end of Route 3 is a large site adjacent to Exit 14B from I-95, a small part of which is currently occupied by a mobile home park. This site is the subject of the site-readiness study funded by Rhode Island Commerce and incorporated into this comprehensive plan. The study includes a site analysis, a high-level market analysis, and zoning concepts for the site.

The Ladd Center Area

The Ladd School, set on 331 acres north of the Rhode Island Veteran's Cemetery in eastern Exeter, operated as a state institution for developmentally disabled people (with many controversial practices and conditions) until closing in 1993. The buildings have been demolished over time. It is the only part of Exeter that has a public drinking-water-supply system (recently found to have some contamination by PFAS to be remediated by the State), but the system is sensitive because it relies on the Queen's River sole-source aquifer. After closing the school, the State proposed several redevelopment plans, such as building a research and technology park, which were not implemented. It is currently a residential training site for Rhode Island Job Corps, with 175 residents; the Rhode Island Fire Academy and Fire Marshal's Office; and a residential addiction-rehabilitation center with 84 beds.

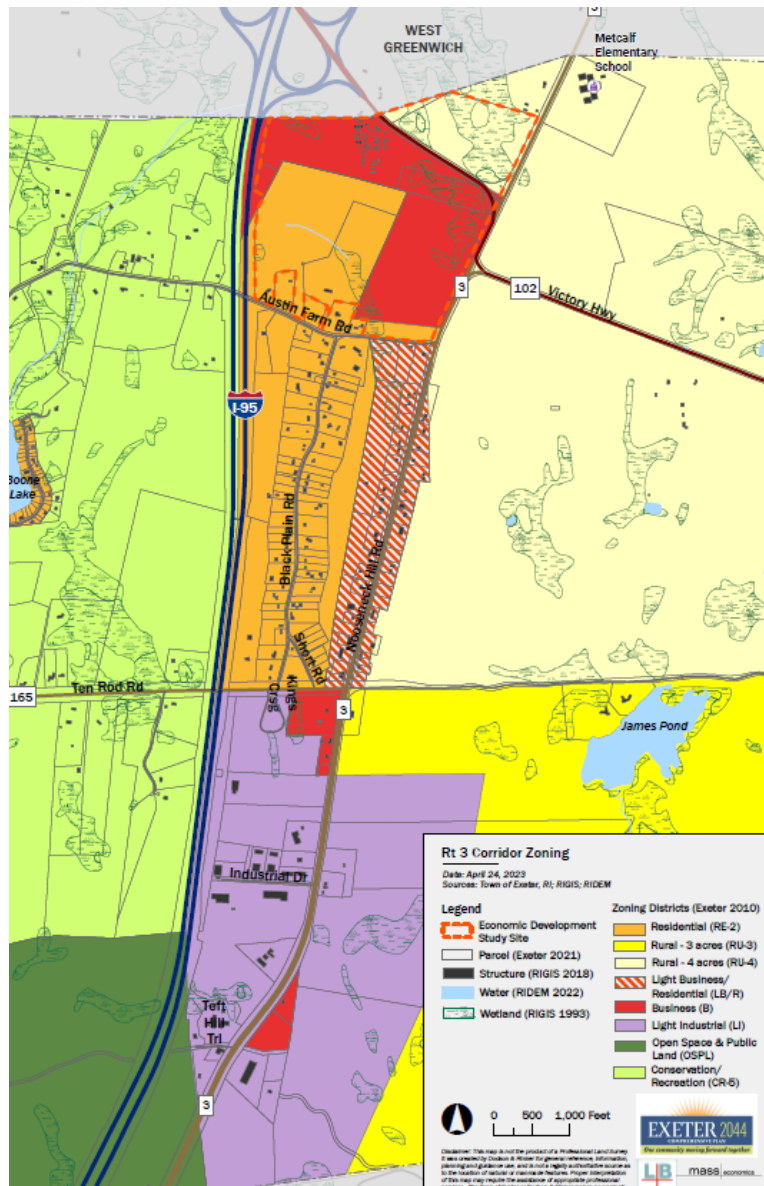


Fig. 8-7 Route 3 Corridor Zoning.
 [Source: Town of Exeter | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

4. Economic development and Town government

Town government includes an advisory group focused on economic development, the Economic Development Task Force (EDTF), sometimes called an Economic Development Commission. (See references in the 2004 comprehensive plan and in ordinances at Chapter 2, Article III, Division 3). It works toward this mission:

The Economic Development Task Force (hereafter referred to as "Task Force" shall advise and make recommendations to the Town Council on matters

related to economic development that include but are not limited to economic development incentives, current business climate, business attraction and retention, marketing opportunities, and other issues and tools that may promote economic development to the Town of Exeter.

The Task Force shall provide input and expertise on ways to encourage and help businesses and individuals to invest in the Town, create jobs, and increase the tax base, which ultimately leads to a better quality of life for all Exeter residents.

The Task Force members shall work in a coordinated fashion, respect all points of view and, in carrying out its duties and tasks, shall adhere to the town's comprehensive plan and provide suggested revisions to enhance the plan when necessary to implement any economic development recommendation.

It may be worth comparing this mission with those of peer communities, such as Richmond, to see if Exeter wishes to expand the mission.



5. Farming and forestry

Forests and farms play a key role in Exeter's sense of identity, even though most residents are not farmers or forest managers.

- There is no complete data for farm operators in Exeter and farmers are not organized as a group, though some are connected to Farm Fresh Rhode Island, the statewide local food system marketing organization, the Rhode Island Farm Bureau, and similar organizations. Enrollment in the FFOS tax incentive program

Comparison: Town of Richmond, Economic Development Commission mission statement

- Encourage the attraction and expansion of industrial and commercial development that is consistent with the environmental policies in the Comprehensive Community Plan and town ordinances and regulations.
- Develop site criteria for new business development and expansion of existing businesses, and identify locations that are most suitable for nonresidential development;
- Recommend strategies to enhance local conditions favorable to the promotion of responsible economic growth;
- Identify potential cooperative ventures with the University of Rhode Island to stimulate commercial and industrial development; and
- Research federal and state economic development funding assistance programs and services. Encourage the attraction and expansion of industrial and commercial development that is consistent with the environmental policies in the Comprehensive Community Plan and town ordinances and regulations.

(1,482 acres in farms) does not provide a complete list because some farms are too small to participate (less than five acres exclusive of a home site). The program also requires an agriculture plan and a small amount of farm income to participate.

- There are different types of farming in Exeter, ranging from homestead farming for household use, traditional farming and livestock raising, producers for specialty markets, and technology-assisted farming. Many farms are part time, some sell value-

added products, and some are innovative and certified organic. There appear to be approximately 12 operators pursuing full-time farming, and another 20 or so that have some agricultural or forestry products for sale produced on their land. There are four state-licensed marijuana cultivators in Exeter.

- The full-time farms produce vegetables, meat, dairy (one farm), microgreens, goats (meat and value-added goods such as soap and candles), and there is a turf farm, a horse-boarding operation, a tulip farm (pick-your-own with “agrotainment” activities), and a farm that offers volunteer opportunities and free camping through a website for RV campers.
- Another 20 or so part-time farmers produce hay, corn, flint corn, Christmas trees, produce and plants, fiber, meat, eggs, and flowers. Part of the traditional farming landscape are hayfields, which are also important as forage for livestock, but hay is not a profitable crop.
- A farm that was the state’s first commercial hops farm has now added a brewery (Tilted Barn).
- Several farms operate farmstands on their property and in 2022 there was a weekly farmers’ market at the brewery. A farmers’ market at the library no longer exists after several years of operation.
- Technology-assisted Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) in greenhouses can be found at several farms. Farming Turtles is a



Farming Turtles [Source: Farming Turtles]



Cedar Valley Farmstand [Source: Dodson & Flinker]

certified organic 22-acre microgreens producer operating in six large greenhouses with a fully automated harvesting and planting system and 30 employees. They sell to Whole Foods among other firms. Our Kids’ Farm grows produce hydroponically in greenhouses and, on the Richmond part of their property, under solar canopies. RI Grows, the former traditional Scharfner farm on Route 2, was allowed under a 2023 zoning amendment to operate a CEA greenhouse to raise hydroponic tomatoes. The zoning includes environmental-impact requirements and a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement. (See *Element 12—Land Use* for more information on 2023 greenhouse zoning.)

- Some of the farms are run by younger farmers, often renting rather than owning land.
- There are at least three certified organic farms.
- More than 7,000 acres in Exeter are enrolled in the FFOS program in the category of Forest and Wetland. They are required to have a 10-year forestry program prepared by a professional forester to achieve land-owner objectives. As a result of the insect and other damage to the forests, wildfire is always a concern. In Rhode Island, most of the trees harvested from forest takes the form of saw timber (industrial pallets) and firewood. Producing firewood does not produce much market return. However, there are some specialty products for niche markets, like artisan products or witch hazel, which potentially could be more remunerative.⁵

⁵ *Rhode Island 2020 Forest Action Plan, p. 14.*

Agricultural context and the Agricultural Viability Index for Washington County

Washington County has more agricultural activity than any other county in Rhode Island. Every five years, the US Department of Agriculture publishes an agricultural census. The most recent available is from 2017. The American Farmland Trust (AFT) recently created an “Agricultural Viability Index (AVI)” based on the 2017 agricultural census and other data and applied it to counties in the New England states, New York, and New Jersey.⁶ While not specific to Exeter, these data provide context for the agricultural sector in Exeter.

The project measured conversion of land over the 2001–2016 period from agriculture to urban density and low-density development and percent of protected land. The Index scored each county across a variety of indicators including net cash farm income, diversity of revenue streams, availability of infrastructure, wealth in assets, gross revenue, and debt to asset ratios.

⁶ *American Farmland Trust, Agricultural Viability Index, <https://ag-viability-aft.hub.arcgis.com/>. A video by the AFT on Rhode Island agriculture appears at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqe0kYL5YiE&t=3463s>.*

Ownership and operator characteristics included were land ownership, presence of multiple producers, involvement in succession planning, proportions of senior producers, and ratio of senior producers to young producers.

In Rhode Island, Washington County had the highest viability index, 0.46 on a scale of 0 to 1, but the majority of farms still lost money. Data for Washington County from the AVI include:

- Number of farms: 319
- Acres in farms: 19,886
- Average gross revenue per farm: \$69,562
- Average net cash farm income per farm: \$13,296
- Farms with net losses: 61.1%
- Farms with farm-related income: 27%
- Average asset values per farm: \$847,467 in land and buildings; \$75,161 in machinery and equipment
- Percent of agricultural land converted to urban and low-density development 2001–2016: 2.54%
- Percent of agricultural land protected: 16.6%
- Acres owned and operated: 70%
- Producers farming alone: 46%
- Producers involved in estate or succession planning: 54%
- Producers 65+ in age: 34%

Survey of agriculture and forestry land owners

The planning team sent a short survey to property owners in Exeter who are enrolled in the agriculture and forestry programs within the state's FFOS tax-incentive program and to other farmers not in the program who could be identified. (FFOS owners have to meet criteria for size and production of some revenue from their farm or

forest activities. Owners in the open-space section of the FFOS program were not contacted because they are not required to meet these criteria.) Thirty out of 92 people responded, for a 33% response rate. Not all respondents replied to all questions.

Responses appear on this and the subsequent three pages.

Exeter Agriculture/Forestry Survey

To better understand issues and conditions facing owners who use their land for agriculture or forestry, the planning team conducted a survey of farm and forest property owners enrolled in the FFOS program and convened a small focus group of farmers. This is a summary of what owners said.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

- **AGE:** Of 24 who answered, 45% aged 36–64; 54% aged 65-plus. (Similar to the Washington County AVI.)
- **OWN OR RENT:** 87% own and operate their farm or forest enterprises; the remainder either own and rent, or rent all land. (Exeter has more owners.)
- **SUCCESSION PLAN** past age 65: Of 11 who answered, 55% yes; 45% no. (Similar to Washington County AVI)
- **LABOR FORCE** (including owner): Of 26 who answered, 38% employ 1-2 people; 61% no more than 4; only one had more than 5 or 6 people. (Similar to Washington County AVI. One to two people worked the farm among 38% of respondents.)
- **VARIETY OF PRODUCTS:** About half of respondents raise vegetables, greens, and produce for sale, and a third have animals, from beef cattle to small livestock to poultry/eggs. Forestry operators mostly sell firewood; about a third of respondents say they operate a forestry enterprise only to fulfill FFOS requirements and keep forests healthy.
- **INCOME:** Of 24 who responded, 62.5% receive less than 10% of their income from agriculture,

forestry, or value-added products (including 20% who say it's a net loss)

- **ACREAGE:** Of 22 total, 3 have between 500 and 700 (including combined crops, forest, and sod); 3 between 80 and 100; 11 fewer than 80 acres (including partial in Exeter). Includes forest, field crops, hay, vegetables, sod, 1 homestead-only farm.
- **BEST YEAR OF GROSS INCOME:** Of 23 who answered, 38.7% made less than \$5,000; 47.4% made less than \$10,000; and 48% made \$20,000 or more.
- **BEST YEAR OF NET INCOME:** Of 22 who answered, 54% made less than \$5,000; 72% made less than \$10,000; the majority made less than \$20,000.

MARKETING CHANNELS

- Most do not operate a **CSA** (Community Supported Agriculture) program; about a third have a farm stand or shop and a third do not.
- Only 2 out of 30 participate in **FARMERS MARKETS**; two-thirds don't participate in farmers markets (although that figure includes foresters).
- **FARM FRESH RI:** 1 yes; 17 no
- **SELL DIRECTLY** to stores and restaurants: Mostly no
- **HOST ACTIVITIES** or entertainment: 60% no
- Interest in selling **VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS:** Yes

► Comments from the survey

What makes Exeter a good place to operate a farm/forestry enterprise?

- *Small government, farm community, reasonable taxation, less regulation.*
- *People in Exeter seem to support a rural, agricultural way of life.*
- *It's rural enough for some privacy and solitude, but also close enough to cities for easy marketing of products.*
- *Great neighbors, clean water, peace and quiet. Beautiful town, great community, great soil and location.*
- *Community values these enterprises.*
- *Not so sure any town in New England is good for farming. Farmers need to farm without interference from nonfarmers.*

How would you define successful farming or forestry?

- *Successful farming and forestry is keeping the land sustainable. Some of the biggest barriers is cost, taxes on farm structures is a very big cost that hurts a lot of farms, regulations on what you can do to supplement and keep your farm going on your farm such as events, solar, etc. to help offset land and farm costs.*
- *Definition of success for me would be the ability to produce a living wage for myself and my employees through the practice of farming this land—and ability to keep the farm from being sold for development because of inability to be viable as farmland.*
- *Capable of providing financially and spiritually for employers and employees, while operating in a way that will at least sustain if not rejuvenate the natural resources.*
- *Being able to comfortably pay your bills at the end of the day and not always feeling like the wolf is at your door and you are up against the world when you try to do something new or innovative.*

- *Getting products to a viable, consistent market. Make enough in 7 months to survive 5 non-revenue months.*

What are the biggest barriers to success?

- *Not being able to produce or have activities that will sustain the farm in the future and the cost of taxation of farm buildings. Farm buildings being taxed prevent expansion since taxation affects the cost of materials stored, therefore you produce less due to storage limitations.*
- *Farming and forestry are very expensive occupations, therefore, keeping cots low, like real estate taxes, and regulations reasonable, helps us to reinvest in our properties and activities.*
- *We lease/barter our hayfields to a few local farmers who need the hay and/or need hayfields to pasture their livestock. We know there are landowners like us who would be interested in leasing/bartering use of their hayfields if the town could help by providing some kind of matching services. One barrier for farmers is that it is hard for livestock farmers to find enough grazing land.*
- *Regulatory barriers to success have been the biggest issues that seem potentially fixable. The barriers have included: regulations around putting up signage to let customers know where the farmstand is, and regulations around farmstand size. Allowing a larger farmstand that can accommodate more products as well as refrigerators/cooling units to keep produce fresh in the summer heat.... It is very difficult to try to sell fresh produce and other farm products out of an open stand that is < 200sq ft. in the heat of the summer and we struggle with this every day.*
- *Need economic incentives to maintain forest land beyond the FFOS act.*



What activities—Town-initiated or not—might provide more support for a successful agricultural or forestry economic sector in Exeter?

ORGANIZATION

- An Ag Committee could be really helpful and could be a place where issues like solar siting guidelines, dual solar options, gleaning and food donation options, help applying for NRCS funding and Rural Energy grants, finding available land, etc. are tackled. There's an interesting mix of new and old farms in Exeter and they might be able to cooperate on sharing info and expertise. I'm not sure about a shared commercial kitchen—you would need to get confirmation that there is enough need for that before moving forward.
- Agricultural and Natural Resource committee for support of activities. Nonregulatory.
- A group for farmers to help market, brainstorm and work together rather than as individual entities.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF ON-FARM INCOME

- Permission for solar installations for value added forestry operation
- Allow weddings, car shows, hay rides, business retreats
- Solar would help farms create an additional income to offset farm costs. Also being able

to have other activities on your farm that do not limit what you can and cannot do such as events would also help farmers out.

- Relax restrictions on size of farmstands so that we can have more spacious and climate-controlled shops that make selling produce easier and are more welcoming to our customers. Help us place signage on our roads so that people know where to find us. Could Exeter's farms get official town approved signs at major intersections, etc., to let people know where to head for a local farmstand? Permission for dual solar installations would also be very helpful. I like the idea of shared commercial kitchen.
- Dual-use solar, advanced greenhouse technology (CEA), Exeter brand and aid in marketing, advanced agriculture technology, ex, biodigesters.

MARKETING AND ACTIVITIES

- An Exeter brand would be great.
- Help in marketing.
- Not in favor of large-scale solar or greenhouses.
- Throughout the whole state RI Farm Bureau organizes a farm scavenger hunt. I think something similar to that for a town wide family-oriented event would help get the town involved more.
- Maybe some type of tax incentive that differentiates between full-time farmers and hobby farmers. My experience is that hobby farmers typically sell their products for far less than their cost of production, because they have another job to support their family. Full-time farmers have to charge enough to cover all household expenses. So any incentives that can help those of us that don't have other income would be very helpful.
- Planning on using 1/2–1 acre of existing hay field for solar farming for home usage. Much more profitable than hay, and would allow me to keep forest intact to help fight carbon dioxide /climate change.

► Farmer focus group

A small focus group of farmers was convened to discuss the issues they see in Exeter agriculture. Participants appreciated the general community support for farming in Exeter. But...

- **Financial issues and insecurity.** *“I don’t think people realize how difficult it is to be able to continue to function financially.” “We feel like 95% of the public has no idea what goes into trying to run a farm and also the financial difficulties of trying to keep a farm, even an established farm.” There is a need for more encouragement from the town for people who are trying to make a living with agriculture and a need to “educate people more about where agriculture in general is going in the future, what things are changing, whether it’s growing produce in a greenhouse, or using robots to milk cows or something else”. People may have a garden or homestead, but they are not paying their bills from farming.*
- **Lack of connections.** *Participants said that the farm community is not strongly connected. Lack of connection is a town-wide issue, not just among farmers. No one has a list of farmers and they do not necessarily know each other or act as a group in town. Older and younger farmers may have differences of opinion and there is a need to celebrate/credit people who have been farming for years. Farmers need to come together, help and support each other more,*
- show up at town council meetings to support each other, and so on. Farmers could start small with a simple organization and rotating get togethers, a farmers’ dinner or tour, then expand to invite the community.*
- **Need to communicate more with the public.** *It is also important to communicate more with the general public. Try an event with food trucks with produce from many farms. Find a regular way to share stories, feature different farms, have an annual Exeter farm scavenger hunt or similar activities.*
- **Interest in the idea of an Exeter brand** *and some kind of agriculture board or commission.*
- **Other issues**
 - > *Need hayfields to feed livestock. “I don’t like fields and hedgerows disappearing.” “Having to go further out to get hay is hard, and it’s expensive. And then the more fields we lose, the worse it’s going to get.”*
 - > *Hard to find labor for the farms. Many farmers work by themselves or with very little help.*
 - > *Bigger space needed for farmstands*
 - > *Encourage technology use in farms as a way to make them more sustainable. Need more flexibility and individuality in use of solar, for example, look for solutions like keeping the traditional agriculture look at the front of a farm and more solar/tech at back.*



CHALLENGES

Lack of consensus

- While residents state a preference for “balanced economic development,” there is not always agreement on the specific characteristics of “balanced” development or growth for Exeter. There is often little consensus among residents and town leaders on what constitutes acceptable economic development and on the environmental impacts of various types of development.

Small local market and amount of zoned land

- Low and geographically dispersed population provides a limited market for community-serving small business retail and services.
- Competition from nearby existing commercial centers in other towns, plus new competition such as the North Kingstown development at Routes 2 and 102.
- Approximately 1,000 acres zoned for commercial/industrial uses.

Information and organizational issues

- No structured longer-term focus from a group responsible for moving projects through a pipeline and lack of follow-through when projects get started. No point person in town government. Reactive rather than proactive.
- No inventory of land and other conditions for economic development.
- Lack of engagement with the business community, owners of commercial real estate, and potential investors.

Infrastructure and services issues

- Lack of water and sewer infrastructure makes development more expensive.
- Reliance on state police and volunteer fire departments increases insurance risk.

Marketing

- No marketing of the town’s attractions to visitors or value to businesses.

Agriculture and farmland preservation economic issues

- Farmland is expensive to own and maintain, but profits have not kept up with costs. Small fluctuations in overhead expenses can have significant negative consequences for farm owners.
- Farmland is typically prime real estate development land, so the price paid to turn a farm into a development is good for the farmer but does not meet Town desires for preservation of farmland. Not enough profit is generated from running a farm business to pay back a multimillion-dollar loan to buy large tracts of farmland to continue agriculture.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Approaches to economic development

Exeter has long articulated a goal of “balanced” economic development that is consistent with “rural character.” However, there has been little consensus on what this would actually mean; the focus has tended to be a narrow search for sources of nonresidential tax revenue, and the town lacks a strategy and effective organizational approach.

The WealthWorks approach

The planning team, CPAC, and members of the public who attended a meeting on this topic explored a holistic approach to rural economic and community development called “WealthWorks.”⁷ This approach works to build community wealth and connect communities with market demand through investment in and development of multiple types of capital—social, political, cultural, built, intellectual, individual, financial, and natural—not financial capital alone. Strengthening and combining these different types of capital

⁷ *Shanna Ratner, principal of Yellow Wood Associates, developed the WealthWorks approach through a long-term practice in rural communities around the country and the world. A copy of her book, “Wealth Creation: A New Framework for Rural Economic and Community Development,” has been provided to the Exeter Library by the Exeter 2044 team. Additional information, including many case studies, is available at wealthworks.org.*

| EXETER AND THE WEALTHWORKS APPROACH TO RURAL ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT | | |
|---|---|--|
| CAPITAL TYPE | WHAT IS IT? | STATUS IN EXETER |
| Natural | Renewable and non-renewable natural resources and ecosystem services provided by these resources. | Very strong: Public and private forests, water resources, environmental systems. |
| Built | Physical infrastructure—for example, buildings, roads, and bridges. | Very limited: Few public buildings with limited meeting space; no town center and limited business. Moving Town Hall to a location near the Library is under discussion. The CPAC and others have increasingly focused on the need for a community center in the same area. |
| Individual | Skills and capacity, including health, which allow individuals to be productive. | Strong individual skills but not well deployed for community purposes to seek innovative ways to solve problems. |
| Social | Trust, relationships, and networks that support civil society in two categories: “bridging social capital” that strengthens relations between different groups and “bonding capital” that strengthens relations within groups. | Weak bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Poor social communication and activities to strengthen relationships. This condition has emerged in many parts of the planning process, from surveys to committee discussions. |
| Political | Connections, power, and voice that result in influence over resource-allocation decisions of any group or organization in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors. Social capital—relationships—provides the foundation for political capital. | Limited social capital, poor communications, internal divisions and difficulty finding consensus weaken political capital. |
| Financial | Financial or near financial assets that are available for investment in the other forms of wealth. Financial capital may be controlled by individuals and corporations or exist in the form of public assets derived from tax dollars and/or donations. | Mixed. Limited public efforts to secure grants and funding for community needs and improvements. Some examples of local fundraising for projects (e.g., running track). Older tradition of affluent residents contributing for community needs (e.g., contributing land for schools). Newer financial resources emerging (such as CEA PILOT payments and retail marijuana sales tax payments). |
| Cultural | Practices that reflect values and identity rooted in place, class, and/or ethnicity—values, traditions, beliefs and norms of behavior in a place. | Few groups and institutions reinforce and sustain local identity. Traditional activities like parades and Exeter Days have declined, though there are efforts to bring some of them back. A few examples, such as the Historical Association, and library-supported groups, including the Fall Festival, could be the foundation of more activities. |

make communities more successful in developing long-term economic strength.

The discussion identified Exeter’s strengths and weaknesses in these eight types of capital, as shown in the chart above.

Management consultant approach

Another way of articulating an approach to economic development comes from the consulting

company, McKinsey & Company. In *Rural Rising: Economic development strategies for America’s heartland*, they identify the elements of a thriving rural community and economy as sectors, workforce, community, and connectivity. “Thriving rural communities play to their region’s strengths, supporting sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, energy, tourism, and postsecondary education.”⁸

⁸ Mike Kerlin et al, “Rural rising: Economic development strategies for America’s heartland,” March 30, 2022 www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/rural-rising-economic-development-strategies-for-americas-heartland

They emphasize that creating an economic development strategy is a “multistep process that requires assessing the current state of the region, identifying the value proposition, evaluating existing programs, and establishing partnerships and rural hubs.” This is a “strengths-based approach to economic development....[that identifies the] value proposition. The value proposition is about creating a regional story line that answers questions such as: Why would someone live here? Why would a company locate here? Why would someone visit?”

The important message for Exeter is that a) the town has to develop and invest in a strategy, b) the strategy should be multifaceted with a focus on more than trying to find non-residential tax revenue, and c) a successful strategy needs to be organized and pursued over the long term.

An action-oriented approach from rural Connecticut

Another useful example of how to implement an economic development strategy for communities similar in many ways to Exeter is *A Homegrown Approach to Strengthening the Region: Action Plan for Economic Vitality*, prepared in September 2020 for the Towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland, Connecticut. Preservation of rural character while enhancing economic strength and focusing on rural assets is central to this plan.

- A foundation for implementing the plan is to maintain an inventory of businesses and real estate opportunities and have a program of ongoing engagement with key property owners and businesses through visits or calls at least once a year. Exeter does not have this foundation for an economic development strategy.
- This plan focuses on outdoor recreation, agriculture, and culture and entertainment,

A Detailed Action Plan for Economic Development in Rural Connecticut

The towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland in Connecticut recently came together to launch a regional economic development strategy and action plan. The towns range in population from Bolton, with 4,839 residents, to Mansfield with 26,431. Mansfield is the least like Exeter in some ways—the largest town in the group and the site of the University of Connecticut’s flagship campus. However, creating a town center and preserving rural character are important to the town. It developed a new town center adjacent to the campus in recent years and half the town’s population is students.



While focused on a larger area than Exeter, the action plan has a similar emphasis on preservation of rural character, strong strategic elements, and a number of specific and practical ideas that could be useful in Exeter. The plan also emphasizes the organizational needs of an economic development strategy.

Source: AdvanceCT, “A Homegrown Approach to Strengthening the Region: Action Plan for Economic Vitality,” September 2020, prepared for the Towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland. www.mansfieldct.gov/2359/Regional-Economic-Vitality-Plan

What Can Agriculture Commissions Or Similar Organizations Do? An Example from Massachusetts

State law in Massachusetts allows towns to appoint nonregulatory agricultural commissions as standing committees of the town with the mission of representing the farming community, encouraging the pursuit of agriculture, promoting agricultural-based economic opportunities, and preserving, revitalizing, and sustaining the communities' agricultural businesses and lands.

Towns provide up to \$1,000 in funding. Respondents to the Exeter Agriculture/Forestry Survey and the agriculture focus group were interested in creating a local organization for farmers. Examples of the kinds of activities undertaken by groups of these types include:

- Mapping farms and farmlands
- Identifying farmers' and the community's needs, issues and concerns
- Serving as an information clearinghouse and forum for farm-town relations
- Facilitating the technical, educational, business and regulatory assistance

- needed to farm and to live near farms
- Developing trust and a working relationship among farmers, residents and institutions
- Advocating at state and federal levels for support of community-identified agricultural needs
- Facilitating access to conflict resolution services for farmers and the community
- Hosting community agricultural events
- Recommending actions on land use programs that would help agriculture thrive, including preservation programs and right-to-farm bylaws
- Seeking out informational and educational resources relevant to farms and farm communities
- Matching farmers with available land and helping the landowner and the farmer promote sustained use

Source: Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions, www.massagcom.org

as well as supporting and attracting small business and entrepreneurs. Basic tasks needed for all these sectors are:

- > Inventory assets
- > Invest in infrastructure
- > Engage the local community (businesses and residents)
- > Partner strategically

The plan also emphasizes the critical role of visibility and marketing, which includes:

- A messaging strategy
- Understanding who the audience is
- A marketing campaign with associated language and graphics, a digital presence, and print materials

- Wayfinding signage
- Business-recruitment marketing and cross promotion

The plan identifies the need for implementers, some of whom can be volunteers, but it also requires a designated person to coordinate plan implementation. Investments in marketing, events, and infrastructure will be necessary, though some costs could be leveraged with donations. A matrix of action items for the plan identifies some actions that don't carry costs, as well as non-municipal partners. (www.mansfieldct.gov/DocumentCenter/View/15017/Matrix) Exeter has less staff than these communities and is only one community, so the need for investment in some kinds of tasks may be different.

2. Opportunities for Exeter

There are a variety of potential actions that Exeter could take to advance achievement of the town's long-time goal of balanced economic development within the context of rural character. To make progress, the town does not need to pursue all these possibilities simultaneously, but could choose over time to make selective strategic efforts.

- Designate a long-term economic development person, office, or group to be in charge of business and real estate data and outreach to the business community. Identify tasks and responsibilities.
- Focus on a long-term strategy of strengthening the economic sustainability of the key elements of Exeter's rural character: agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation-based economic sectors.
- Create an Exeter brand, with a name and logo, to support that strategy and identify Exeter within Rhode Island as a center of rural character, activities and opportunities and a place that contributes through rural character to state goals.
- Create an agriculture board, commission, or independent group to represent agricultural interests, to network and exchange information, to partner with state and other organizations, to promote more value-added products and activities and explore possible needs for access to creating value-added or processed products, such as a commercial kitchen or poultry processor, and explore potential partnerships with the Job Corps culinary training program.
- Identify business and real estate opportunities to attract nonresidential businesses for tax revenue.
- Explore a long-term strategy to make improvements to the Route 3 business corridor, such as creating a business cluster related to outdoor recreation as a gateway to the Arcadia Management Area.
- Review and modify zoning regulations to enhance the sustainability of desired businesses consistent with the public interest.
- Actively pursue development at the I-95 interchange to add nonresidential tax revenue through a program that includes proactive efforts after appropriate zoning.

Summary: Site-Readiness Study

Economic Development Opportunities Adjacent to I-95

The Town of Exeter received a grant from Rhode Island Commerce under the Site Readiness Program to fund technical assistance for site-specific planning, strategies and improvements to catalyze development on land parcels at the intersection of Routes 3, 102, and the I-95 ramp.

The Town recognized that this area holds the potential to increase the tax base and reduce the residential tax burden, provide services to residents, and minimize impacts of development on the majority of the town—thanks to its status as the only large and undeveloped site adjacent to an I-95 ramp in Rhode Island. The study includes an analysis of development constraints and opportunities; a high-level market analysis to determine the kind and amount of development the site could support; and draft zoning that allows for economic development uses, design standards, and a streamlined local permitting process. The full Site Readiness Study is available on the Town website..

Opportunity to work with the Rhode Island Ready program

Since Exeter's grant application was approved, the State of Rhode Island established the RI Ready program to prepare pre-permitted industrial sites throughout the state. This study aims to help the Town position the Exeter site for enrollment in the RI Ready program.

The purpose of this program is to create a portfolio of pre-permitted, pad-ready properties throughout the state with the characteristics and infrastructure

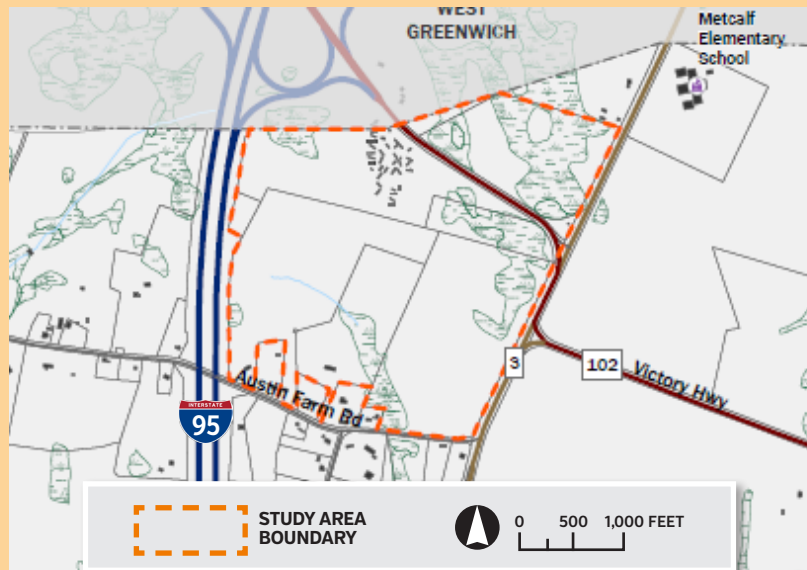


Fig. 8-8 Route 3 Corridor Study Area. (Source: Town of Exeter, RIGIS, RIDEM | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

needed to successfully support industrial development and bring jobs, tax revenue and private investment to the state. The Quonset Development Corporation (QDC) administers the program. Sites must apply for enrollment and, if accepted, become eligible for technical assistance and capital investment. QDC will evaluate how well sites that apply for enrollment in the program meet these requirements:

- Areas where investment in upgraded or improved infrastructure would activate properties, parcels, or districts for development as industrial uses (i.e., sewer/water expansions, traffic improvements, etc.); or where investment in the site would allow for an existing industrial use or facility to expand significantly; or
- Properties or parcels that are:
 - > “Approximately 10 acres in size or are capable of supporting an approximately 100,000 square foot building;

I-95 Interchange Study Site - Combined Constraints

Date: February 24, 2023
Sources: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; RIDEM

Legend

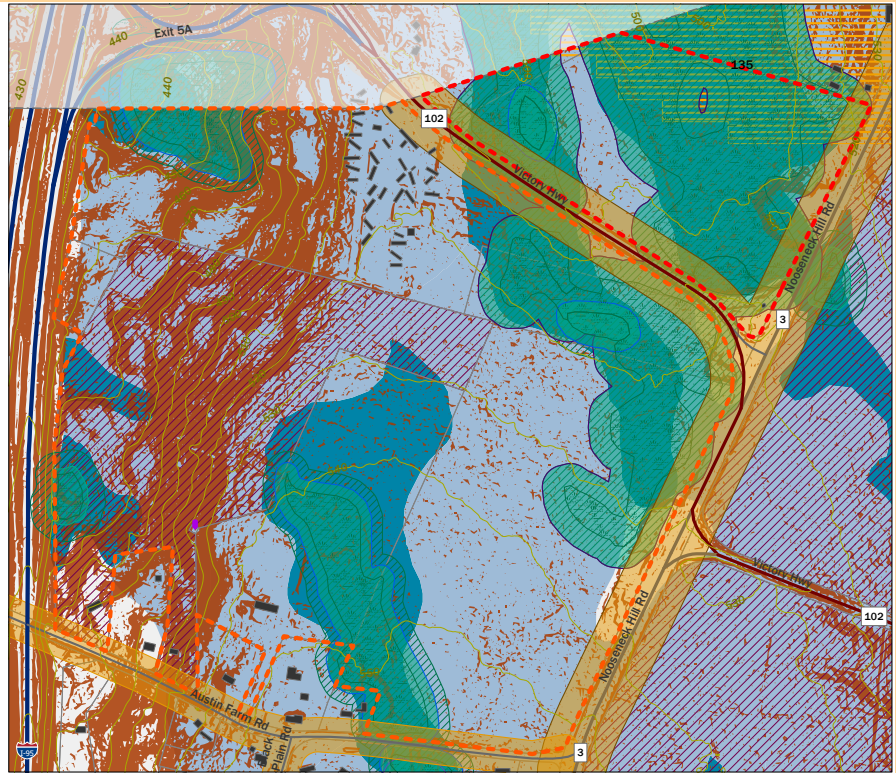
| | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|---|
| | Study Area South | | Slope > 20% (URI, 2011) |
| | Study Area North | | Wetland Regulations (RIDEM, 2022) |
| | Municipal Boundary (RIGIS, 2021) | | Jurisdictional Area (100ft) |
| | Parcel (Exeter, 2021) | | Buffer Zone (25-100ft) |
| | Structure (URI, 2018) | | Dimensional Regulations (Exeter Zoning, 2022) |
| | Roads (RIDOT, 2016) | | Right-of-Way Setback |
| | Interstate Highway | | Natural Heritage Program (RIDEM, 2022) |
| | Principal Arterial | | Natural Heritage Polygon |
| | Collector or Minor Arterial | | Other Constraints |
| | Local Road | | Parcel enrolled in RI Farm, Forest, & Open Space Program (Exeter, 2022) |
| | Wetlands (URI, 1993) | | Historic Cemetery (URI, 2012) |
| | Contours 10ft (URI, 2013) | | |
| | Soil Constraints (URI, 2022) | | |
| | Hydric Soils (0-18 in. depth) | | |
| | Seasonal High | | |
| | Water Table (19-42 in. depth) | | |



0 400 800 Feet



Disclaimer: This map is not the product of a Professional Land Survey. It was created by Dodson & Flinker for general reference, information, planning and guidance use, and is not a legally authoritative source as to the location of natural or manmade features. Proper interpretation of this map may require the assistance of appropriate professional services. The Town of Exeter or Dodson & Flinker makes no warranty, express or implied, related to the spatial accuracy, reliability, completeness or currentness of this map.



- > Proposed for development or redevelopment for manufacturing, assembly, distribution, production, and processing or for a use that supports the offshore wind industry [the Targeted Uses];
- > Zoned to allow one or more of the Targeted Uses; and
- > Within one [1] mile of a designated Arterial roadway, Highway, Freeway, or Expressway as depicted on the State's highway functional classification map.”¹

The I-95-adjacent site that is the focus of the site-readiness study would fit these criteria.

Site constraints

- Wetlands and steep slopes (on the western edge of the site near I-95) present the greatest development constraints in the study site. Most of the remaining land has soils with

seasonal high-water tables. The principal development issue for areas with high groundwater is the increased cost of construction.

Development potential

- Taking into account possible lot coverage from 25% to 35% and eliminating the steep slopes, there is potential for a one-story building coverage of approximately 600,000 to 850,000 square feet in the area south of Route 102.
- The land parcel north of Route 102 has more extensive wetlands and less developable land but could accommodate one-story building coverage of approximately 30,000 to 43,000 square feet or possibly affordable housing.

Market opportunities

The Providence market has the lowest industrial vacancy rate of 83 real estate markets across the United States. Asking

¹ “RI Ready Program Guidance,” Revised March 2022, <https://riready.org/resources/>

industrial rents are relatively affordable compared to the Boston and New York City areas (but higher than Connecticut).

On the other side of I-95, on Route 102 in West Greenwich, there are two large industrial properties of interest for comparison.

- Coast to Coast, a third party (3PL) fulfillment and third-party logistics (TPL) company is headquartered in West Greenwich. It occupies a 16-acre lot with a 102,456 SF warehouse-distribution facility. The company provides business to business (B2B) and business to consumer (B2C) services, processing orders for clients and shipping them to the clients' wholesale or retail customers all over the country.
- Also on Route 102 is a 76-acre former gravel pit that has been marketed as a potential site for a single distribution

facility of more than 500,000 SF. (The current configuration appears to be a 14-lot industrial park for multiple users.) The original marketing for the site highlighted these benefits:

- > Viability for a 500,000+ SF industrial [warehouse] building based on preliminary studies
- > Visibility from I-95 with traffic counts >45,000 per day
- > Proximity to deep water ports and an international airport, "which make it an ideal location for warehousing, logistics and fulfillment services"
- > Support from Rhode Island Commerce and its various incentives to assist the buyer
- > Opportunity for net-zero green development using solar or geothermal renewable energy

Example of a flex building from Quonset Business Park's Flex Campus

Source: Vision 3 Architects



Potential development scenarios

The study evaluated several potential development scenarios according to these criteria:

- Single-user warehouse/distribution, such as Amazon, Walmart, Target
- Multi-user B2B/warehouse-distribution industrial Park—possibly one building or several, or flex space (combined office and warehouse/distribution)
- Food hub—shared-use food- and beverage-processing facilities; agriculture business access to commercial processing space,

equipment, expertise and resources

- Office—possible expansion of an existing or new tech business
- Hotel—previously discussed, has disadvantages (water, septic); comparable West Greenwich hotel across I-95 appears to have high vacancy
- Solar Farm—for comparison, no truck traffic, no advantage to ramp access, limited tax benefit, community concerns about forest clearing for solar
- Affordable Housing—to replace mobile home housing and/or add to the affordable housing inventory

How Potential Site Uses Score Against Evaluation Criteria

| Criteria | SINGLE-USER TDL (E.G., AMAZON/ WALMART/TARGET WAREHOUSE) | MULTI-USER B2B/TDL INDUSTRIAL PARK | FOOD HUB | OFFICE | HOTEL | SOLAR FARM | AFFORDABLE HOUSING |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| KEY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POSITIVE / ✕ NEGATIVE / ⇄ NEUTRAL / | | | | | | | |
| Compatibility with site constraints | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄/✕ | ✕ | ✕ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✕ |
| Utilization of site assets | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄/✕ | ⇄/✕ | ⇄ | ⇄ | ✕ | ⇄ |
| Market opportunity | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄/✓ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄ | ⇄/✓ | ⇄ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Job creation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄/✓ | ⇄/✓ | ⇄/✓ | ⇄ | ✕ | ✕ |
| Job accessibility | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✕ | ✕ |
| Job quality | ⇄/✕ | ⇄/✓ | ⇄/✓ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✕ | ✕ | ✕ |
| Positive externalities | ⇄ | ⇄ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄ | ⇄/✕ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Negative externalities | ⇄/✕ | ⇄/✕ | ⇄ | ⇄/✕ | ⇄/✕ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ⇄ |
| Neighborhood integration (open for residents) | ✕ | ✕ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ✕ | ✕ | ✕ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Compatibility with housing | ✕ | ⇄ | ⇄/✕ | ⇄/✕ | ⇄/✕ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Compatible in south study area? | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Compatible in north study area? | N | N | N | N | N | N | Y |

Market prospects

The site has good prospects for warehouse/ distribution, light manufacturing, or flex uses. As the only remaining large site near a Rhode Island ramp to I-95 without truck impact on local roads, the site has excellent and unique access to the highway. Options include:

- Single-user, large-scale (>=500K square feet) warehousing/ processing/ distribution center. It's rare to find a site like this in Rhode Island with access to the interstate.
- Multi-tenant facilities in one or more buildings.
- Flex space in a group of buildings for a variety of light manufacturing, assembly, and processing: single-story buildings that combine warehouse space with office [and sometimes retail] space; have a warehouse door or loading dock and a 14- to 24-foot ceiling; attractive to a broad variety of users, versatile and easy to customize, and cost-effective.
- Warehouse and storage buildings are the least water-intensive of major building types.

Potential Tax Revenue

Very preliminary estimates of potential tax revenue (using the 2024 tax rate of \$14.27) indicate that a warehouse-distribution facility of 250,000 square feet valued at approximately \$20 million would generate \$285,400 in taxes annually. This is for



Example: Rhode Island Food Hub, Providence: 60,000 square feet

the structure only and does not include the land value, which would include some infrastructure improvements.

Evaluating Options

This study investigated development constraints and market opportunities. The final task of the study was to develop potential zoning concepts and standards for consideration by the Town, based on discussion of different development types and intensities. This consideration of preferences, potential regulations, working with landowners, and potential marketing efforts will take place during the implementation of the comprehensive plan.

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

As one of Rhode Island’s most rural, most forested, and least-populated communities, Exeter can play a special role in contributing to achieving the State’s economic development goals as delineated in *Ocean State Accelerates*. The economic development opportunities that emerged from the comprehensive planning process are consistent with local values and with the three overarching themes of the State strategy. Exeter’s plan is particularly relevant to the Sustainable Growth theme, which incorporates resilience and natural resource protection, infrastructure and facilities to support business, and support for the State’s renewable energy and climate resilience goals. In addition to the relevant goals and policies of the comprehensive plan found in the elements on natural resources, open space, and sustainability and climate resilience, and land use, the Goals, Policies, Strategies, and implementation options in this economic development element include:

- Developing capacity within town government to work with existing and recruit new businesses, and pursue economic development consistent with rural character.
- Developing a long-term strategy for economic development based on rural assets—agriculture, forestry, and nature recreation.
- Improving commercial and industrial areas in the Route 2 and 3 corridors, including working with the State to attract appropriate commerce and industry adjacent to I-95 through improvements in infrastructure, zoning, transportation, and placemaking.
- Continuing to support workforce education in the public school system and at the Job Corps Center.

The 2014 state economic development plan, *Rhode Island Rising*, identifies principles to guide implementation of the plan,⁹ which also offer good guidelines for Exeter:

- Set goals.
- Collect data—clear, consistent, easy to track and fully accessible to the public.
- Be accountable.
- Act equitably.
- Innovate.

⁹ *Rhode Island Rising (2014)*, page viii

Goal 8-1

A PERMANENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION ROLE IN TOWN GOVERNMENT PROVIDE DATA, INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FOR STRENGTHENING EXETER'S ECONOMY, INCLUDING REDUCING THE RESIDENTIAL TAX BURDEN.

POLICIES

- Support a permanent role for economic development coordination and guidance in town government.
- Support a regular inventory of businesses and commercial real estate opportunities in Exeter.
- Promote communication to and engagement with local businesses.
- Develop an economic development strategy that builds on Exeter's rural assets.
- Continue to support Career Pathways workforce education in the Exeter-West Greenwich school system and workforce education at the Job Corps Center.

Goal 8-1 / Strategy A

Establish and clarify the role of a permanent Economic Development Commission and coordinator to strengthen the economic sustainability of the town's non-residential sector, consistent with preservation of rural character.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Establish a permanent Economic Development Commission (EDC) in Town government. In addition to the EDTF's existing mission, the Town may wish to include:

- *Developing site criteria for new and expanded businesses*
- *Identifying suitable locations for nonresidential development*
- *Recommending strategies to enhance local asset-based economic development and small-scale community-serving retail and services*
- *Coordinating with efforts to attract developers to the Village Center Plan*
- *Identifying potential partners to enhance economic development*
- *Identifying programs, services, partners and potential funding sources to advance economic development consistent with preservation of rural character.*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; advice from existing EDTF | Review mission statements from peer communities. |

ACTIONS

ii. Provide an annual budget allocation to pay for an economic development coordinator to assist the EDC in inventorying and engaging with businesses and commercial property owners.

- *This coordinator could be part of an expanded planner job, or a contractor, rather than a regular employee.*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council | General Fund |

Goal 8-1 / Strategy B

Create a regular program of business information and engagement to be implemented by the economic development coordinator.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|--|
| i. Create and maintain a list of businesses and contact information, recognizing that including all micro businesses and home-based businesses may be difficult. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Update the business list annually [this could be done on a rolling basis]. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Economic Development Commission (EDC) and coordinator | Assessor's lists, business licenses, state data, maps, Internet resources |

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| ii. Create and maintain a commercial real estate inventory. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Because there are few non-residentially zoned properties in Exeter, updating this inventory should not be very time-consuming once the initial inventory is created. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | EDC and Coordinator | Assessor's lists; commercial RE sites, e.g., LoopNet, CoStar; commercial real estate brokers; businesses |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| iii. Develop and implement a program for annual visits and/or telephone contacts to businesses in Exeter. These contacts should include discussion of any issues, needs, and opportunities. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ideally, important businesses and those in priority economic sectors should receive in-person visits.The engagement program could be organized to occur in stages throughout the year. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | EDC and coordinator | Business inventory as it is developed; possible group of elected officials, Planning Board, Town Planner |

Goal 8-2

EXETER'S ECONOMY SUPPORTS RURAL CHARACTER.

POLICIES

- Develop and support a long-term economic strategy that promotes rural assets.
- Support the economic viability and sustainability of agriculture and forestry, access to outdoor recreation, and tourism focused on rural assets.
- Support opportunities for community-serving small business retail and services consistent with rural character, including in a possible new town center.

Goal 8-2 / Strategy A

Develop a long-term economic strategy plan focused on rural assets.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Explore and identify specific goals and actions.

- Create an educational community process to promote and develop consensus around economic development.
- Consider creating an Exeter brand with a logo and message about Exeter, such as “Rhode Island Rural.”
- Invest in visibility and marketing.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|------------|---|---|
| FYIP #1-#2 | Economic Development Commission, coordinator with Town boards and members of the public | Examples from other similar communities and economic development examples; case studies from www.wealthworks.org ; URI extension and subject experts; state agencies |

ACTIONS

ii. Develop an outdoor recreation strategy to make Exeter an outdoor destination. Activities may include:

- Inventory assets—create maps, a smart phone app and self-guided tour.
- Create a list of priority projects.
- Invest in infrastructure to create a visitor-friendly environment with amenities such as signs, wayfinding, and trailhead markers.
- Grow and attract complementary businesses to create a critical mass—consider creating an Arcadia gateway district on Route 3.
- Talk to outdoor enthusiast groups and businesses elsewhere.
- Engage partners and the community.
- Develop activities such as wildlife and native-vegetation walks and conservation tours.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| FYIP #2 and long term | Economic Development Comm. and coordinator; strategic partners such as RIDEM, outdoor recreation groups, outdoor recreation businesses, etc. | State, regional, and national agencies and organizations in the outdoor recreation sector; RIDEM, especially Arcadia Management Area; Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Assoc. and Wild & Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council; outdoor recreation and nature groups, businesses, guides, and volunteers |

Goal 8-2 / Strategy A (continued)

Develop a long-term economic strategy plan focused on rural assets.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

iii. Develop an agriculture strategy. Activities may include:

- Inventory assets—map out assets open to the public, farm tours; map overlaying outdoor recreation and farm assets.
- Form an Agriculture Committee (Town-sponsored or independent).
- Allow standardized signage with the Exeter brand logo for farmstands.
- Identify needed agricultural infrastructure, such as access to a commercial kitchen or other processing.
- Consider Town investment or securing grants to upgrade the Grange commercial kitchen to meet code, with access for farmers.
- Support young farmers and closely track farmland that becomes available, making information about financing programs available.
- Develop consensus on and make zoning adjustments to reduce barriers to agricultural success (e.g., farm viability uses—see Element 12, Land Use)
- Facilitate creation and expansion of breweries and wineries.
- Connect farmers to information sources and technical assistance.
- Engage the community by telling the stories of Exeter farms and with educational activities.
- Create an app for a self-guided farmstand tour.
- Create fun events and activities like community dinners with local foods, Farm Day tours, “Porchfest” events with musicians.
- Supply local foods to the school system.
- Coordinate participation in the farmer’s market and a pooled CSA pickup.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|--|--|---|
| FYIP #1-#2 EARLY ACTION ITEMS: Agriculture Committee; possible Town role in upgrading the Grange kitchen | EDC with coordinator; members of the farm community; Town Council to seek grant or otherwise assist the Grange; state and regional partners; URI Extension; volunteers to help organize and publicize events | Local farm community; state and regional agriculture organizations; URI; grant programs; volunteers |

ACTIONS

iv. Develop a strategy to support community-serving small businesses. Activities may include:

- Business recruitment package—real estate opportunities; market dynamics; key resources
- Communication to understand needs
- Single point of contact in Town Hall
- Connect to resources—pipeline to URI for interns, potential employees; business services
- Buy Local campaign

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---|--|--|
| FYIP #1-#2 and ongoing | Economic Development Coordinator; possible consultant assistance | State and regional agencies, organizations, and commercial real estate groups; examples from other rural areas |

Goal 8-3

COMMERCIAL AND LIGHT-INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTE TO TOWN FINANCIAL RESOURCES IN APPROPRIATE LOCATIONS.

POLICIES

- Most commercial and light industrial development remains focused on state Routes 2 and 3.
- Support improvements to the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors to attract higher-value and mixed-use development.
- Pursue online and innovative businesses with limited impacts on residential areas.

Goal 8-3 / Strategy A

Create a business-recruitment package.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Communicate with existing businesses to learn about their needs, such as desire to expand operations.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| FYIP #1, and ongoing | Economic Development, Coordinator; possible consultant assistance | Business inventory |

ACTIONS

ii. Research innovative and online business types that might be a good fit for Exeter, similar to the current technology and online businesses in town.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------|--|--|
| FYIP #2 | Economic Development, Coordinator; possible consultant assistance | Existing technology and online businesses in rural context; tech business organizations |

ACTIONS

iii. Create a business-recruitment package, including real estate opportunities, market dynamics, and key resources.

- Communication to understand needs
- Provide a single point of contact in Town Hall
- Connect to resources—pipeline to URI for interns, potential employees; business services

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| FYIP #1-#2, and ongoing | Economic Development, Coordinator; possible consultant assistance | Examples from other communities and regions |

Goal 8-3 / **Strategy A** (continued)

Create a business-recruitment package.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|---|---|
| iv. Work with Rhode Island Ready to prepare and market the I-95 Site Readiness area for development. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify preferred development options.• Work with landowners.• Develop regulatory framework and zoning. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 | Town Planner; EDTF or Commission | Rhode Island Ready; General Fund |

Goal 8-3 / **Strategy B**

Develop corridor-improvement plans for commercial/industrial areas.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|--|
| i. Create enhanced-development corridor plans for Route 3 and Route 2 to create improved conditions and focus areas along the corridors that can implement economic plan elements, such as a visitor-friendly outdoor recreation hub on Route 3. (See Element 12—Land Use.) | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 and long term | EDC and coordinator with Town Council, Planning Board, RIDOT, property owners and businesses; consultant assistance | Examples from rural highway business development projects (e.g., “When Main Street is a State Highway”); seek grants for consultant funding; RIDOT funds; RI Commerce; General Fund |



Transportation

Exeter is Rhode Island's second largest municipality by land area but has one of its smallest populations, according to the 2020 US Census. The town's low population density and large size present special transportation needs and challenges. Exeter's elongated shape and large undeveloped areas mean that highways and larger collector roads play an essential role in connecting remote areas with regional resources such as schools, stores, and jobs. Most transportation in Exeter occurs by motor vehicle, for which maintaining adequate roads, highways, and bridges, is essential, but some residents may be unable to drive or don't have access to a vehicle. Moreover, residents are increasingly interested in opportunities for safe walking and bicycling.

Transportation systems must provide an efficient and effective balance between access and mobility. The overall goal of transportation is access: we travel to reach destinations and the opportunities that those destinations represent. Transportation is accomplished through mobility: our physical movement through space. Access is represented by transportation networks and mobility options. Mobility is often connected to speed of movement—how fast can we get to our destination? Transportation networks and systems affect and are affected by land-use choices, and they also affect the preservation and function of natural environments.

A. TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION IN THE EXETER 2044 VISION

...We protect the qualities that make Route 102 our designated Scenic Road and we have cost-effective policies for maintaining our road system. There are expanded opportunities for safe bicycling, walking, and hiking in Exeter. Greenways link wildlife habitat and recreation sites in a continuous network, preserving the health of the entire ecosystem and enhancing outdoor recreation. At the same time, the Town cooperates with others to support mobility and transportation innovations, such as electric vehicles or on-demand public transportation to better serve our population.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|---|--|
| 1 Exeter has well-maintained and cost-effective road management. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support cost-effective road maintenance and pavement management. |
| 2 Speeding is controlled on major Exeter roads. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a traffic-calming program. |
| 3 Exeter has multimodal routes for safe walking and biking that connect town destinations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support safe walking and biking routes in appropriate areas of town. |
| 4 Exeter protects the character of its Scenic Roads. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support protection of Scenic Road character with development standards. |
| 5 The Town conducts a brief survey of seniors and others about public transportation needs every five years. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support regular evaluation of public transportation needs for seniors and others and advocacy to the state if expanded options are needed. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Comments on transportation issues in the town-wide public opinion survey focused especially on traffic and, to a lesser extent, the lack of places for safe walking and cycling, especially for children. “Low traffic” was one of the features that respondents mentioned in response to questions about what they liked about Exeter and what should be preserved.

- However, although many noted that Exeter has “little traffic” and lacks “sidewalks, street lights, traffic lights or traffic jams,” when asked what they liked least about Exeter, speeding and the lack of safe walking/biking topped the list of topics mentioned. “I do not enjoy the speeding cars on the back roads as well as on 102;” “165/102 traffic is increasing daily.”
- When asked to rank up to five priorities for town improvements from a list of fourteen, the top choice was “trails, paths, or routes for safe hiking, walking, or biking” and the third choice was “road improvements such as paving.”
- Example comments:
 - > *It seems Mail Road is an alternate route to routes 138 and 102 for commuting and has quite a bit more traffic than we expected when we purchased our home.*
 - > *People speeding on our roads.*
 - > *If you live on a main road, abundance of traffic and noise.*
 - > *...a lot of speeding/illegal passing on Rt 102 and Rt 165.*
 - > *Not being able to ride a bike outside of the neighborhood due to high speed traffic on rte 102, rte 2.*
 - > *Speeding drivers and narrow country roads makes them unsafe for children bicycling or walking. Rt 102 serves as a bypass for Rt. 95 to Rt 4 and can be noisy and carry a lot of truck and non-local traffic.*
 - > *Noticing more cars on 102 and finding it hard to get out.*

- > *My road is now a cut through from 165 to route 3 with lack of care for speed and residents living, walking, running, and biking on the road with or without young kids.*
- > *I think some public roads could be better taken care of or repaved...*
- > *...reduce the speed limit on Rte 2. Cement trucks are doing 60 MPH by my house daily.*

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

The State transportation plan

The Division of Statewide Planning, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, and the Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority prepare the state’s Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The current LRTP, *Moving Forward RI 2040*, outlines broad goals and initiatives for the state’s transportation network to meet economic, housing, and sustainability goals on a 20-year time frame. The plan also includes a Bicycle Mobility Plan, a Transit Master Plan, and a Congestion Management Plan to create more unified multimodal connections throughout the state. The LRTP lists two key projects in Exeter:

- Adding bicycle lanes to key thoroughfares and two bike path segments
- Creating a local mobility hub with access to the 95x Park-n-Ride bus at the I-95 interchange with Route 102, Victory Highway¹

Key findings:

- There is a total of 142 miles of roadway in Exeter, of which the Town maintains 88.3 miles (including some public gravel roads).
- Exeter’s Route 102 (7.3 miles along Ten Rod Road between Routes 2 and 3) was designated in 1993 as one of Rhode Island’s eight Scenic Roadways.

¹ <https://planning.ri.gov/planning-areas/transportation/long-range-transportation-plan>

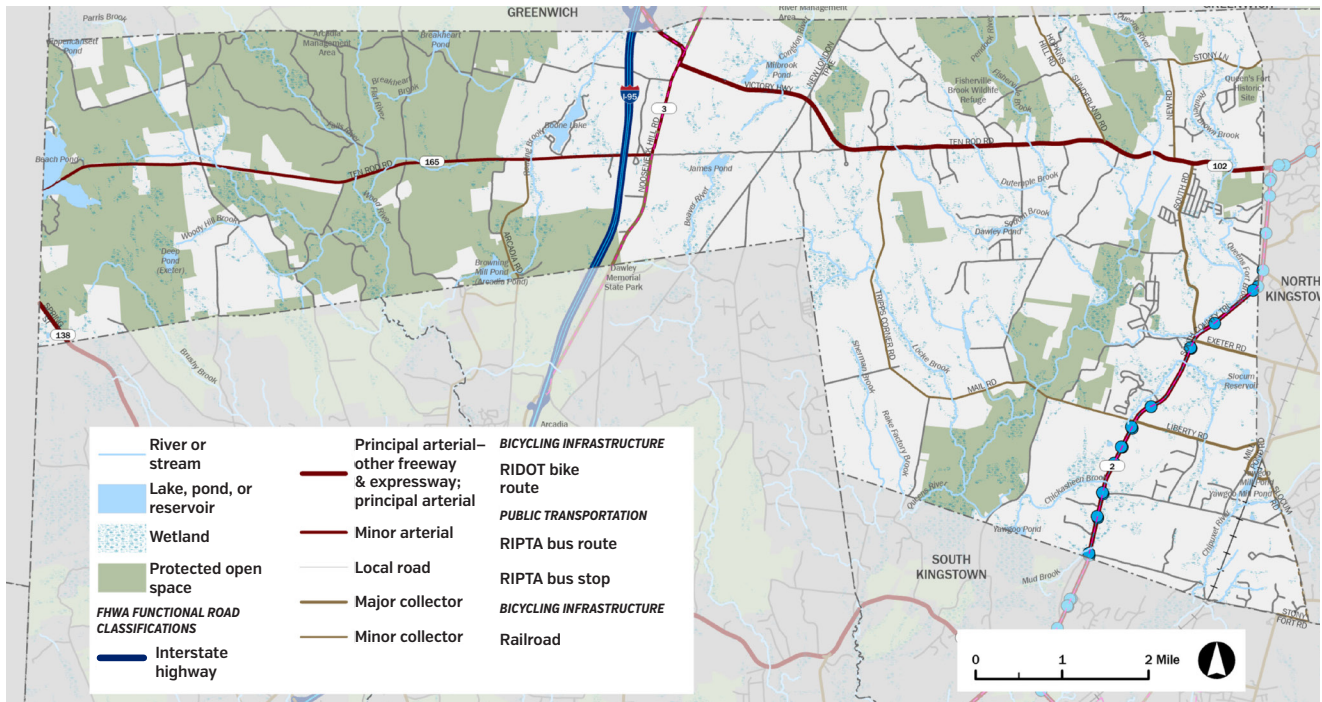


Fig 9-1 Transportation & Complete Streets. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

- Exeter residents depend on cars and trucks to get around town and to other destinations; 89% of workers drive to work alone.
- Lacking a town center or villages, Exeter has no walkable districts.
- Roads in Exeter have no significant bicycle facilities. Routes 2 and 3 are marked as bicycle routes with small striped bike lanes but no other safety facilities.
- Public transportation access in Exeter is limited to one bus stop on Route 2 and on-demand service from RIDE. Residents can travel by car to the Wickford MBTA station for the train to Providence and Boston, or to park-and-ride lots in Richmond or West Greenwich for commuter bus service.
- In recent years, traffic has increased on arterial roads such as Route 102, Route 165, and Route 2. Traffic on I-95 has remained at about 40,000 vehicles per day.

Existing transportation network

Residents of western Exeter are dependent on RI-165 (Ten Rod Road) for traveling east-west, and RI-138 (Spring Street) in the southwest

corner also provides travel to Richmond and points southeast. Smaller roads branching off of RI-165 run north to West Greenwich or south to Hopkinton or Richmond. In the eastern half of town, RI-102 (Ten Rod Road) connects with RI-2 (South County Trail) and RI-4 in North Kingstown to the east, and with RI-3 (Nooseneck Hill Road) and the I-95 interchange along Victory Highway to the northwest. Smaller roads intersecting with RI-102 include the New London Turnpike, Tripps Corner Road, and South Road. In southeast Exeter, RI-2 (South County Trail) is a major thoroughfare between the North Kingstown and South Kingstown town lines, and intersects with a few larger local roads, such as Liberty Road.

Functional classification of roads

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) classifies roads based on their function for travel mobility and access to local property:

- Principal Arterials:** Highest travel mobility—more travel lanes, higher speeds and usage, greatest distance between routes; Interstate highways, other freeways and highways;

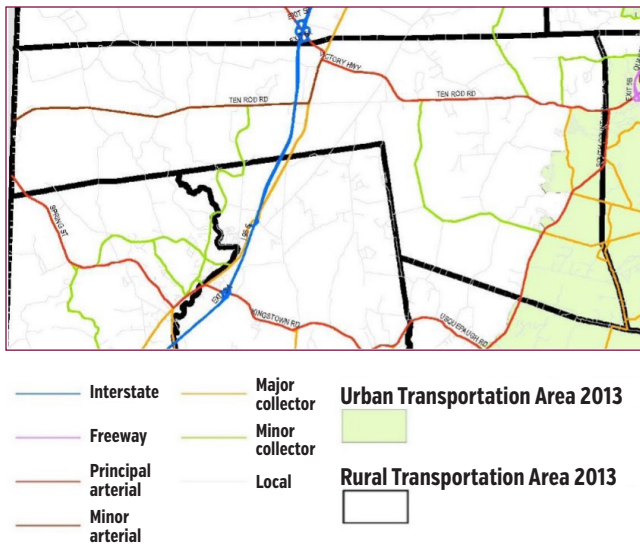


Fig 9-2 Rural and urban transportation zones.
 [Source: RI Statewide Planning Program
 and RIGIS, 2019]

- **Collectors:** Balanced service for both travel and access—larger roads that may be single- or multi-lane and may connect local roads with an arterial; major and minor collectors
- **Local Roads:** Highest access to local property—short distances between routes, many access points, low usage and speeds; typically single lane roads that deliver people to properties.

Additionally, the FHWA classifies roads as “urban” or “rural,” to distinguish factors such as typical distance between exits, need for multiple lanes, and average traffic load that may vary based on population density.² In Rhode Island, the urban-rural transportation boundary crosses through the southeast corner of Exeter, defining the area south and east as urban, and all areas west and north as rural (see Figure 9-2). About 20% of the mileage of Exeter’s roads falls into this urban area, and the rest is rural.

Highway functional classifications and urban/rural designations are used in developing long-range transportation plans and federal-aid funding categories. All arterials and major collectors are eligible for federal-aid funding in

both urban and rural areas, and minor collectors are eligible in urban areas, but not in rural areas. No local roads are eligible for federal funding.³

Exeter has a total of 142 miles of roadway.

Functional classification:

- > *Arterials or major collectors* cover 35.6% of roadway. Arterials include 5.6 miles along I-95 North and South, and a little over twenty miles of principal and minor arterials. These include five US Highways: RI-2 (South County Trail), RI-3 (Nooseneck Hill Rd), RI-102 (Ten Rod Rd and Victory Highway), RI-138 (Spring St), and RI-165 (Ten Rod Rd). Major collectors include other parts of RI-3 and South Rd, Exeter Rd, Liberty Rd, and Slocum Rd, together making up 9.4 miles. All of these roads are eligible for federal aid.
- > *Minor collectors* account for 8% of roads. Exeter’s minor collectors are all designated as rural and ineligible for federal aid. These include Mail Rd, Tripps Corner Rd, Arcadia Rd, and Sunderland Rd, among others, accounting for 11.4 miles. (See “Local Road Maintenance” section below)
- > The remaining 95 miles of local roads depend upon local funding for maintenance by Exeter’s Department of Public Works, making up about two-thirds of roadway miles.
- Exeter *local roads* do not have traffic lights, street lights, or sidewalks.
- Road mileage by jurisdiction (total 141.9 miles):
 - > State-maintained Interstate 95: 5.6 miles
 - > State-maintained US routes: 24.5 miles
 - > State-maintained other: 23.5
 - > Locally-maintained: 88.3 miles

³ **US Department of Transportation (2013)**

² **US Department of Transportation (2013)**

Traffic volumes

RIDOT measures Annual Average Daily Traffic volume data (AADT) at stations along routes I-95, RI-102, RI-2, and RI-165. ⁴ Inconsistency in traffic data limits direct comparisons, but the data suggest that between 2000 and 2021, traffic decreased somewhat along I-95, but increased by about 45% along RI-102 and by about 25% along RI-2. Traffic also appears to have increased by as much as 65% along RI-165 between 2000 and 2022. These trends indicate a significant increase in the use of Exeter's principal and minor arterials over the last two decades, which may also indicate similar increases in collectors and local roads.

- Exeter's station on I-95 averages nearly 40,000 vehicles per day.
- Among other arterials in Exeter, the highest traffic volumes occur along RI-2 (South County Trail) between the North Kingstown line and Exeter Road. This route is a major north/south thoroughfare between RI-138 and the RI-4 interchange, used to access I-95 North and South, as well as URI and other southern destinations such as South County beaches.
- RI-102 (Ten Rod Road), between Widow Sweets Road and the Exeter Public Library, has the next heaviest volume, which may be due to the traffic between eastern Exeter or North Kingstown and RI-3 and I-95. Of Exeter's two public schools, one sits near RI-3 across the West Greenwich border, and one directly on RI-102. School traffic on Nooseneck Hill Road and Victory Highway also contributes to this traffic. In western Exeter, the station along RI-165 (Ten Rod Road) sees the least traffic, a little over half of the volume of RI-102 and 40% of RI-2.
- Many respondents to the public opinion survey perceived Route 102 traffic, particularly speeding traffic, as having increased.

⁴ Traffic volume data from 2022 has not yet been calculated as an AADT, but the average count over a 10-day period in October-November 2022 provides an approximation. AADT data from 2021 is available for three of the four stations, but Station 110031 only started transmitting data in June 2022 and doesn't have historic records. Data from 2000 or 2001, available on RIGIS, provide AADT counts for locations near the current stations along the same routes, but locations may have shifted some.

FIG. 9-3 Commuting Patterns

| COMMUTING GROUP | ESTIMATED NUMBER | PROPORTION |
|--|------------------|-------------|
| WORKERS 16 YEARS AND OVER | 3,296 | 100% |
| Car, truck, or van: drove alone | 2,938 | 89.1% |
| Car, truck, or van: carpooled | 16 | 0.5% |
| Public transportation (excluding taxicab) | 14 | 0.4% |
| Walked | 0 | 0.0% |
| Other means | 44 | 1.3% |
| Worked from home | 284 | 8.6% |
| Mean travel time to work: 25.5 minutes | | |

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DATA PROFILES (2020) DP03-SELECTED

Size and type of vehicles

The traffic measuring station on RI-165 one mile east of the Connecticut border, contains Weigh-in-Motion sensors that assess the size and type of vehicle. In 2022, the vast majority of traffic along RI-165 consisted of smaller passenger vehicles, while about 6% of vehicles were used for heavier loads and freight. (See Appendix for data.)

Commuting patterns

In Exeter, 89% of workers drive alone to work. Only half a percent carpool and another half percent takes public transportation. Most of the remaining 10% work from home. The high percentage of car commuters indicates Exeter's dependency on arterials and collector roads, such as RI-2 and Ten Rod Rd. The 25-minute mean travel time also indicates that many commuters are using I-95, RI-2, RI-4, or other highways to travel to regional economic centers, such as Providence.

Bridges

Exeter has 31 state-numbered bridges that range from small culverts to major highway overpasses.

Under federal highway regulations, any bridge spanning more than 20 feet is included in the National Bridge Inventory (NBI) and subject to National Bridge Inspection Standards (NBIS) and reporting requirements (23 CFR 650 Subpart C). These include routine inspections by RIDOT every two years to assess the bridge's structural elements, use, load capacity, and other factors.

The Federal Highway Administration uses these data to rate each bridge's overall condition as "Good," "Fair," or "Poor." Bridges rated "Poor" have structural deficiencies that compromise their performance and require annual inspections, while others require inspections every two years.⁵ NBIS also requires that some bridges with documented structural deficiencies restrict the weight, or load, of vehicles that can use them. These bridges must post their maximum legal load and require annual inspections under RIDOT's 2019 Transportation Asset Management Plan.⁶

- Exeter has 14 bridges listed in the 2022 NBI, of which 13 are owned by the State of Rhode Island, and one, the Liberty Road Bridge that crosses Sodom Brook, is owned by the Town of Exeter. Six of these bridges are rated as being in "Good" condition, seven as "Fair," and one, the Midway Bridge in Arcadia Management Area, as "Poor." Four NBI bridges have load postings, including the Midway Bridge. The Liberty Road Bridge is rated as "Fair," requiring two-year inspections, but does not have a posted load.⁷
- Exeter has 17 other bridges that span less than 20 feet and are not listed in the NBI. Most are also owned by the State, with five owned by Exeter: the Millville Bridge on Arcadia Road, the Exeter School Bridge on Dawley Road, and three culverts crossing the Chipuxet River on Liberty Road, Mill Access Road, and Wolf

Rocks Road.⁸ RIDOT's 2019 *Transportation Asset Management Plan* stipulates that non-NBI bridges also be inspected and assessed

⁸ *Town of Exeter, citing RIDOT, 2004. Table 5.6.F. "State Numbered Bridges in Exeter"*



Exeter's Scenic Roadway

Exeter's Rt 102, 7.3 miles along Ten Rod Road between Routes 2 and 3, was designated in 1993 as one of Rhode Island's eight Scenic Roadways. The Scenic Highways law (RIGL § 24-15) allows municipalities to nominate roads with high scenic or historic value to be protected as a Scenic Roadway. This designation gives more local authority to regulate tree removal, highway and bridge construction, and other matters, and may qualify the road for federal grants for enhancement projects.

Scenic Roadway description:

The roadway traverses Exeter's rolling topography, including some of the highest hills in Rhode Island, and a landscape of forest and farmland that is unspoiled by commercial development. Most of the highway is still bounded by original 18th century stone walls, along with historic sites and two historic districts. Commonly known as "Exeter's Main Street," Route 102 was once used to carry goods and livestock to a market at the colonial seaport of Wickford.

⁵ US DOT, Federal Highway Administration, 2022a. *Specifications for the National Bridge Inventory*.

⁶ 23 CFR 650.313 *Inspection Procedures*.

⁷ US DOT, Federal Highway Administration, 2022b. *National Bridge Inventory ASCII*.

(SOURCE: RIDOT'S SCENIC ROADWAYS WEBPAGE: [HTTP://WWW.DOT.RI.GOV/COMMUNITY/SCENICROADWAYS.PHP#ROUTE102](http://WWW.DOT.RI.GOV/COMMUNITY/SCENICROADWAYS.PHP#ROUTE102))

every two to four years, though they do not have the same reporting requirements and listed conditions. Three non-NBI bridges have posted loads, and one bridge, over Breakheart Brook, has been closed. (See Appendix.)

Local road maintenance

Sixty-two per cent of Exeter's road mileage is owned and maintained by the Town, and the rest by RIDOT.

- Exeter's Department of Public Works (DPW) is responsible for routine maintenance and improvements for the 88 miles of Town-owned roads under a budget of approximately \$350,000 per year. Exeter's 2004 Comprehensive Plan reported a road maintenance budget of \$60,000, indicating a significant increase above inflation has occurred in the past 18 years.
- According to the director of Public Works, most roads in Exeter are on a five-year cycle for surface treatments to help seal cracks, fix potholes, and correct drainage issues, and a full repaving every 10-15 years. The director notes that the Town's budget only allows for a stone-seal paving for most roads, with an asphalt overlay on some, while more expensive full-asphalt paving would last longer but is not currently funded.
- Other routine road maintenance costs for Exeter include repairing guardrails, pruning or removing trees, grass-mowing, repainting road lines, maintaining signage, street sweeping, snowplowing and salting, and other tasks. The DPW defrays the cost of some of these needs by seeking opportunities to share equipment and materials with neighboring rural towns.
- However, the department has not adopted a formal Pavement Management Program nor has the Town invested in a GIS-based asset-management system to track road repair and other municipal maintenance needs, which would streamline work and be more cost-effective.
- Most subdivision roads in Exeter are privately owned and maintained by the development.

However, the DPW Director notes that subdivisions off town-owned roads add to local maintenance expenses. The Director also has found that these agreements have sometimes broken down and shifted the burden onto the DPW. Although the Town can charge developers an impact fee for new developments of a certain size, this money goes toward school expenses.⁹

Public transportation

Public transportation is almost nonexistent in Exeter. The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) offers one bus route, with one stop, that passes through Exeter. The fare is \$2.00 per ride, with options for day passes or monthly passes. Park-and-ride locations in Richmond and West Greenwich provide bus service to Providence and Westerly.



- The #66 URI/Galilee route, the longest bus route in Rhode Island, runs between URI and downtown Providence. It stops seven days a week at the Exeter Variety convenience store, 205 South County Trail, near the junction of RI-2 and Exeter Rd. Service is every half hour on weekdays, AM/PM, with service every hour in the late evening. Weekend and holiday service runs every hour.
- The 95x Westerly Park-n-Ride route provides weekday service to commuters who park their cars at designated stops between Westerly Railroad Station and downtown Providence. The two stops closest to Exeter are in Richmond, at the RI-138 interchange with I-95 in the village of Wyoming, and in West Greenwich, off I-95's former Exit 7 (re-numbered as Exit 21), along the New London Turnpike. Service runs only on weekdays, AM/PM: four stops inbound; five stops outbound.

⁹ *Exeter Ordinances.*



Wickford Junction Station (Source: Pi.1415926535 own work; CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20180320>)

Special needs transportation

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, RIPTA offers the RIdE Program, a door-to-door paratransit service for travelers with disabilities. The RIdE Program picks up and drops off travelers within ¼ mile of any fixed route service and requires reservations at least one day in advance. RIdE fares are \$4.00 per trip.

Rail transportation

Exeter has access to Amtrak and MBTA commuter service.

- Exeter contains approximately 1.7 miles of the Northeast Regional Amtrak railroad line and the train between New York and Providence stops at Wickford Junction, about three miles from the Exeter town line. Eastbound trains provide service to Providence and Boston, with some trains making more local stops. Westbound trains provide service to Westerly, New London and other locations on the way to New York and onward to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.
- The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Providence/Stoughton commuter rail line connects Wickford Junction station at 1011 Ten Rod Road with T. F. Green Airport, Providence, and Pawtucket-Central Falls as well as Massachusetts stations, ending

in Boston. The service to Boston operates weekdays only. The trip to Providence takes 35 minutes and the trip to Boston takes approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes. There are approximately 10 inbound and 10 outbound departures (Wickford and Boston) every weekday. Parking at Wickford Junction is free. The Wickford station opened in 2012, and ridership has not met expectations but has been increasing. An Exeter resident who uses the train to commute to a job in Boston was quoted in a recent *Providence Journal* article extolling the benefits of avoiding I-95 traffic to Boston by taking the train.¹⁰

Bicycle and pedestrian circulation

Exeter has very limited facilities to support pedestrians, bicyclists, and other multimodal travelers.

- The town has two crosswalks accompanied by short segments of sidewalk: one crosses Route 2 at the junction with Main St/Exeter Rd, adjacent to the small business plaza that hosts the post office, Exeter Variety, Village Pizza, and the RIPTA 66 bus stop. The other crosses Route 165 at Beach Pond, connecting a parking area for a trail head on the south side with the Beach Pond State Management Area and boat ramp on the north side. No other crosswalks or sidewalks exist in the town's public right-of-way.
- Exeter has no bicycle or shared-use paths or dedicated bicycle lanes along roadways. A shoulder bicycle lane comprising a 4-foot shoulder with signage for bicycle travel exists for a short segment along Route 3 before crossing into West Greenwich, and along much of Route 2.

The state's 2020 *Bicycle Mobility Plan*, part of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, proposes several candidate routes throughout Exeter.

¹⁰ Jim Hummel, "After 10 years and millions of tax dollars, what's the status of Wickford train station?" *The Providence Journal*, October 21, 2022. (<https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/2022/10/21/mbta-station-wickford-junction-rhode-island-10-years-later-ridership-boston-gradually-rising/10535271002/>)

Fig. 9-4 Candidate Bike Treatments Proposed in Rhode Island's Bicycle Mobility Plan

| PROPOSED BIKE TREATMENT | CANDIDATE ROUTES |
|---|---|
| Shared-use Path/Sidepath | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connector along RI-3 Nooseneck Hill Rd between RI-102 Victory Hwy east and west 2. Mancini Place (N. Kingstown) and along N. Kingstown town line from RI-102 to Stony Lane |
| Dashed/Advisory Bicycle Lane | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New London Turnpike, between Richmond town line and RI-102 Victory Highway 2. Arcadia Rd between Richmond town line and RI-165 3. Narrow Ln along N. Kingstown town line to Gerald's Farm Dr |
| Road Diet with Bicycle Lanes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RI-3 Nooseneck Hill Rd between RI-165 and RI-102 2. RI-102 Victory Hwy between RI-3 and W. Greenwich town line |
| Shoulder Bicycle Lane (4-foot shoulder with signage) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RI-2 South County Trl between Yawgoo Valley Rd and Liberty Rd 2. RI-102 Ten Rod Rd and Victory Hwy to RI-3* 3. RI-165 Ten Rod Rd between RI-3 and CT state line 4. RI 138 Spring St between Hopkinton town line and CT state line |

* The 2004 Comprehensive Plan reported high residential interest in walking and biking along Ten Rod Rd and recommended the route for a multiuse path (p. 5.6-5).

SOURCE: RI DIVISION OF STATEWIDE PLANNING PROGRAM (2020)

Candidate corridors are conceptual and require design assessments. The different types of bicycle facilities defined are:

- **Shared-use path:** multi-use paths completely separate from vehicle traffic (shared by pedestrians, runners, skaters, etc., as well as bicyclists)
- **Sidepath:** similar to shared-use paths but parallel to and immediately adjacent to roadways and frequently within the right-of-way; typically separated from the roadway by some kind of barrier or buffer
- **Bicycle lane:** designated exclusive space along a roadway using striping, pavement markings, and signs
- **Road diet:** reconfiguration of a four-lane undivided highway, to allow for two through lanes and other uses in reclaimed space, such as turn lanes, bike lanes, pedestrian refuge islands, sidewalks, landscaping, and so on. According to the US Federal Highway Administration, road diets provide proven safety benefits and enhanced mobility and

access for all road users.¹¹ This is proposed for most of the commercial-zoned Route 3 corridor in Exeter between Route 102 and Route 165, which would support economic development opportunities in that area, as described in Element 8—*Economic Development* and Element 12—*Land Use*.

- **Shoulder lane:** The paved shoulder on the edge of a road with at least 4 feet width can serve as space for pedestrians and bicyclists by using striping, different paving, and rumble strips.
- **Dashed/Advisory lane:** For roads too narrow for separate bike lanes, an advisory shoulder lane is designated by pavement markings. Motorists can enter the area only if there are no bicyclists present.¹²

See Element 5—*Open Space and Recreation* for bicycle trail priorities.

¹¹ USFHA, "Road Diets," <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/other/road-diets>

¹² "Small Town and Rural Design Guide: Facilities for Walking and Biking," <https://ruraldesignguide.com/>

Electric vehicles

According to RIDEM, there are 56 electric vehicles registered in Exeter. Eleven buyers have benefited from the state's rebate program, Drive EV, for electric and hybrid vehicles. There are two public charging stations: Ocean State HD DC Fast (Route 3) Exeter at 435 Nooseneck Hill Road and the Dunkin' Donuts on Route 2 (261I South County Trail) at Oak Harbor Village.

State transportation projects in Exeter

The Division of Statewide Planning, RIDOT and RIPTA prepare the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for federal funding projects. The LRTP lists two key projects in Exeter:

- Adding bicycle lanes to key thoroughfares and two bike path segments
- Creating a local mobility hub with access to the 95x Park-n-Ride bus at the I-95 interchange with Route 102 Victory Highway¹³

The STIP contains a schedule of projects that is updated every four years. Qualifying projects must meet the criteria established by RIDOT and be defined as a capital improvement project, to be included in the Capital Budget-Capital Improvement Program. The most recent STIP covers federal fiscal years 2022-2031, projecting beyond the required time frame for longer-range projects, and includes six projects in Exeter.

¹³ RI Statewide Planning Program (2020). *Statewide Bicycle Mobility Plan*.

Fig. 9-5 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Projects Planned for Exeter, 2022-2031

| STIP ID | NAME & DESCRIPTION | STIP PROGRAM | BUDGET, 2022-2031 |
|---------|---|--------------|-------------------|
| 3037 | BRIDGE GROUP 03_OS—BURDICKVILLE & BREAKHEART BROOK Major rehabilitation of bridges #375, Burdickville [Charlestown], and #786, Breakheart Brook [Exeter]. Breakheart Brook will be rehabilitated and converted into a pedestrian structure. | Bridge | \$7,500,000 |
| 3138 | BRIDGE GROUP 57J—BROWNING MILL This line item involves major rehabilitation work, superstructure, and/or total bridge replacement for Bridge #38, Browning Mill. Removal of Bridge #39, the Browning Mill Culvert. These bridges are located in Arcadia Wildlife Management Area, which is managed by RIDEM. | Bridge | \$950,000 |
| 3157 | BRIDGE GROUP 38B—ARCADIA WILDLIFE MIDWAY AND FROSTY HOLLOW This project will perform major rehabilitation work on bridges #787 and #788 in the Arcadia Wildlife Management Area. These two structures support access to multiple recreational facilities and paths throughout the site. | Bridge | \$1,000,000 |
| 5475 | HIGH RISK RURAL ROADS (HRRR)—RI-165 AT RI-3; RI-165 BETWEEN RI-3 AND CT STATE LINE This project will consist of roadway-departure countermeasures such as striping, signing, rumble strips, high friction surface treatments, and guardrail [in Exeter, Cranston, and Foster] [...] Traffic signal improvements include a new traffic signal system at the Route 3/165 intersection and a RRFB at the midblock pedestrian crossings along Route 165 near the CT State Border. | Safety | \$3,050,000 |
| 9991 | BRIDGE GROUP 18_HR-NK AND EXETER RAIL BRIDGES Historic Major Rehabilitation [in Exeter and N. Kingstown]—replacement of a structural unit, such as a pier, pier cap, or superstructure along with repair of other bridge elements. on historic bridge[s] over Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. This project may require additional funding beyond 2031. | Bridge | \$24,000,000 |

SOURCE: RIDOT (2021) STIP 10-YEAR PLAN, 2023-2031 PROJECT LIST

Four are bridge-related projects, of which one, a bridge above Breakheart Brook in the Arcadia Management Area, will be converted into a pedestrian bridge. A High-Risk Rural Roads project will also improve roadway safety along RI-165 and at the junction of RI-165 and RI-3. The Town should prepare to communicate any issues and coordinate with RIDOT on this project, in particular because of its importance to the interface between the Route 3 commercial area and more rural and residential areas on Route 165.

RIDOT also reports each tax quarter on transportation projects of \$500,000 or greater that were recently completed or planned for the coming fiscal year. These may include STIP projects, along with other RIDOT projects. Of eight maintenance projects for the federal fiscal years 2018–22, five were completed as of November 2022; the remaining three were slated for completion in 2022, 2023, and 2024. (See the Appendix.)

Local transportation planning and assistance.

RIDOT also provides support for local transportation planning and maintenance.

- The RIDOT Local Technical Assistance Program (RI LTAP) offers training opportunities and technical assistance, focusing on “road and bridge/culvert maintenance, the use of traffic control devices, and other techniques to promote traffic safety.”¹⁴
- At the county level, the Washington County Regional Planning Council, which is no longer active, promoted the idea of a regional transportation plan, supported by the state, to help implement regional transportation priorities. In addition to emphasizing multimodal options, the Council identified Scenic Roadway opportunities alleviating traffic on Route 102 among its transportation goals.¹⁵

¹⁴ RIDOT (2022). “RI Local Technical Assistance Program” webpage

¹⁵ Washington County Regional Planning Council (2022)

CHALLENGES

Exeter’s transportation challenges include:

- Virtually complete dependence on driving to reach destinations. While most adults drive and have access to a car or truck, there are some seniors who no longer can drive and young people below driving age who are dependent on others or on often unsafe walking and biking.
- Funding and optimal management systems for road maintenance.
- Speeding on major roads.
- Need for improved design standards for lands along designated scenic roads
- Coordination with state agencies around transportation, including RIDOT, RCommerce, and RIDEM.
- A series of bicycle routes to connect town destinations, including recreational areas.

OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting the State plan

Although Exeter has a smaller population and fewer transportation assets than many other Rhode Island municipalities, there are still many opportunities for projects and activities that can support the state’s transportation vision: support economic growth, promote environmental sustainability, strengthen communities, maintain transportation infrastructure, connect people and places.

A pavement-management system for efficiency and cost-effectiveness

A GIS-based pavement-management system should be established in Exeter as the first step in an asset-management system for all Town assets. An asset-management system is a software- and GIS-based approach to monitoring, operating, maintain, upgrading, and disposing of assets in a cost-effective way. It is used to track and manage infrastructure and facilities, vehicles, and equipment. It has proven

benefits in improving efficiency by optimizing the maintenance, repair, and replacement of assets and improving service delivery.

Speed management/traffic calming

Residents expressed concern about speeding on Route 102 and other roads in Exeter. The Federal Highway Administration has detailed information on methods for managing speeding, otherwise known as “traffic calming,” in the online publication *Traffic Calming ePrimer*.¹⁶ Traffic-calming measures especially appropriate for rural areas are also discussed in the FHWA publication, *Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks*.¹⁷ Sometimes called

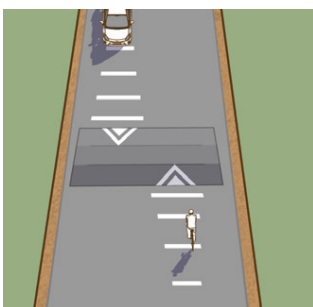
a “silent policeman,” traffic calming is intended to enforce speed limits where there is no police officer present. It can include physical changes to the roadway, signage, and operational changes.

Examples of physical traffic-calming measures appropriate for rural locations include physical changes such as speed humps, speed tables, pinch points, lateral shifts, and median islands. “On roadways with no curb and gutter, speed reduction measures constructed with traffic islands to deflect and channelize traffic can be constructed with minimal impacts to drainage and reduce construction and maintenance costs.”¹⁸

¹⁶ <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/speed-management/traffic-calming-eprimer>

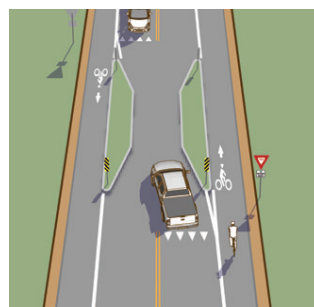
¹⁷ www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/small_towns/fhwahep17024_lg.pdf

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, page 5-5.



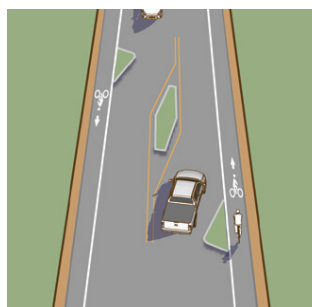
Speed Humps and Speed Tables

Speed humps and tables apply vertical deflection in the roadway that is designed to limit the speed of traffic. The main difference between humps and tables are length and profile. For more information on speed humps refer to the MUTCD 2009.



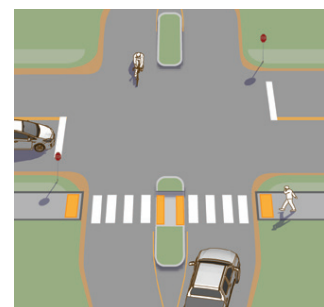
Pinch Point

Pinch points, also called chokers, are curb extensions or edge islands at midblock locations which narrows the road for a short distance, forcing all motorists to merge into a single lane.



Lateral Shift

Lateral shifts are realignments of an otherwise straight travel path. When multiple lateral shifts are applied to form an S-shaped curve it is called a chicane. For traffic calming, the taper lengths may be as much as half of what is suggested in traditional highway engineering.



Median Island

Median island are raised islands located along the centerline of a street that narrow the travel lanes and require deflection of an otherwise straight travel path.

Median islands are an FHWA Proven Safety Countermeasure.



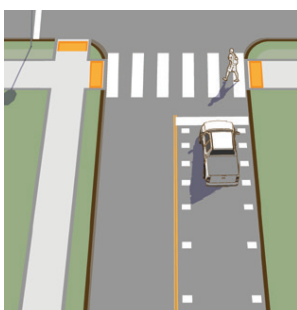
Speed Feedback Sign

Police departments and transportation agencies use speed feedback signs as educational tools that can enhance enforcement efforts directed at speed compliance. Speed feedback signs educate drivers as to their operating speed, and remind them of the posted speed limit on the roadway.



SLOW or Speed Limit Pavement Legends

Use SLOW or speed limit pavement markings as a supplement to speed-limit signs and reinforce the lawful speed limit.



Speed Reduction Markings

Speed reduction markings are a series of white rectangular markings typically 1 foot wide placed just inside both edges of the lane and spaced progressively closer to create the illusion of traveling faster as well as the impression of narrower lane.

The Federal Highway Administration recommends a range of tools, both physical (upper row) and nonphysical (lower row), for calming traffic on rural roads. (Source: Federal Highway Administration, “Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks,” 2016.)

Nonphysical methods of speed management include speed feedback signs, pavement legends, and speed-reduction markings. “Generally appropriate on higher speed roadways and high-

to-low-speed transition areas, nonphysical speed reduction measures use signs and markings to warn, regulate, and influence driver behavior.”¹⁹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, page 5-6.

CASE STUDY | BIKE LANE

Lyndonville, Vermont

PROJECT DESCRIPTION



The Lyndonville planner worked with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) during the construction of a large repaving project through Lyndonville to incorporate bike lanes into the project. Bike lanes were incorporated on Main Street, Broad Street, and Center Street. Along Depot Street, shared lane markings are the preferred option given on-street parking. On the Main Street section of the project, the existing roadway had no parking and wide shoulders. This combination allowed VTrans to design painted buffered bike lanes.

The addition of buffered bike lanes to the already under construction paving project was possible through the use of painted buffers. In addition, green paint was added at the bike lane through the intersections to highlight the areas of potential conflict. Because of variable shoulder widths, the painted buffer has a constant width of 2 ft while the bike lane width varies between 5 and 8 ft.

DETAILS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Lyndonville, population 1,207, is a village within the town of Lyndon, VT. Located in Vermont’s rural Northeast Kingdom, Lyndonville is home to Lyndon State College with approximately 1,400 students. Nearby Burke Mountain offers lift access downhill mountain biking, and Kingdom Trails anchors a growing network of mountain bike trails in the region.

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

Painted buffered bike lane with additional pavement markings.

ROLE IN THE NETWORK

The buffered bike lanes on Main Street are part of the network of on-street bike lanes and shared streets that connect the downtown businesses with residential streets and Lyndon State College.

FUNDING

The bike lanes were included as part of the paving project which was funded with 81 percent Federal funds and 19 percent State funds. Being incorporated into a planned and funded paving project meant that the additional costs for the buffered bike lanes were minimal.

For more information, refer to the Vermont Agency of Transportation: <http://vtrans.vermont.gov/>

(SOURCE: FHWA, SMALL TOWN AND RURAL MULTIMODAL NETWORKS, P. 3-15).

Some residents suggested traffic cameras, but enforcement issues would need significant community discussion.

Safe bicycle and pedestrian routes

Rural communities like Exeter are typically very car-dependent for transportation, but people increasingly want to have safe ways to walk and bike in their own communities—especially when there are beautiful natural areas to enjoy. This is also true in Exeter. When asked in the public opinion survey about their priorities for improvements, respondents ranked “trails, paths, or routes for safe hiking, walking, or biking” as their highest priority. During the preparation of this plan, Exeter residents were observed walking and biking on local roads, and members of the public who participated in Zoom meetings also expressed interest in opportunities to get around town without having to drive. Expanding opportunities for multimodal transportation—driving, walking, bicycling, public transportation, using scooters and similar lightweight vehicles (“micromobility”) are different transportation modes—is a goal of state and federal transportation plans. (See the bicycle route priority map showing routes connecting town destinations in Element 5—*Open Space and Recreation*.)

The present comprehensive plan includes goals, strategies and actions to plan and create walking, bicycling and hiking connections through Exeter, connecting community destinations with the Arcadia Management Area and its network of trails (See Element 5). In a place like Exeter, with many narrow roads and complex conditions, developing pedestrian and bicycle facilities may seem difficult. However, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has developed design guidance for creating multimodal facilities in rural areas. When a re-activated Conservation Commission, Department of Public Works, along with volunteers and partner groups, begins to work on routes, they should consult available resources such as:

- The website ruraldesignguide.com/ with a “Small Town and Rural Design Guide: Facilities for Walking and Biking,” includes case studies and image galleries.
- The FHWA’s Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks website (www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/small_towns/) provides expanded information, including a publication, *Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks*.²⁰

Exeter’s DPW can work with RIDOT on relatively low-cost opportunities to incorporate bike lanes in maintenance projects, similar to the case study of a repaving project in rural Vermont from the FHWA publication shown on page 9-14.



Source: City of Burlington, Vermont, “Community-Led Demonstration Project Policy Guide,” 2018, page 22. Julie Campoli photo.

Pop-up demonstration projects for traffic calming and multi-modal facilities

Pop-up demonstration pilot programs, sometimes called “tactical urbanism,” use low-cost and temporary methods to test the viability of traffic calming and similar transportation solutions. Using traffic cones, paint, planters, and other low-cost items to create new road conditions can help identify physical solutions to slow traffic, especially where safe walking and biking facilities are desired. Put into place for short periods, typically from a week to a month,

²⁰ www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/publications/small_towns/fhwahep17024_lg.pdf

potential changes are tested and evaluated before investment in more permanent solutions. Although more commonly found in cities, pop-up demonstrations can also be used at select locations in more rural environments such as Exeter.²¹

Concepts for high-priority transportation locations to coordinate with RIDOT projects.

- Prepare information on town plans and preferences in order to coordinate with RIDOT about any planned projects on arterials in Exeter, such as Routes 2 and 3, the Town's focus areas for business, and other major roads such as Route 102, as well as desired pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- The STIP includes a High-Risk Rural Roads project on Route 165 at Route 3 and between Route 3 and the Connecticut State Line. This project will include various physical improvements to deter crashes and a new traffic signal system at the Route 3/165 intersection. As noted, this comprehensive plan includes exploration of a Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan between Route 102 and Route 165 to include a "road diet," with the Route 3/165 intersection as a potential "gateway to Arcadia" location for development serving outdoor recreation. The road diet would manage traffic with a three-lane road plan (one lane in each direction and a flex lane in the

middle), increasing safety and helping to create a more village-like atmosphere. (See Element 8—*Economic Development* and Element 12—*Land Use*.) The Town should make RIDOT aware of the future planning for this area.

Scenic character protection on Exeter roads.

- Route 102 is a designated Scenic Road. Development standards along the road frontage should be reviewed and, if necessary, improved to ensure protection of scenic qualities.
- Nomination of other Exeter Roads, such as Route 165 and the New London Turnpike, should be considered.

Identify needs for public transportation.

- Over time, more and more residents, particularly seniors, may not be able to drive and will find it difficult to get around. The RIde only serves areas within 3/4 mile of RIPTA's single bus route.
- The Town could survey Exeter residents every five years on transportation issues to see if there is a need to advocate with the State or arrange other transportation options for people who cannot drive.

²¹ See the "tactical urbanism" page at Strong Towns Action Lab: <https://actionlab.strongtowns.org/hc/en-us>

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 9-1

EXETER HAS WELL-MAINTAINED AND COST-EFFECTIVE ROAD MANAGEMENT.

POLICIES

- Support cost-effective road maintenance and pavement management.

Goal 9-1 / **Strategy A**

Create systems to track and manage road maintenance and road equipment.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Create a pavement-management system as part of a municipal asset-management system. Pavement management can be the first step in an asset-management system.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--------------|--------------|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council | General Fund |

Goal 9-2

SPEEDING IS CONTROLLED ON MAJOR EXETER ROADS.

POLICIES

- Support a traffic-calming program.

Goal 9-2 / **Strategy A**

Develop and implement a plan to manage speeding.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Identify locations where speeding is a problem**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|-------|--------------|
| FYIP #1 | DPW | General fund |

ACTIONS

- ii. Place speed limit signs in any identified locations that need them.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|-------|--------------|
| FYIP #1 | DPW | General fund |

ACTIONS

- iii. Create a pilot program to test the performance of nonphysical traffic-calming elements such as speed feedback signs and pavement markings.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|-------|--------------|
| FYIP #1 | DPW | General fund |

Goal 9-2 / **Strategy A** (continued)

Develop and implement a plan to manage speeding.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|-----------------|--------------|
| iv. If necessary, develop and implement a plan for physical traffic calming using pop-up pilots to identify the best solutions and measure results. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | DPW; consultant | General fund |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|-------|---------------------|
| v. Install permanent solutions. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 | DPW | General fund; RIDOT |

Goal 9-3

EXETER HAS MULTIMODAL ROUTES FOR SAFE WALKING AND BIKING THAT CONNECT TOWN DESTINATIONS.

POLICIES

- Support safe walking and biking routes in appropriate areas of town.

Goal 9-3 / **Strategy A**

Develop and pursue implementation of a plan for safe walking and biking routes that connect town destinations.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024–2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028–2033); LONG-TERM (2034–2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| i. Seek opportunities to integrate safe walking and biking facilities into road maintenance projects. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consult the Conservation Commission for routes.• Use the FHWA guidance publication on Small Town and Rural Multimodal Networks. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW; Conservation Commission | General fund. See potential priority routes in Element 5–Open Space and Recreation of this plan. |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|-------------------|--|
| ii. Coordinate with RIDOT on multimodal opportunities in commercial corridors (Routes 2 and 3) and other state maintenance roads. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW; Town Planner | General fund. See Route 3 concept plan in Element 12–Land Use. |

Goal 9-3 / **Strategy A** (continued)

Develop and pursue implementation of a plan for safe walking and biking routes that connect town destinations.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| iii. Identify and implement pop-up demonstrations to test possible route options. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 and long term | DPW; Town Planner; Volunteers | RIDOT; resources from Strong Towns: https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2017/4/10/use-these-resources-to-host-a-pop-up-traffic-calming-demonstration |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|-------------------|--------------|
| iv. Evaluate the need for sidewalks and crosswalks at the Route 2, Oak Harbor, and Pine View Apartments locations to provide access to the bus stop and potential future town center. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | DPW; Town Planner | General fund |

Goal 9-4

EXETER PROTECTS THE CHARACTER OF ITS SCENIC ROADS.

POLICIES

- Support protection of Scenic Road character with development standards.

Goal 9-4 / **Strategy A**

Inventory the scenic resources of Route 102 and any future designated Scenic Roads and ensure protection of those resources through development standards.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|--------------|
| i. Inventory conditions along Route 102. | | |
| • Petition RIDOT for a load-limitation study on Route 102. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Planner; volunteers; Town Council | General fund |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|--------------|
| ii. Review and modify development standards for Route 102 and any other future designated Scenic Roads to ensure protection of scenic character | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | General fund |

Goal 9-4 / **Strategy A** (continued)

Inventory the scenic resources of Route 102 and any future designated Scenic Roads and ensure protection of those resources through development standards.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|
| iii. Develop a consistent, simple, and attractive signage system for Exeter assets located on Scenic Roads that can also be used elsewhere in town. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The signage would be used for farms or farm stands, conservation areas, historic sites, and similar assets important to Exeter's character | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 to long term | Town Planner; Planning Board; possible consultant assistance | General fund; grant funding |

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| iv. Consider nominating Route 165 and New London Turnpike for Scenic Road designation. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP-#2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Historical Association | General fund |

Goal 9-5

THE TOWN CONDUCTS A BRIEF SURVEY OF SENIORS AND OTHERS ABOUT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NEEDS EVERY FIVE YEARS.

POLICIES

- Support regular evaluation of public transportation needs for seniors and others and advocacy to the state if expanded options are needed.

Goal 9-5 / **Strategy A**

Survey the Exeter population every five years to gauge transportation needs.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| i. Survey the population about transportation needs every five years, with special attention to seniors. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Planner; Director of Social Services | General fund |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|---|----------------------|
| ii. Work with state transportation officials and with local volunteers and regional nonprofit providers to fill any gaps, especially for seniors and youth. | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider organizing a volunteer ride board system (similar to college ride boards) to assist people needing rides. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Town Planner; Director of Social Services | General fund; grants |



Public Facilities, Services & Infrastructure

As a small town with a rural ethos and characteristics, Exeter has few public facilities and public services, and limited infrastructure. Most Town tax resources go to support the well-regarded Exeter-West Greenwich public school district. Volunteer fire departments provide emergency services, and the town lacks a municipal police force. The town is managed by elected officials, volunteer appointed officials, and a small staff, many of whom are part-time and nearing retirement age. Many residents are happy to continue a traditional “small government” approach, but others believe that the town could more effectively protect its rural character, enhance quality of life, and be ready to avoid threats and take advantage of opportunities with proactive policies to make it more efficient and cost-effective. In addition, participants in the planning process repeatedly voiced a desire for better and more organized communications between Town government and residents.

A. PUBLIC FACILITIES, SERVICES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE EXETER 2044 VISION

...Town government is responsive, transparent, and accountable. Public facilities and services are resource-efficient, well-maintained, cost-effective, sustainable, and resilient. The Town maximizes long-term benefits through improved planning, enforcement, implementation and coordination between departments and volunteer committees.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|--|---|
| 10-1 Exeter town government communicates effectively with Exeter residents, businesses, and visitors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support systems for town government to collect and report data. • Ensure that information on town data, town services, and town operations is available to the public. |
| 10-2 Exeter has a new town hall and a new community center. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support building a new town hall. • Support building a new community center |
| 10-3 Exeter has effective management systems for town assets and infrastructure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support establishment of cost-effective asset-management systems. |
| 10-4 Exeter employs stormwater best practices to protect the Town's groundwater and surface water quality. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote good stewardship of Exeter's exceptional water resources with stormwater best practices. |
| 10-5 The Town of Exeter and the Volunteer Fire Departments collaborate to ensure continuing public safety over the next 20 years. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance communications between Town government and Fire District/Fire Departments. • Collaborate to plan for future public safety needs. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Comments from the townwide public opinion survey about public facilities and services included a variety of issues.

Facilities and services

- In response to a question asking respondents to rank their top five priorities from 14 choices (and a “no change” option), “Community center for cultural, recreational, educational and social activities” ranked second, after “trails, paths or routes for safe hiking, walking or biking.” “Senior center” was the fourth choice. A desire for a community center was also mentioned in comments to other questions.

General Town government improvements

- In response to a question about whether town government needs better communication and transparency, 70% of respondents would like better communication from Town government. More than half (52%) would like more transparency as well. Only 30% were satisfied with current practice.
- When asked what one thing Town government could do to improve quality of life, the major themes among the responses were better town government communication; community-building events, facilities, and places; town recreation; and activities and opportunities for youth and seniors. Respondents also mentioned improved traffic enforcement and specific aspects of tax incentives and discounts. A broader and more general theme was controlling development. Example comments from this open answer question included:
 - > *Communication with the residents. Listen to their concerns. Involve the stakeholders before making decisions.*
 - > *Create a better communication system among the departments and public.*

- > *Promote town meetings better by communicating the issues at hand much more clearly vs attaching the agenda to an email.*
- > *Listen to all constituents with an open mind.*
- > *Better online presence/website for government services.*
- > *More town sponsored events to meet local families and better advertisement of events.*
- > *Community center.*
- > *Plan events, parades—things that bring our small community together.*
- > *Focusing on keeping Exeter just the way it is!*
- > *Keep taxes low.*
- > *Create outdoor recreation areas.*
- > *Senior services.*
- Participants in the community open house also expressed strong support for statements on better town communications:
 - > *Upgrade the Town web site to be more useful and attractive to Exeter residents, businesses, and visitors.*
 - > *Develop a program to collect and report town data and town government activities and make the information easily available online, at the Library, and in Town Hall.*

Taxes and small government

The subjects of taxes and small government came up repeatedly in different contexts in free answer questions and comments. For some respondents, Exeter’s small government is a hallmark of a small, rural community and is beneficial to town residents. At the same time, other respondents would like to see more professional, full-time staff in town government in order to face the challenges of the future. However, the issue is not simply that taxpayers want the lowest taxes possible. In many cases, respondents expressed the opinion that taxes in Exeter are high considering that the Town provides very few services outside of public education. Some people are concerned that taxes are too high for low-income seniors.

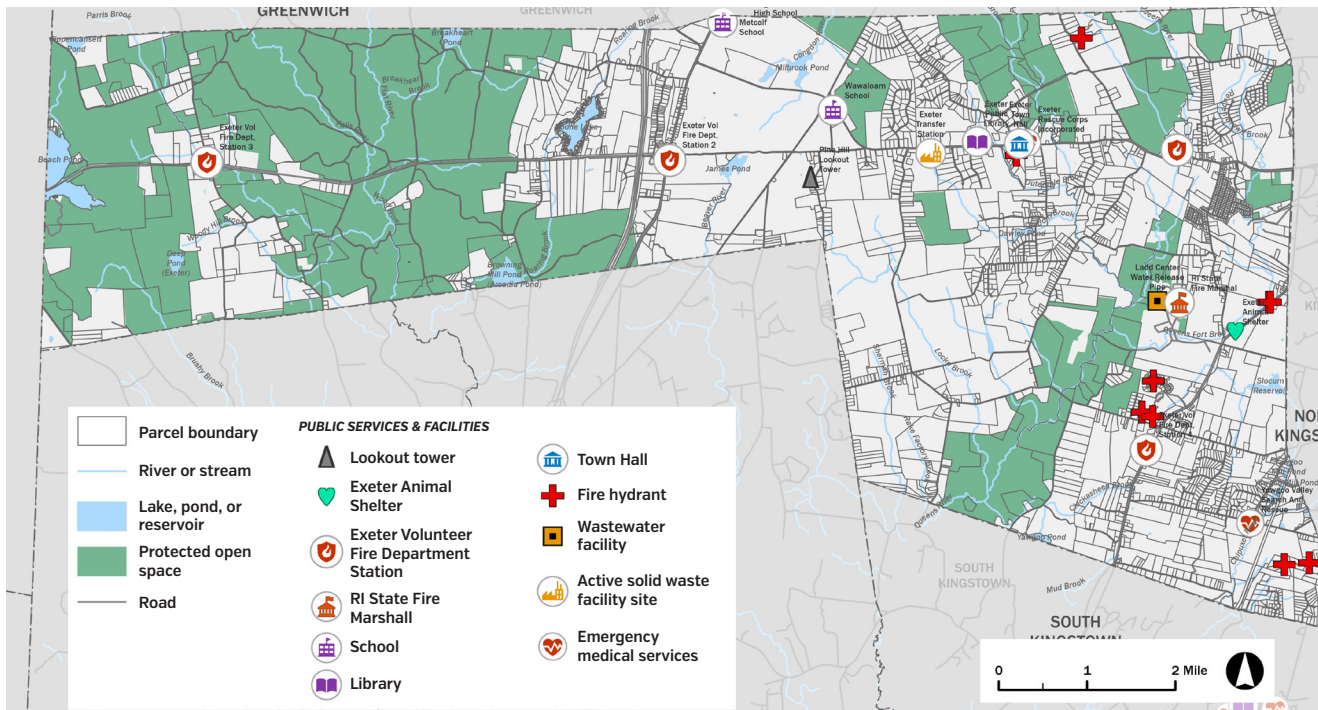


Fig 10-1 Public Facilities (Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

- Exeter has a small government, limited facilities, and offers few services beyond the Exeter-West Greenwich Public School District. The Town's contribution to the School District takes up 76% of the Town's FY23 total budget (and 93% of net property taxes).
- There are 18 full-time staff positions, including the elected Town Clerk and Town Treasurer, 18 part-time positions, and some 34 people in government who fall under neither category—some of whom are elected, others of whom serve on boards and commissions, including Town Council and regulatory boards, and may receive some compensation, and others who serve as volunteers in advisory roles.
- Unpaid volunteers serve on the following committees and positions: Parade Committee (8); the Reynolds Charitable Trust (5); Historic Preservation (3); Rural Land Preservation Trust (3); Viewer of Fences (1); Sealer of weights and measures (1); Economic Development Task Force (8); Juvenile Hearing Board (5); and Library Board of Trustees (5).
- Volunteer positions currently not filled include Personnel Board (5); Conservation Commission (5); Wood River Stewardship Council (1 alternate); Library Board of Trustees (1); Juvenile Hearing Board (1 alternate); Rural Land Preservation Trust (1).
- Many long-time staff members are nearing retirement age and the Town will need to recruit new staff. There is a generational transition occurring in elected and volunteer positions as well. Programs to welcome new residents and encourage them to get involved with town government are needed.
- Elections for Town Council and other elected positions are held every two years. This has sometimes resulted in abrupt changes in policy when there are controversial issues. Some elected positions are very unusual and typically would be staff positions: Town Sergeant, Zoning Inspector, and Director of Social Services.

- Unless required by another level of government, Town government is not well set up to have good basic data and information resources. There is no annual report to summarize the yearly activities of departments, boards and commissions. The small and mostly part-time and volunteer staff have neither the time nor the technical systems to help them produce data to inform decision-making and residents. The Town's website is substandard, with some information scattered on other websites such as clerkshq.com/exoteric, and the RI Department of State Open Meetings website (opengov.sos.ri.gov/open meeting). There is almost no "e-government" capability, whereby residents and others could pay bills and otherwise do business with the town.

TOWN FINANCES

Town budget

Since FY2021, the Town has received approximately \$17 million annually in revenue.

- Revenue is composed of fees, state transfers (such as library aid), miscellaneous payments, and property tax revenue.
- In FY 2023, the net property tax accounts for 82% of the total budget.
- The Town budget has grown slowly to over \$17 million to match the revenue, including the Exeter contribution to the EWG School District, which accounts for 76% of the total budget and reflects the Exeter enrollment in the system.

Fig. 10-2 Cost of Government by Fiscal Year

| | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Town Government | \$3,938,720 | \$4,024,752 | \$4,162,661 |
| School District | \$12,300,326 | \$13,005,889 | \$13,525,447 |
| Total Budget | \$16,239,046 | \$17,030,641 | \$17,688,108 |

- Otherwise, Town government obligations (salaries and wages, employee benefits, departmental budgets, general government, community services, capital program fund, and debt service) cost a bit more than \$4 million annually.

New sources of revenue

New revenue sources have emerged during 2023: excise tax on retail cannabis sales, federal ARPA funds, and future PILOT payments for Tier III greenhouses.

- A licensed dispensary for medical and recreational marijuana, Sweetspot, opened at the end of 2022, the first in South County. It is subject to the Adult Use Cannabis Tax (10% of the selling price to the state and 3% of the selling price to the municipality). In the first quarter of 2023, Exeter received \$41,000 in Local Cannabis Excise Tax. If revenues continue at that rate, at a minimum the town will receive an additional \$164,000 a year.
- The Town has been allocated \$1,948,573.62 in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds for localities to alleviate the economic and public health effects of the COVID pandemic. As of spring 2023, the Town had allocated the funds as shown in Figure 10-3:

Fig. 10-3 ARPA Project funding

| ARPA PROJECT | AMOUNT |
|--|-----------------------|
| Town Hall addition/new Town Hall | \$1,077,000 |
| Library recreation facility (to match state funds) | \$80,000 |
| Two electronic road signs to alert residents about accidents or construction. | \$32,570 |
| Public Works equipment | \$300,000 |
| Library building maintenance | \$275,000 |
| Administrative and other miscellaneous | \$185,091.22 |
| TOTAL | \$1,950,091.22 |

The federal allocation requires obligation of funds by December 31, 2024, and expenditure of these funds by December 31, 2026.

Consideration should be given to application of some of the "miscellaneous" category to initial investment in some of the proactive strategies of this comprehensive plan. If not eligible, the ARPA funds could be used for other eligible projects, freeing up Town revenue for initiating data collection and inventories needed by the town for proactive planning.

- The recent adoption of a zoning ordinance on greenhouse lot coverage provided that Tier III

greenhouses, which include large Controlled Environment Agriculture systems, would be subject to an annual PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) payment of \$10,000 per acre of greenhouses to go into a fund for Town purposes: construction and financing of new town buildings that serve the public; acquisition of property by the Exeter Land Trust for conservation; capital improvements of historical buildings owned by the Town of Exeter; provision of matching funds for RIDEM open space and recreation grant programs or other similar grants available to preserve or enhance the town's open space and recreation areas. At 25 acres of greenhouses, the proposed RI Grows Tier III CEA greenhouse project is expected to provide \$250,000 annually in PILOT payments.

- These new sources of funding could be used over time to invest in management, programs, and planning initiatives described in various elements of this comprehensive plan. Examples include an asset-management system, a business and commercial real estate inventory and engagement program, initiation of other data-gathering systems, corridor plans for Route 3 and Route 2, and an economic development coordinator staff position.
- Exeter does not have a municipal credit rating. With a credit rating, the Town would be able to raise money through low-interest municipal bonds for needed projects.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Public facilities in Exeter consist of local buildings and structures owned by the Town, the Volunteer Fire Department District, the Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District; and state-owned facilities in the Arcadia Management Area and at the former Ladd Center.

Municipal buildings and structures

- **Town Hall** (Town Clerk's Office and Police Sergeant Office). The Town Hall has very limited office and public meeting space.

Discussions about a new town hall or an addition to the existing facility have been going on for more than 20 years. As of this writing, approximately \$1 million of federal funding through the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) has been allocated to new town offices. Originally focused on building a new addition, the fifth in the life of the town, the project has been changed to the creation of a new Town Hall on Town-owned property near the Public Library, and an RFP has been issued for architectural services.



- **Public Library.** A new public library opened in 2006, replacing a small library area in Town Hall that had existed since the nineteenth century. The library includes one of the few public meeting spaces in Exeter, a program room with modern audio-visual equipment that can accommodate up to 47 people. The Library Board has discussed expanding the library to provide more community space but there is no detailed plan or identified funding.
- **Old Town Hall.** A historic building currently not in use, the 936-square-foot old town hall was built in 1878. The New Town Hall project is intended to include moving and incorporating the Old Town Hall as community space into the new town offices at the library site.
- **Animal Shelter.** The shelter building is located on 169 South County Trail for animal control, licensing, and a rabies clinic.
- **Public Works Garage.** The Department of Public Works (DPW) is located at the Town Garage at 175 South County Trail. DPW is responsible for maintaining and improving all Exeter public infrastructure and public properties

including roads, municipal buildings, recreation facilities, solid waste, and animal control. DPW responsibilities also include fleet maintenance, MS4 stormwater management, and general assistance to other departments and public safety.

- **Transfer Station.** The Department of Public Works operates a transfer station and recycling center at 890 Ten Rod Road. The Director of Public Works reported that about 1,000 taxpayers (around half of households) use the transfer station with the remainder contracting with private haulers. An annual transfer station permit costs \$190. Private hauling typically costs over \$400 annually for the convenience of not having to go to the transfer station. In many rural areas, the transfer station functions as a town gathering place, as residents meet each other and exchange news there. There is a bulletin board at the transfer station which has typically not been well-used. The use of private haulers for half the households in Exeter means that the transfer station does not fulfill this function as well.

Fire Department buildings

- **Fire District.** Exeter has one Fire District to collect and distribute tax monies to three public safety non-profits: two volunteer fire departments and one dispatch center. In addition, they oversee the operations of the paid Emergency Rescue service. There are four fire stations overall. Two serve Fire Department No. 1 at 669 Ten Rod Road (Rescue Building) and 475 South County Trail (Station #4) and two serve Fire Department No. 2 at 365 Nooseneck Hill Road (Station #2) and 50 Woody Hill Road (Station #3).

Municipal vehicle fleet

- The Town-owned vehicle fleet consists of:
 - > **DPW:** 18 registered vehicles, 3 registered trailers, three zero turn mowers, and one roller.
 - > **Town Sergeant:** 4 registered vehicles
 - > **Animal Shelter:** 1 registered vehicle



Public school buildings

There are two public elementary school buildings in Exeter:

- **Wawaloam Elementary School** (40,300 gross square feet) on Victory Highway was constructed in 1951. In October 2022 it had a total of 192 students, of whom 108 were from Exeter.
- **Metcalf Elementary School** on Nooseneck Hill Road (76,220 gross square feet) was built in 1967. In October 2022 it had a total of 586 students, of whom 277 were from Exeter.
- A 2017 facility assessment found that the Metcalf School was in poor condition but not a candidate for replacement.
- Voters approved a \$17.8 million capital/facilities improvement bond in 2021. Included in the improvements are roof replacements for Wawaloam and Metcalf schools and replacement and relocation of the Wawaloam playground.
- Another elementary school, the district middle school, and the high school are located in West Greenwich.

State facilities and services

State-owned buildings and facilities in Exeter include:

- **Arcadia Management Area** forest and recreational area management facilities
- **Rhode Island Job Corps** at the Ladd Center site



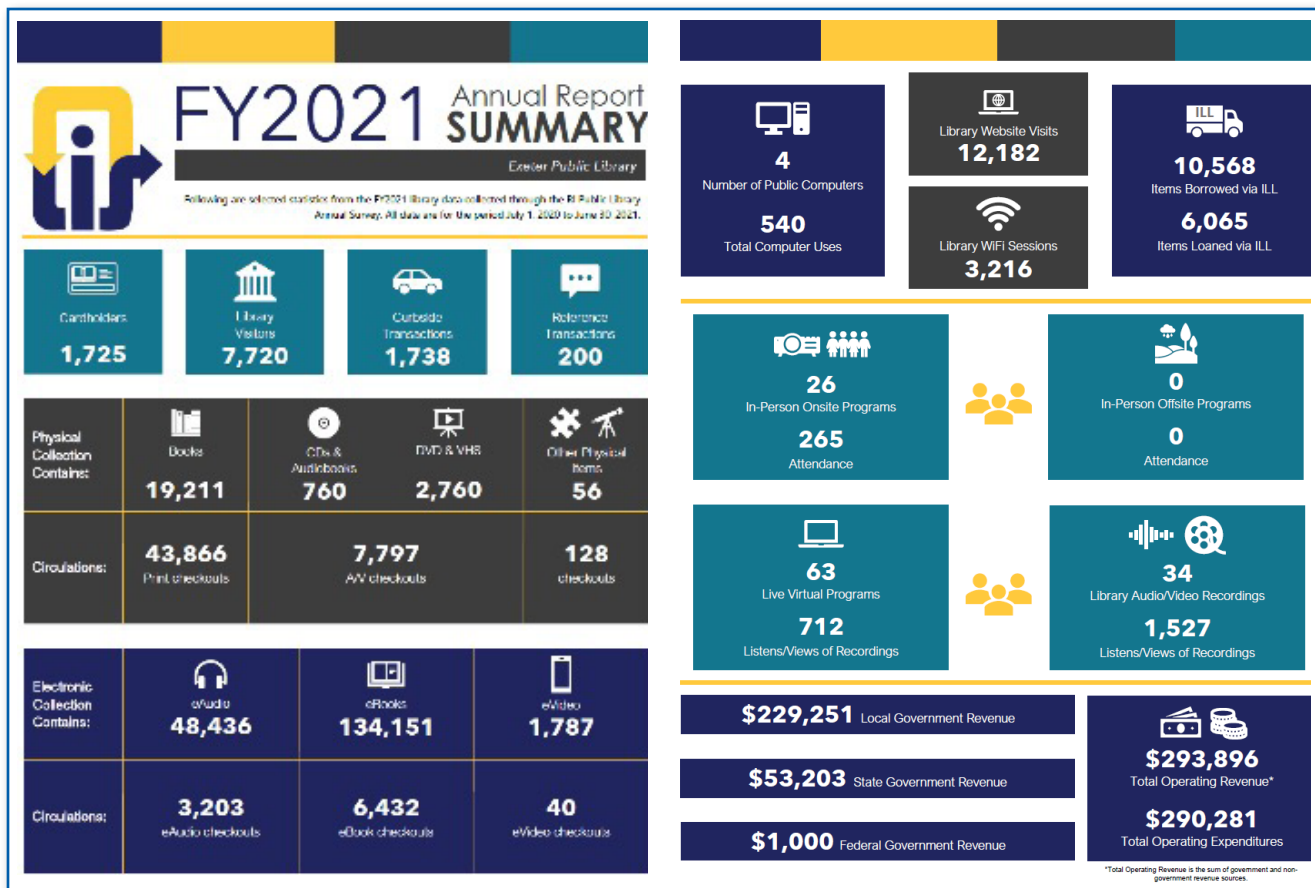


Fig 10-4 An overview of the Exeter Public Library activity in 2021. (Source: RI Office of Library & Information Services. See olis.ri.gov/)

- **Rhode Island Fire Academy** and Office of the State Fire Marshal at Ladd Center
- **Drinking water system services** (operated by the Quonset Development Corporation) at state-owned property at Ladd Center

PUBLIC SERVICES

Municipal services

- **Public library.** Library collections include books, CDs and DVDs, databases, E-books and digital audiobooks, an equipment library (telescope, microscopes, beam balance), and a seed library. The library also hosts groups and clubs, story times for children, and youth programs. In addition, the library offers community services including passport applications, notary public, and print/copy/scan/fax service. The Library receives

state aid annually—for 2023 the amount is approximately \$57,000. Unlike most other town departments, the public library tracks data related to materials, services, patrons, and so on.

Department of Public Works

DPW is responsible for managing all town property, including roads, parks and facilities; public stormwater management; solid waste and recycling; public building and landscape maintenance; tree warden tasks; fleet maintenance; snow plowing; street cleaning; assistance to fire departments and emergency management; and animal control. There is no asset-management system or other system for tracking repairs, costs, equipment, and vehicles, resulting in a lack of data. There is some mutual-aid sharing of equipment and resources with

other communities, but such arrangements depend on trust and relationships.

- **Animal Shelter.** The shelter includes animal control services, dog licensing, and hosts a rabies clinic. It cooperates with Friends of Exeter Animals, a nonprofit that helps manage a listing of animals available for adoption. The shelter also maintains a list of goods needed by donation. An annual car show raises money for the Shelter. Because Exeter has a lot of open space and public land, people leave unwanted animals in the town. There are many state requirements and regulations.
- **Solid waste transfer station and recycling.** The Town does not have a solid-waste management plan but is required by the State to have an Operations Plan and update it every two years. The Transfer Station is open Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday for residential trash only. An annual permit is required for use of the Transfer Station and is available only to Exeter residents. Recycling is mandatory and is also provided through private haulers. The transfer station accepts household items as listed by the RI Resource Recovery Corporation, many e-waste

items at no charge and printers, computers, microwaves, and air conditioners for a fee.

Certain large, bulky, or hard-to-dispose-of items are accepted for a fee or restricted, and some are prohibited. Items for recycling go to the Central Landfill in Johnston. In 2023, the Exeter Transfer Station will start having a reuse shed where people can leave items for possible reuse. The Town also holds periodic household hazardous waste collections (Eco-Depot). The Town Transfer Station budget for FY 22-23 is \$159,359.

In 2022, Exeter generated 2,261 tons of total waste—0.92 tons of trash per household served—that was sent to the state central landfill in Johnson. The overall diversion rate (solid waste diverted to recycling) was 40.7%, which includes some items diverted by recycling through methods other than the transfer station. The diversion rate tops the statewide rate, essentially matches communities such as Richmond (42.7%) and South Kingstown (39.5%), but remains below the half-dozen communities near or above 50%. (Detailed municipal data appears below.¹)

¹ <https://rirrc.org/municipal-officials-haulers/municipal-officials/annual-metrics>

| Municipality | 2020 Census Population | Households (HH) Served | Solid Waste (Tons) | Diverted Materials (Tons) | | | | | Total Waste Generated (Tons) ¹ | Rejected Recycling (Tons) ² | How Is My City or Town Doing? Annual Metrics | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| | | | | RIDEW Mandatory Materials | | | | Overall Diversion | | | Recycling & Diversion Rates | | | Per Household (HH) Served: | | |
| | | | | MRF Recycling | Composted Material ¹ | Scrap Metal ² | Clothing | Other Recycling ³ | | | MRF Recycling Rate ^{4a} | Mandatory Recycling Rate ^{4b} | Overall Diversion Rate ^{4c} | Tons of Trash Landfilled | Pounds of MRF Recycling | Pounds of Rejected Recycling |
| Barrington | 17,153 | 6,024 | 5,824 | 1,897 | 3,236 | 163 | 3 | 125 | 11,247 | 126 | 24.6% | 47.6% | 48.2% | 0.97 | 630 | 42 |
| Bristol | 22,493 | 8,700 | 6,364 | 2,252 | 1,100 | 64 | | 80 | 9,859 | 26 | 26.1% | 34.9% | 35.4% | 0.73 | 518 | 6 |
| Burrillville | 16,158 | 6,206 | 5,007 | 1,649 | 541 | 70 | 12 | 116 | 7,395 | 19 | 24.8% | 31.2% | 32.3% | 0.81 | 532 | 6 |
| Central Falls | 22,583 | 5,293 | 6,107 | 1,255 | 91 | 60 | 0 | 34 | 7,547 | 146 | 17.1% | 18.7% | 19.1% | 1.15 | 474 | 55 |
| Charlestown | 7,997 | 2,160 | 726 | 241 | 172 | 69 | 2 | 36 | 1,245 | | 24.9% | 39.9% | 41.7% | 0.34 | 223 | |
| Coventry | 35,688 | 12,363 | 11,121 | 3,555 | 1,587 | 239 | 117 | 178 | 16,797 | 71 | 24.2% | 33.1% | 33.8% | 0.90 | 575 | 11 |
| Cranston | 82,934 | 29,275 | 25,937 | 6,382 | 5,550 | 49 | 61 | 166 | 38,145 | 1,912 | 19.7% | 31.7% | 32.0% | 0.89 | 436 | 131 |
| Cumberland | 36,405 | 13,700 | 11,427 | 3,288 | 1,655 | 31 | 7 | 61 | 16,468 | 178 | 22.3% | 30.4% | 30.6% | 0.83 | 480 | 26 |
| East Greenwich | 14,312 | 4,297 | 4,260 | 1,387 | 821 | 45 | 5 | 30 | 6,547 | 18 | 24.6% | 34.6% | 34.9% | 0.99 | 646 | 8 |
| East Providence | 47,139 | 16,910 | 14,477 | 3,359 | 6,355 | 136 | 37 | 208 | 24,572 | 549 | 18.8% | 40.6% | 41.1% | 0.86 | 397 | 65 |
| Exeter | 6,460 | 2,454 | 1,340 | 366 | 93 | 98 | 34 | 331 | 2,261 | | 21.4% | 30.6% | 40.7% | 0.55 | 298 | |
| Foster | 4,469 | 1,575 | 1,870 | 437 | 5 | 15 | 2 | 27 | 2,355 | | 18.9% | 19.7% | 20.6% | 1.19 | 554 | 6 |
| Glocester | 9,974 | 4,172 | 2,842 | 833 | 49 | 204 | | 138 | 4,078 | | 22.7% | 27.9% | 30.3% | 0.68 | 399 | |
| Hopkinton ^{7a} | 8,398 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jamestown | 5,559 | 2,466 | 2,141 | 956 | | | | | | | | | | | 776 | 5 |
| Johnston | 29,568 | 9,866 | 17,544 | 2,107 | | | | | | | | | | | 427 | 48 |
| Lincoln | 22,529 | 6,086 | 7,443 | 2,030 | | | | | | | | | | | 667 | 32 |
| Little Compton | 3,616 | 2,506 | 1,594 | 462 | 69 | 106 | 12 | 82 | 2,324 | | 22.5% | 28.9% | 31.4% | 0.64 | 369 | |
| Middletown | 17,075 | 4,675 | 2,722 | 1,485 | 881 | 33 | | 45 | 5,165 | 43 | 35.3% | 46.9% | 47.3% | 0.58 | 635 | 18 |
| Narragansett ^{7b} | 14,532 | 7,989 | 5,411 | 2,184 | 149 | 74 | 32 | 48 | 7,899 | 6 | 28.8% | 31.1% | 31.5% | 0.68 | 547 | 2 |
| New Shoreham ⁸ | 1,410 | 730 | 175 | 16 | 18 | 49 | | 42 | 301 | | 8.5% | 32.4% | 41.9% | 0.24 | 45 | |
| Newport | 25,163 | 10,100 | 5,753 | 2,198 | 1,238 | 32 | 19 | 64 | 9,305 | | 27.6% | 37.7% | 38.2% | 0.57 | 435 | |
| North Kingstown | 27,732 | 9,076 | 5,746 | 2,781 | 3,628 | 98 | 30 | 114 | 12,397 | | 32.6% | 53.2% | 53.6% | 0.63 | 613 | |
| North Providence | 34,114 | 12,545 | 10,863 | 2,071 | 1,386 | 68 | 37 | 59 | 14,485 | 488 | 16.0% | 24.7% | 25.0% | 0.87 | 330 | 78 |
| North Smithfield | 12,588 | 4,100 | 3,757 | 1,164 | 516 | 36 | 10 | 103 | 5,586 | 93 | 23.7% | 31.5% | 32.7% | 0.92 | 568 | 45 |
| Pawtucket | 75,604 | 30,000 | 26,575 | 4,242 | 2,442 | 49 | 33 | 119 | 33,460 | 2,075 | 13.8% | 20.3% | 20.6% | 0.89 | 283 | 138 |
| Portsmouth | 17,871 | 2,429 | 1,360 | 705 | 709 | 168 | 31 | 85 | 3,059 | | 34.1% | 54.3% | 55.5% | 0.56 | 581 | |
| Providence | 190,934 | 55,000 | 73,647 | 2,179 | 3,864 | 160 | | 430 | 80,279 | 17,173 | 2.9% | 7.8% | 8.3% | 1.34 | 79 | 624 |
| Richmond/Hopkinton ^{7a} | 8,020 | 3,000 | 1,482 | 864 | 67 | 78 | 10 | 86 | 2,587 | | 36.8% | 40.7% | 42.7% | 0.49 | 576 | |
| Scituate | 10,384 | 3,756 | 3,941 | 1,091 | 186 | | | 41 | 5,259 | 6 | 21.7% | 24.5% | 25.1% | 1.05 | 581 | 3 |
| Smithfield | 22,118 | 7,560 | 5,836 | 2,065 | 1,543 | 57 | 9 | 92 | 9,603 | 42 | 26.1% | 38.6% | 39.2% | 0.77 | 546 | 11 |
| South Kingstown ^{7b} | 31,931 | 9,999 | 5,632 | 2,366 | 726 | 362 | 15 | 202 | 9,303 | | 29.6% | 38.1% | 39.5% | 0.56 | 473 | |
| Tiverton | 16,359 | 6,782 | 3,414 | 1,545 | 309 | 20 | 14 | 63 | 5,366 | 89 | 31.2% | 35.6% | 36.4% | 0.50 | 456 | 26 |
| Warren | 11,147 | 5,015 | 3,759 | 1,122 | 878 | 70 | 23 | 253 | 6,107 | | 23.0% | 35.8% | 38.4% | 0.75 | 448 | |
| Warwick | 82,823 | 31,372 | 26,768 | 8,668 | 15,842 | 222 | | 354 | 51,854 | 34 | 24.5% | 48.0% | 48.4% | 0.85 | 553 | 2 |
| West Greenwich | 6,528 | 1,000 | 1,186 | 369 | 50 | 120 | 23 | 50 | 1,797 | | 23.7% | 32.1% | 34.0% | 1.19 | 737 | |
| West Warwick | 31,012 | 9,300 | 10,083 | 1,597 | 1,471 | 61 | 63 | 119 | 13,393 | 617 | 13.7% | 24.0% | 24.7% | 1.08 | 343 | 133 |
| Westerly | 23,359 | 10,874 | 9,628 | 4,105 | 1,561 | 452 | 27 | 3,214 | 18,987 | 14 | 29.9% | 39.0% | 49.3% | 0.89 | 755 | 3 |
| Woonsocket | 43,240 | 10,540 | 9,610 | 2,481 | 1,219 | 266 | 4 | 231 | 13,811 | 49 | 20.5% | 29.2% | 30.4% | 0.91 | 471 | 9 |
| Statewide Totals | 1,097,379 | 369,895 | 343,371 | 77,756 | 62,092 | 3,871 | 695 | 7,533 | 495,318 | 24,120 | 18.5% | 29.6% | 30.7% | 0.93 | 420 | 130 |
| MRF Residue Applied ⁹ | | | 361,653 | 59,474 | 62,092 | 3,871 | 695 | 7,533 | 495,318 | 24,120 | 14.1% | 25.8% | 27.0% | 0.98 | 420 | 130 |

Fig 10-5 The Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation publishes an annual report with metrics that allow town-by-town comparisons ("How Is My City or Town Doing?"). This most recent report contains data for 2023. [Source: <http://www.rirrc.org/municipal-officials-haulers/municipal-officials/annual-metrics>]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Police

Exeter is the only municipality in Rhode Island without its own local police department.²

- A volunteer police department was dissolved in the late 1960s and the town has depended on Rhode Island state police since then.
- State troopers respond from the Hope Valley Barracks in Richmond or the Wickford Barracks in North Kingstown but are not individually assigned to Exeter.
- Whether the town should have its own police force has periodically been discussed since at least the early 2000s.
- A town task force in 2020 studied the idea of a town police force, suggesting that a force of 8 to 12 officers might cost \$1 million annually.
- The State wanted to charge the town for this service, with a budget of \$440,000 for one corporal and two troopers proposed in 2020.
- Many residents oppose establishment of a town police force because of a perceived lack of need and the likely cost. Others believe it would be beneficial to have a local police force. Lack of local police can deter some kinds of businesses, such as a bank, from locating in town.

Town Sergeant and Constables

Exeter has an elected position of Town Sergeant (two-year term).

- The Town Council can also elect one or more constables for a one-year term with duties assigned by the Council or the Sergeant “as may be necessary to protect, preserve or maintain the public peace, health, safety, or welfare.”
- In early 2020 there was discussion about the fact that Rhode Island law and the Exeter Code of Ordinances are vague about policies and procedures for the Town Sergeant. Town

Council voted that the current Town Sergeant was to compile a list of appropriate policies and procedures. The municipal code does not seem to have been updated with this information yet.³

Fire District

Exeter has one Fire District to collect and distribute tax monies to three (3) public safety nonprofits: two volunteer fire departments and one dispatch center. In addition, they oversee the operations of the paid Emergency Rescue service.

- **Fire District.** The Fire District has a separate tax rate (1.7000 in 2021). It is administered by a Board of Commissioners (elected and appointed) and has one part-time employee, the tax collector. The district is authorized to borrow up to \$200,000.
- **Fire District Division of EMS.** The emergency rescue service has two ambulances and six fulltime paramedic/cardiac staff that rotate on a 24-hours-on/72-hours-off schedule, providing 24-hour service for the entire town. They are supplemented by per diem staff.
- **Volunteers.** Each volunteer fire department is autonomous. Fire Department No. 1 has approximately 50 active/semi-active members and Fire Department No. 2 has 25 active/semi-active members. Volunteers who live in Exeter have the opportunity to receive a property tax exemption by accumulating points based on attending meetings, trainings, and responding to incidents. There is a two-tiered property tax exemption cap of \$50,000/\$100,000 by State law. This is used as an incentive to recruit and retain volunteers. It has become more difficult to attract and maintain local volunteers—some are not residents of the town, which is not ideal.
- **Fire Stations.** There are four fire stations overall. Two serve Fire Department No. 1 at 305 Ten Rod Road (Station #1) and 475 South County Trail (Station #4) and two serve Fire Department No.

² Anita Baffoni, “RI has one town without a police department—but that might change,” (March 12, 2020), WPRI.com; <https://www.wpri.com/news/local-news/south-county/ri-has-one-town-without-a-police-department-but-that-might-change/>

³ Alex Trubia, “Exeter talks procedures for town sergeant,” The NK Standard-Times, March 7, 2020. https://www.ricentral.com/nk_standard_times/news/local_news/exeter-talks-procedures-for-town-sergeant/article_41806e2c-5efe-11ea-bef5-677ce88303b2.html

2 at 365 Nooseneck Hill Road (Station #2) and 50 Woody Hill Road (Station #3).

- **Firefighting apparatus.** Fire Department No. 1 has 3 engines, 3 tankers, and 1 brush and forestry unit. Fire Department No. 2 has 3 engines, and 2 tankers.
- **Required water storage tanks.** The zoning code requires new subdivisions of 5 houses or more or land development projects over 5,000 sq. ft. to provide water storage tanks of 10,000 gallons.

- **Dependence on volunteer services.** As with the question of town police, some people in town are concerned that having volunteer service will be increasingly inadequate over time.

The information in the sidebar that appears over the next five pages was prepared for the comprehensive plan by the Exeter Fire District and Volunteer Fire Department Chiefs.

Present Conditions of Emergency Services in Exeter

The municipal government of the Town of Exeter does not provide fire protection or emergency medical services. Fire protection services are provided by two (2) legislatively chartered non-profit volunteer fire departments. Emergency medical (rescue) services, in the past, were provided by the Exeter Rescue Corps, Inc. Beginning in 1989, paid staff were hired to fill voids when volunteers were not available. A change in the legislative charter of the Exeter Fire District, due to continuing lack of volunteers, was sought in 2014 to allow for the Exeter Fire District to absorb the Exeter Rescue Corps. Dispatching for all three (3) agencies is handled by another legislatively chartered non-profit entity, the Exeter Emergency Dispatch Corporation.

FUNDING

In 2004, the Exeter Fire District was formed with voter approval. The entity was originally legislatively chartered to provide funding for all emergency services. The Exeter Fire District, whose land boundaries are the same as the Town's, is governed of a Board of Commissioners consisting of two (2) persons each appointed by the respective boards of the active volunteer fire companies and three (3) persons who are not active members of Exeter public safety organizations, who are elected at the annual financial meeting of the district.

The Fire District's primary purpose is to provide fire, rescue, and dispatch services within the fire district and/or to provide operational funding for nonprofit fire, rescue, and dispatch companies. The Commissioners meet monthly and hold the Fire District Annual Financial Meeting granting the taxpayers their right to vote on the budget every April.

As a usual line item in each fire and rescue department's operational budgets, some monies are budgeted for a Capital Account towards the purchase of apparatus and facility maintenance, as well as upgrades. With the rapidly exploding cost of apparatus, and the more frequent need to replace Rescue vehicles due to increased calls for service, this account rarely contains enough money to outright purchase a new vehicle.

Additional funding, at times, comes from the awarding of Grants by private, local, state and federal government programs. This funding is competitive and generally requires a matching monetary expenditure of up to 25% of the grant. This funding stream is unstable given its limited funds and substantial pool of applicants: for example, the Federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program receives about 8,500 applications and awards approximately 2,500 departments funding.

All of the Exeter emergency services, fire, rescue and dispatch, have been fortunate to have realized several grants being awarded. Successful funding can only be used for the specific infrastructure purpose, as described in the grant narrative, such as replacing fire apparatus, upgrading firefighter's turnout gear or radios. District and department officers remain alert to take advantage of grant sources as they arise.

OPERATIONS

The Exeter Fire District Commissioners do not have operational jurisdiction over either volunteer fire department or the dispatch corporation: oversight of the EMS division is under their purview. Their role is strictly to assess and collect taxes and distribute the monies.

The Exeter Fire District employs one (1) Tax Collector. In accordance with the 2004 Exeter Fire District Charter granted by the R.I. Legislature, the collector determines and assesses all real and personal property located within the boundaries of the Exeter fire district on December 31st of each year in the same amount as assessed by the Town of Exeter. The tax collector, after receipt of the list of assessments from the Town of Exeter, produces a tax bill based on the tax rate approved by the qualified voters of the Exeter fire district. The tax collector uses office space in the fire station at 305 Ten Rod Road.

The Fire District's EMS Division employs one (1) part-time Rescue Chief with, as of this writing, seven (7) full time employees and varying numbers of per diem employees to handle emergency medical incidents throughout the jurisdictional boundaries of Exeter. These employees provide medical care at the advanced emergency medicine level 24/7/365. The

EMS division operates out of a 2-bay garage building built in 1987. An office and bathroom in the building is allocated to the Exeter Emergency Dispatch Corp. for the dispatching center.

The Exeter Emergency Dispatch Corp, in existence since August 1989, employs four (4) full-time dispatchers, with additional per diem dispatchers when needed. Their duties include the receipt of emergency calls for assistance, by any means and the transmission of those requests for assistance to any of the emergency services.

Since February 1944, residents of the eastern side of Exeter, approximately from Victory Highway around Wawaloam Elementary School area easterly to the North Kingstown line are served by the Exeter #1 Volunteer Fire Department. Exeter #1 operates out of two (2) fire stations: 305 Ten Rod Rd. and 471 South County Trail. Collectively they have 3 fire engines, 3 tankers, 1 brush truck and a utility vehicle. Leadership is provided by a volunteer fire chief, who receives a stipend for handling administrative work but not for duties as a chief officer in charge of strategy, tactics, and training. There are approximately 50 active volunteers at this time.

Residents of the western side of Exeter, approximately Victory Highway around Wawaloam Elementary School westerly to the Connecticut border, are served by the Exeter Volunteer Fire Company No. 2, in existence since April 1945. Exeter #2 operates out of two (2) fire stations: 366 Nooseneck Hill Rd. and 50 Woody Hill Road. Collectively, they have 4 fire engines, 2 tankers and a pickup/utility vehicle. Leadership is provided by a volunteer fire chief, who receives a stipend for handling administrative work but not for duties as a chief officer in charge of strategy, tactics,

and training. There are approximately 25 active volunteers at this time.

Both volunteer fire departments are members of the R.I. Southern Firefighters League, a group of fire departments within a radius of up to 20 miles that provide mutual aid to each other and, at times, work together on training exercises. Each are also participants in the state-wide Mutual Aid Compact to supplement any R.I. community in case of large scale emergency incidents.

One of the challenges faced by Exeter's firefighters is the lack of water; Exeter is a community without a municipal water supply. Communities of this type must have specialized vehicles (known as Tankers) that can carry upwards of 3,000 gallons of water to provide sufficient water to begin firefighting efforts. Therefore, the tanker trucks are vital to the effectiveness of the department. These vehicles cost as much as fire engines (upwards of \$850,000 in 2023 dollars). Since all vehicles have a useful life span, they must be replaced approximately every 15 to 20 years.

Fire and Life Safety Code enforcement is provided by a per diem independent contractor who has State of Rhode Island Fire Marshal's Office credentials. This position exists in each fire department's budget and they have hired the same independent contractor in order to provide for community wide adherence to the R.I. State Fire Code. This person works in conjunction with Town personnel (Building/Mechanical/Plumbing) in order to ensure safe buildings and events for citizens and guests of Exeter.

THE FUTURE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Exeter has not been immune, nor shall it be immune, to community growth. This

growth affects the public safety services with increased calls for services and a greater need for Fire Code enforcement. The pace of this change is highly dependent upon the town's growth. Faster growth, larger buildings, more complex fire situations will require a speedier change. Slower growth, smaller planned developments, less business growth will retard the need for large changes in the fire and EMS services. The State of Rhode Island's legislative state-wide mandates to combat social ills such as affordable housing and the promotion of advanced farming will be a driver on this issue.

Additionally, the State of Rhode Island's Arcadia Management Area, and other large tracts of conservation areas, which have received little to no attention for brush clearing, maintenance of access roads/ fire trails, access to natural water sites or installation of strategic underground water tanks, are a serious concern for wildfires. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the term wildland-urban interface (WUI) is defined as the area where houses and other structures are built within or close to wildland vegetation. The term is used in the context of wildfire to identify settlements that are potentially at risk from fire. As evidenced by Exeter's 2023 Queens River Fire, at 576 acres the largest wildland fire in R.I. since the 1950's, this type of fire requires extraordinary resources to combat and extinguish. If the State of Rhode Island does not take steps to clear the undergrowth and open access points, this type of situation may well occur again within the next 20 years. While no houses or business buildings were impacted in the 2023 fire, given the unknown growth of the Town over the next 20 years, it would not be unexpected to see serious casualties in either or both categories should there be a future conflagration.

Exeter Fire District's Rescue (EMS) Division has already responded to the need for expanded services due to its increased requests for services by adding a second rescue vehicle with personnel three (3) days per week for eight (8) hours each day. It is expected that the EMS Division will require staffing and vehicles to maintain two (2) full-time rescues with two (2) paramedics' 24-hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year in the not too distant future.

Exeter Dispatch Corporation's emergency dispatching services are not expected to require more personnel over the next 20 years, unless calls for service rise to unanticipated levels. Their vast and serious infrastructure needs are addressed below.

RECRUITMENT

The volunteer fire services, like all specialized volunteer endeavors everywhere, have encountered difficulty in recruiting and maintaining volunteer members. A joint Town of Exeter and Exeter Fire District initiative to provide a tax discount for property owners who live and volunteer in Exeter was instituted with the view of recruiting and retaining volunteers. It has been successful in this endeavor. However, most new volunteers come from neighboring towns. In the 21st century, fighting fires is not all the fire service is expected to do, nor is it simply pointing a hose full of water at fire until it goes out. Today's firefighters need training on the many facets of emergencies experienced by our residents, such as the rapidly changing nature of strategy and tactics of extinguishment, hazardous materials and specialized rescue situations. Training is time-consuming and costly. It is a fact that people today have less leisure time than in the 20th century which translates into less time to volunteer. Many potential

volunteers reconsider when faced with the time commitment for interior structural firefighting training. In addition, fewer people are willing respond in the middle of the night to emergency calls and then go to their full-time careers during the day on little to no sleep.

It is anticipated that over the next 20 years there will be a need to supplement the volunteer service with part time (a/k/a call firefighters, paid a certain wage to be available and respond during certain periods of the 24 hour cycle) or full-time paid employees. This change has already taken place in numerous Rhode Island communities.

While it is to be considered a last resort measure for ensuring community wide safety for firefighting purposes, given the lengthy time-frame of this comprehensive plan, it is not unreasonable to anticipate a structurally different future fire service. This could be a Fire District controlled combination fire department with a full-time Chief, paid staff to handle code enforcement and administrative matters, and some paid firefighters to ensure apparatus can arrive on scene within nationally recognized standards expected response times. These paid firefighters would work with call and/or volunteer firefighters. The timing on any change to the current method of providing emergency services in Exeter will hinge on the growth of construction, changes to the demographics of the residents and their expectations for emergency services.

The volunteer organization's governing officers strongly believe that their administration and the Town of Exeter governmental officers need to combine forces with a focus of increasing volunteer membership, in order to maintain the

volunteer backbone which will benefit all citizens. Several options which have worked well in other States with largely volunteer fire services, such as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Tennessee include:

- A tuition benefit plan whereby tuition payments are made for the volunteer firefighter or his/her child or grandchild conditioned on a predetermined response arrangement;
- Young adult volunteers are provided some type of live-in housing in exchange for availability to respond to emergency incidents, similar to an arrangement the Kingston (RI) Fire Department is utilizing.
- Consideration should be given to enact a Length of Service Awards Program (a/k/a LOSAP) whereby financial awards are made to volunteers based upon their longevity of service. These programs have been enacted in many other states to the benefit of the taxpayers by keeping emergency forces mostly volunteer.
- Work with Federal legislators to enact tax incentives for active volunteer firefighters.

EMERGENCY SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE

It is prudent to expect upgrades will be needed to all emergency services buildings in the course of the next 20 years. Given the quickly evolving nature of communication technology in this century, the Exeter Emergency Dispatch Corp. is already facing deficits in this sector. The communications equipment was purchased in 1992 with a grant. It has not had any major upgrades in 30 years, which will necessitate a significant investment of funds in order to continue with its' mission. This investment to adequately equip and house this division will need to occur in the near to mid-future of this plan.

Should the EMS division expand to require two (2) vehicles and associated personnel on duty 24/7 significant consideration shall need to be given to housing the vehicles and personnel, either in a new larger building, or at the fire stations at either end of town, for quicker arrival to emergency assistance incidents.

Expansion of either of the main fire stations (305 Ten Rod and 366 Nooseneck Hill) would be a future contemplation dependent upon the need for 24 hour coverage with personnel remaining at either or both fire stations during overnight hours.

Water availability for tanker truck filling:

Without a municipal water supply the volunteer fire departments use water from tankers when fighting fires. After this water has been exhausted the vehicle must refill. One method is to draft from ponds or water holes, lakes or rivers. This is not the most efficient method and is very time-consuming. The quickest and most efficient method of refilling is to use clean water from fire hydrants. Thought should be given by all entities on approaches to extending water lines down State highways for hydrants purposes only.

Communications towers and range: One final piece of foreseeable changes to the fire and emergency services of the future in Exeter, R.I. concerns the receipt of emergency radio transmissions at the Dispatch Center. Due to the topography and the growth of trees even now some radio transmissions, both voice and supervised fire alarm system transmissions (Radio Box) cannot be received. A more immediate evaluation of this technology and how to harden or upgrade the infrastructure will need to be completed early in this 20-year Comprehensive Plan.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Department of Social Services

- The Town has an elected Director of Social Services to assist residents who need assistance (under RIGL Title 40—Human Services § 40-5-1). At the 2022 Town Financial Meeting, voters supported a somewhat expanded budget for this department. The Director is the only social services staff member.
- The Director reports that there is “invisible” distress and poverty in Exeter. Town residents experience the issues found in other communities, such as poverty, inadequate heat or water, domestic violence, and homelessness. Older people may own a house or a trailer but have insufficient income to meet their needs or maintain the home and they can be reluctant to seek help. The Town’s Reynolds Charitable Trust, created by an 1844 bequest, provides grants of up to \$5,000 to residents needing help with food, clothing, shelter, senior services, literacy or healthcare, but it is not set up to provide emergency grants.
- On average there are about 12 calls per month about housing, 7 for utility assistance, 5-6 for food assistance, and various other needs such as home repair, tax assistance, transportation, mental health, SNAP (food stamp) benefits, and so on.
- Social services programs and participation over the last year include:
 - > **Senior Yard Cleanup:** In spring and fall, an average of 20 volunteers of all ages assisted in cleanup of 11 yards, and an additional four seniors are interested in participating. The program is in partnership with the Exeter Town Democratic Committee for this event. More volunteers are needed to continue the program.
 - > **Exeter Extras:** One volunteer assisted 9 senior residents last year. Others were denied or referred to other agencies (Habitat for Humanity, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, etc.) if the scope of project was beyond the volunteer’s capabilities.
 - > **Entrees for Exeter:** A bi-weekly meal-share program for 20 seniors, partnering with 401 Deli.
 - > **Growers Give Back:** A no-cost produce market in partnership with local farms ran 9 sessions during the growing season, serving 52 families last season (an average of 23 households per session and 8 deliveries per session to homebound seniors). The program will continue in the summer of 2023 in partnership with 6 local Exeter farms to provide produce. This supplements the Exeter food pantry which does not have refrigeration for fresh or refrigerated food.
 - > **Senior Group** “coffee hour” and Health and Wellness Group for aging adults: Low participation so the groups will be discontinued at present.
 - > **Christmas and Thanksgiving programs:** average of 76 households served.
 - > **School Supply Giving Tree:** 28 households served.
 - > **Sports and Recreation Scholarship** (privately funded): 12 children awarded funds to participate in a sports program of their choice.
 - > **Random Acts of Kindness Grant** (privately funded): 16 residents served since May 2022 for critical financial need emergency assistance such as rent, medical bills, childcare, and utilities.
- Funding sources for social services includes the town operating budget; state legislative grants; privately funded grants; Office of Healthy Aging state designated grant and funding from the Exeter Community Food Bank; Narragansett Gun Club annual fundraiser for the department; and private donations from residents, particularly around the holidays. Exeter Chapel contributes volunteers and space for Growers Give Back and Holiday Programming. The Exeter Grange also offers support as well as local business owners for donations or toy drives or Adopt a Family.

- The Director of Social Services works with numerous regional organizations, serving on the Washington County Health Equity Zone steering committee to represent the needs of Exeter, and working closely with the Warm Center to assist residents facing homelessness, the Domestic Violence Resource Center in Wakefield, Sojourner House, RI Legal Services, resident support staff at Pineview Apartments, Tri County Community Action, Wood River Health Center, United Way 211 Bus, Reynolds Trust, Kiki's Garden, Southern RI Volunteers (which provides transportation to Exeter seniors), the Chariho Basic Needs and Safety Network.
- Communication to the community about programs and opportunities is through three email lists (residents who have received services, volunteers and Exeter seniors); a Department Facebook page; flyers at the library, town hall, and local businesses; emails out to agencies that serve Exeter residents such as the Head Start program in North Kingstown and local food pantries that serve residents. For residents (particularly seniors) who do not have access to technology, there are paper mailings and one mailing per year to seniors describing yearly services and programs. The Town website has not been an effective communication vehicle and attempts to provide information through the schools have had limited success.

WATER AND WASTEWATER SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Drinking water supply

There is no public drinking water system in Exeter with the exception of the state-owned property at the former Ladd Center.

- The Ladd Center Water System served 129 people as of 2021, but has a 2 mgd (million gallons per day) potential, considerably in excess of current use. The utility is managed by the Quonset Development Corporation (QDC). The water utility tests the water

regularly and provides the information to the State Department of Health and the U.S. EPA Enforcement and Compliance History database (ECHO). As of 2021 the water was in compliance with federal health-based drinking water standards but some contaminants were found. However, in 2023, testing for PFAS contaminants in Rhode Island water systems found that the Ladd Center Well #2 was contaminated. This was potentially because of the presence of the state fire-fighting training facility, since fire fighting foams use PFAS. The State and QDC are developing a remediation plan.

- The Shadow Woods at Deer Brook water system serves 300 people. This system also complied with federal standards in 2021, but also had a few contaminants.
- Otherwise, residents depend on private wells located on their own property.

The Natural Resources element of this plan provides detailed information on water quality and quantity, as well as mapping of aquifers and wellhead protection areas.

Regulated stormwater management

A small part of eastern Exeter is regulated for stormwater discharge under the federal Clean Water Act and a federal permit that is administered by RIDEM (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System).

- The Town is responsible for the development and implementation of the MS4 (urbanized) stormwater management plan for this area, which includes the public drinking water system at the state-owned Ladd Center. The stormwater management plan includes limits on what can be discharged, mapping, monitoring and reporting requirements, and other provisions to protect water quality and human health. Exeter has contracted with an engineering firm which is completing the stormwater plan as of summer 2023.

PUBLIC SCHOOL SERVICES

Public schools

- The Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District, founded in 1956, is a highly-rated public school system with two elementary schools in Exeter and a third elementary school, a middle school and a high school in West Greenwich close to the border with Exeter. It has an average graduation rate of 92%.
- As of October 2, 2022, Exeter students made up 48.81% (799 students) of total enrollment of (1,637 students) in the EWG School District. The district as a whole has seen a decline in enrollment between the 1998-99 school year and the 2019-20 school year, losing 403 students or 21% over the period, like all but three school districts in Rhode Island. ⁴

⁴ I Viz RI, "RI School District Enrollment Shift Since 1998," <https://ivizri.com/posts/2020/02/ri-school-enrollment-shift-1998/>

- Total enrollment for the years 2022–2031 is projected to be approximately 1400 students, which would result in 683 students from Exeter, based on the 2022 percentage.
- The school district's 2021-2025 Five-Year District Strategic Plan focuses on measurable goals for reducing achievement gaps between identified student groups; support for social-emotional needs; providing individualized instruction especially for special education needs; meeting proficiency goals; engaging the community; and addressing capital facilities improvements.

STATE FACILITIES AND SERVICES

As noted earlier, the State has facilities and services at state-owned properties in the Town:

- Arcadia Management Area forest and recreational area management

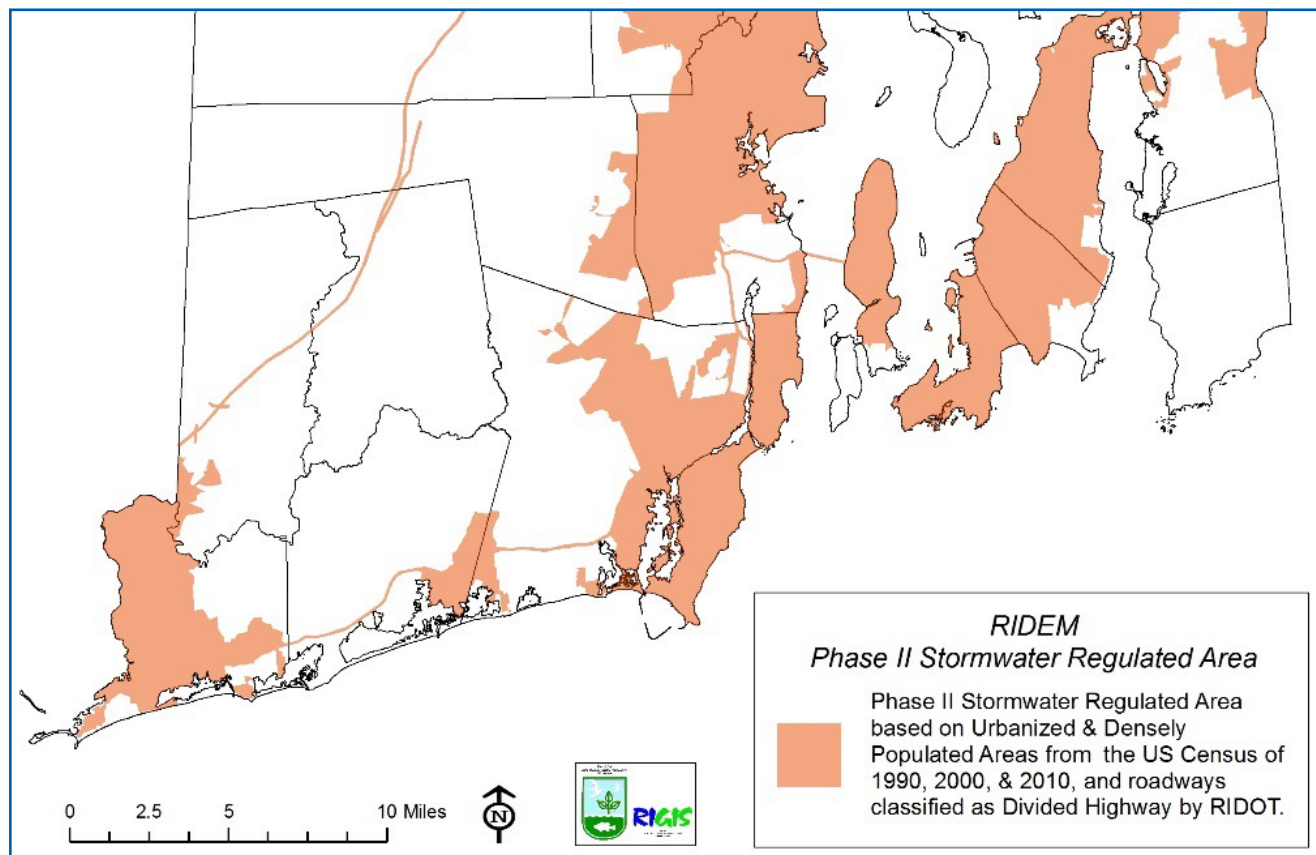


Fig 10-6 Areas of Phase II Stormwater Regulation. (Source: RIDOT)

- Rhode Island Job Corps at Ladd Center site
- Rhode Island Fire Academy and Office of the State Fire Marshal at Ladd Center
- Drinking water services at state-owned property at Ladd Center

CHALLENGES

Town government operations

- **Lack of data and information on demographics, assets, and operations.** Unless required by other levels of government, town government does not keep data and information in an organized way on town facilities, assets, and government operations. Population numbers and demographic information can be problematic because the Census Bureau now uses survey data to estimate demographic information in years outside of the decennial census. This is a problem for communities like Exeter with small populations (slightly above or below 5,000), because margins of error are large for small populations and subpopulations. Decision making can suffer without more reliable and stronger sources of data and information.
- **Communication with residents and businesses.** Today, modern municipal governments communicate to their constituencies through informative websites and online services, in addition to traditional methods like posting notices at town hall. Because no media cover Exeter consistently (although the North Kingstown News has recently engaged an Exeter correspondent, it has a small audience) and there is no town center or much in the way of gathering places or community activities, Exeter needs to significantly improve communications with the public. At a basic level, the website remains inadequate compared with other small towns and does not attract much traffic because people discover that it is marginally useful.
- **Generational transition of staff and volunteers in town government.** Exeter's small government depends on aging volunteers and aging staff that is mostly part-time. With the growth of two-earner families and many responsibilities, people tend to have less time for volunteering. Other towns have experienced this problem and put into effect programs to invite and welcome younger people and newcomers to become active in town government and other community activities.
- **Discussion about a town manager.** The Town lacks a town administrator or town manager to lead, coordinate, and manage town staff and organize implementation of priorities. Many Town Hall staff or others who work with Town Hall believe the Town would benefit by having a person in charge of municipal government staff and coordinating activities. Having a town manager would make it possible for Town government to be more proactive in pursuing achievement of community goals. However, many residents prefer keeping Town government small.
- **Dependence on state police and volunteer fire departments.** Similar to the discussion about a town manager, opinions differ on whether Exeter should have its own police department and a professional fire department. Some businesses might be reluctant to locate in Exeter because they see this situation as creating insurance risk.

Municipal facilities

- **Lack of adequate municipal facilities and recreation.** The need for a new town hall has been under discussion for more than twenty years and has become more urgent. In addition, there is almost no community meeting and activity space, and limited recreation and athletic facilities.

Water resources management

- **Lack of programs to manage potential pollution of Exeter's exceptional water resources.** Exeter has not taken advantage of programs to promote inspection and proper maintenance of septic systems and offer loans to repair or replace septic systems, nor does it promote stormwater management Best Management Practices.

OPPORTUNITIES

SYSTEMS TO COLLECT TOWN DATA

- The Town can set up simple systems to collect town data for annual reports from departments and boards and commissions and have an annual count of residents through a mailing. As discussed in the economic development element, inventories of town businesses and commercial real estate are the foundation of an effective economic development strategy.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY IN TOWN GOVERNMENT

Town website

- Improve the town website to make it a central information resource for residents, businesses and visitors to Exeter.
 - > There are a number of companies that specialize in municipal and other government websites, and it might be valuable to use a consultant to organize and design a more informative and effective website for residents, businesses, and visitors.
 - > In addition to contact information and meeting agendas and minutes, a municipal website should include other public-disclosure content such as budgets and financial reports, online bill-paying and permitting, public notices, bid opportunities, program opportunities, and promotion of environmental and ecological incentives,

events, and activities. The website should be organized so that users can easily navigate to the information they seek.

- > Town websites are often organized for the outside user: by audience type (residents, tourists, businesses, etc.) and by task (such as pay a bill, find a job, or get information on current events). Users do not necessarily know how the Town organizes information in departments when searching for information, so organizing a website only by department is not ideal.
- > Town websites are generally simple and easy to navigate. Too many choices, images, or moving visual elements can confuse visitors to the site.
- > Exeter should review other town websites to see if their organizational systems would be useful for Exeter. Examples of small communities with useful websites include Tiverton, Little Compton, and Weston, MA.
- Develop a section for the website to welcome new residents and invite all residents to get involved and volunteer for town committees and activities. For example, Weston, MA, has a "New to Weston" web page ("Welcome Home! We're Glad You're Here") with information about town government, services, community partners and links, and other useful information (Weston.org)

Asset-management system

Asset-management systems help communities understand the lifecycle costs of assets so that they can manage them to provide a high level of service in a cost-effective manner. Because Exeter does not have many town-owned infrastructure or other assets, it would not be complex or expensive to set up an initial system. Asset management can be implemented incrementally, as existing assets are repaired or improved and new assets are created. The construction of new town offices, a community center, or recreation facilities would be appropriate to begin an

asset-management system. The questions to be answered with an asset-management system are:

- What do we have—what is our basic inventory?
- What is it worth—based on the estimated cost to replace it?
- What condition is it in—based on known or estimated age?
- What do we need to do to it—minor or major maintenance, rehabilitation, or replacement?
- When do we need to do it—what is the estimated end of service life?
- How much will it cost—what is the investment required for upkeep or retirement of the asset?

With this knowledge the town can lengthen the service life of assets with timely and cost-effective maintenance, rather than waiting until replacement is needed.⁵

FACILITIES

New town hall

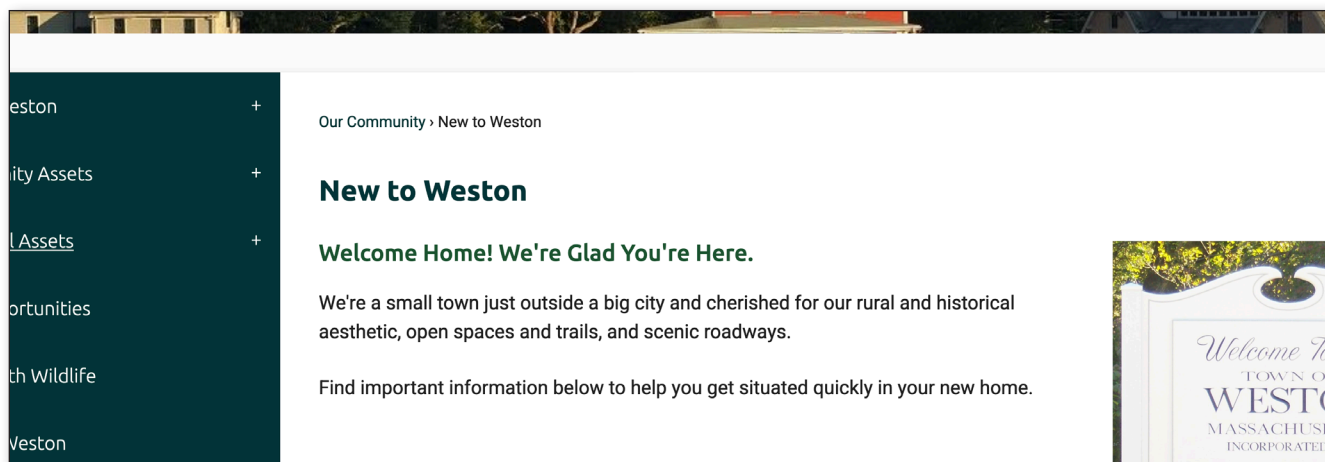
- A new town hall is a high priority. Current town hall facilities have long been inadequate, with added urgency because of the recent discovery that the septic system is located too close to

⁵ CMT, “New to Municipal Asset Management?” www.cmtengr.com/2022/09/13/new-to-municipal-asset-management-how-to-get-started-no-special-software-required/

the drinking-water well. The Town Council has issued an RFP for architectural services to design potential new facilities on town property near the library, including moving and rehabilitating of the Old Town Hall building.

Community center and recreation facilities

- Through the public opinion survey and in CPAC discussions, residents have expressed strong interest in creating a community center to bring residents together for recreation, entertainment, youth, and senior activities. There are several models of how a community center can be financed, organized, and managed, including several approaches to self-funding through fee-based services accompanied by scholarships.
- Recreation facilities, especially for youth, are also a high priority. The Town applied for state funding for a recreation program near the Library but did not receive it on first application. ARPA funds will be used as a municipal match for a repeat application for state funding. In addition, many residents would like to see improvements for youth athletic facilities.
- Exeter has a history of volunteer groups organizing for community facilities, including the library and the track at the high school in West Greenwich.



Weston, MA, maintains a page expressly for new residents on its town website. (Source: Weston.org)

WATER RESOURCES

Stormwater management best practices

Stormwater runoff occurs when the amount of rainfall and snowmelt exceed the land's ability to absorb it. Even in rural areas, runoff can transport contaminants such as heavy metals, bacteria, pathogens, viruses, organic compounds, and other pollutants directly into creeks, lakes, rivers, and eventually, marine waters, and it can cause erosion and flooding. Because Exeter depends on its groundwater and surface water resources, residents understand the importance of clean water resources to the town. However, because of the large amount of conservation land and low-density settlement in most areas of town, residents may not be as aware of the importance of stormwater management in rural contexts.

- Reducing pollution from stormwater can happen two ways: reducing pollutants in stormwater and reducing the amount of stormwater runoff.
- Stormwater best management practices should be modeled by town departments and promoted for private property owners. A demonstration rain garden was funded by the Wild and Scenic River Council for the Town Hall site.
- Examples of Best Management Practices are rain barrels, rain gardens, bioswales, and drainage ditches as well as practices that keep pollutants, such as excessive fertilizers, pesticides, oil, grease, antifreeze, gasoline, deicing products including salt, and pet droppings, out of stormwater.
- The Town can easily promote best practices by property owners by making resources from RIDEM and other sources available on the Town website, at the Library, and at Town

Hall.⁶ Exeter's neighbors, Richmond and West Greenwich have very good outreach materials on stormwater management for residents. (An example from West Greenwich appears on page 10-23.)

Drinking water supply

- Exeter's vision plan for a new village center was developed with an assumption that the center's density could be accommodated by access to the public water supply at the Ladd Center. Town use of this resource is expected to be part of a broader initiative for a joint State-Town master plan for the Ladd Center area (taking into account a State program to remediate recently-identified contamination by PFAS pollutants). (See Element 12—*Land Use*.)

⁶ See dem.ri.gov/environmental-protection-bureau/water-resources/outreach-education/ri-stormwater-solutions-water-21 ; dem.ri.gov/environmental-protection-bureau/water-resources/outreach-education/ri-stormwater-solutions-water-10. Municipal examples (including West Greenwich and Richmond) can be found at dem.ri.gov/ri-stormwater-solutions/stormwater-managers/educational-materials/education-outreach/examples.php

10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE STORM WATER QUALITY IN WEST GREENWICH

There are many streams and rivers that flow through our backyards and drain into ponds, lakes, and ultimately the ocean. Pollutants such as fertilizer, animal feces, oil, hazardous waste, and road sand on the land can be washed into our waters, but we can reduce this type of pollution. Here is a list of 10 things you can do to help clean our local waterways.



1. Learn about your local waters and the animals and plants that live in your watershed. Everyone lives in a watershed, which is the drainage area to a local waterbody. West Greenwich is comprised of two main watersheds: the Pawtuxet River watershed and the Pawcatuck River watershed. Check out these watershed associations' websites to learn more and to find out how you can get involved! <http://www.wpga.org/> and <http://www.pawtuxet.org/river.html>



2. Don't feed ducks! Although you may enjoy feeding geese, ducks, gulls and other waterfowl, remember that they too contribute to the same type of pollution

that limits swimming and fishing. One bird dropping can contaminate 10,000 gallons of water. Bread and other human food are bad for birds' digestive tracts too. Feeding waterfowl can also attract larger bird populations and may cause some birds to stop migrating.



3. Pick up after your pets. Pet waste pollutes local waterways and are greater polluters than you may think. This type of pollution contributes to the closing of swimming ponds and fishing areas all over the state. Pick up your pet's waste and deposit it in a trash can. See Scoop the Poop at www.ristormwatersolutions.org



4. Avoid over-fertilizing your lawn. During rain storms, nutrients from lawn fertilizer can be washed off lawns and paved areas into local waters. This type of pollution contributes to **eutrophication**, a process that causes nuisance algal blooms and reduction of habitat and oxygen levels for many aquatic organisms. This leads to a decline in fish in our waters. Get your soil tested to see if it really needs more fertilizer and if so, use as little as necessary. Also, reduce your lawn area by planting native, more drought-tolerant plants that are better adapted for the environment, and can act as buffers to prevent runoff from your lawn. For more information and fact sheets, log onto the University of RI Cooperative Extension Home*A*Syst website at www.uri.edu/ce/wq.



5. Minimize the use of hazardous products and **recycle** as much as possible. Cleaning and other household products can contain hazardous chemicals. Try to use the least harmful products available. Learn how to dispose of household hazardous chemicals properly by calling the **RI Resource Recovery program** at 942-1430 x 241 or visit them online at www.rirrc.org. Recycling helps to conserve natural resources and reduces the amount of refuse sent to landfills. Start a **compost** bin and buy products made with or packaged in recycled material to reduce waste further. Bring your used motor oil to the town transfer station for recycling. Consult your Town Planner for recycling guidelines.



6. Inspect septic systems. The entire town relies on some form of septic system for sewage disposal. Failing septic systems or cesspools are a major source of pollution to ground water and local reservoirs. If you have a septic system inspect it regularly, pump and repair it as needed. If you have a cesspool, replace it. For more information on maintaining a healthy septic system the **Septic System Checkup Handbook** is available online at www.dem.ri.gov/pubs/regs/regs/water/isdsbook.pdf or call for a copy at 222-6822.



7. Get involved. Volunteer. Help with the WG Conservation Commission's clean-up efforts or be a local volunteer water monitor. To find out more about becoming a volunteer water monitor visit URI's Watershed Watch at www.uri.edu/ce/wq/. Participate in other local activities and organizations that benefit the environment, such as the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association or the Pawtuxet River Watershed Council. In West Greenwich, you can join the **Lake Mishnock Preservation Association!** www.lakemishnock.org Statewide non-profit organizations also need volunteers, such as Save the Bay at www.savebay.org. Every little bit you do counts! **Speak out.** Attend public meetings that pertain to storm water quality. Your participation is imperative if your local and state public servants are to help you make large-scale improvements in your watershed. If you see a problem in your area or want something done, say something! If you don't have time to attend meetings, call or contact your Town Planner, your town or state officials, or DEM.



8. Conserve water. Indoors and outside. Indoor conservation helps prevent septic system failures. Install a rain barrel to your downspout to save rainwater for outdoor watering. This helps save water in your well during the summer low water table season. To learn more about conserving water, visit the RI Water Resources Board at www.wrb.state.ni.us.



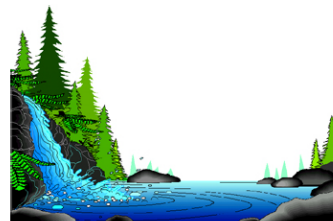
9. Care for your Car. Leaking oil and other fluids from cars drip onto driveways and roads. Then the next time it rains, these hazardous pollutants are washed into our rivers and streams. Fix oil leaks and never dump oil, antifreeze or any other materials into the storm drains. When you wash your car on the driveway all the soap, dirt and oily grit run down the street into the storm drain and directly into the river. Wash your car on grass where water can infiltrate and receive some treatment in the soil. Better yet, take your car to a car wash where water gets treated and recycled.



10. Get out! Get out on the water. Fish, swim, sail, kayak, boat, go birding or walk along one of the many rivers and streams. Visit Big River Reservoir, Arcadia Management Area, or any of the other natural attractions West Greenwich has to offer. Explore the waters near your home or visit other parts of the state. Make it a point to enjoy the benefits of living near water, and while you're out there, keep an eye out for problems or pollution sources. **To file an environmental complaint with DEM** (which can be anonymous), call: 222-1360. Or call your Town Planner at 392-3800 x 111.

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Office of Water Resources
235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908-5767
Phone (401) 222-6800
www.dem.ri.gov
Modified April 2009 by WG Town Planner

10 SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP CLEAN



WEST GREENWICH WATERS

West Greenwich uses this three-fold brochure to help educate property owners and other residents about ways they can help keep the town's waters cleaner.

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 10-1

EXETER TOWN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATES EFFECTIVELY WITH EXETER RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND VISITORS.

POLICIES

- Support systems for town government to collect and report data.
- Ensure that information on Town data, services, and operations is available to the public.

Goal 10-1 / **Strategy A**

Develop a program to collect and report Town data and Town government activities,

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Create a data plan identifying what, how and when data should be collected by town departments, boards and commissions, and so on.**
- Designate an employee or contractor to be the project manager
 - Consider creating a public annual Town report to consolidate reports from town government.
 - Consider an annual town census through a mailing and online.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------|---|---|
| FYIP #1 / FYIP #2 | Town staff and officials; possible consultant assistance for initial organization | General fund; ARPA funds; possible grants |

ACTIONS

- ii. Make this information easily available online, at the Library, and at Town Hall and publicize the availability of this information.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------|---|--------------------------|
| FYIP #1 / FYIP #2 | Town project manager with Town staff, IT director | General fund; ARPA funds |

Goal 10-1 / Strategy B

Upgrade the Town website to make it useful and attractive to Exeter residents, businesses, and visitors.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| i. Consider hiring a specialist consultant in municipal websites to organize and design the town website. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; IT Director | ARPA funds; General fund |

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| ii. Identify high-priority information for the website that can be implemented quickly <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a short survey to ask the Exeter public what they would like to find on the Town website—what would make them use it?• Convene a one-time focus group of invited residents and business owners to ask what they want the website to show and to understand design/navigation preferences.• Set a deadline, such as three months, to ensure that this information is easily accessible and test changes.• Publicize the site as improved and useful through various vehicles, from the Library to Facebook, and ask for feedback in a survey on the web site. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 / FYIP #2 | IT director; planner; director of social services; focus group | General fund; ARPA funds |

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|------------------------------|--------------|
| iii. Work with town staff and boards/commissions to incorporate data and information system into the continuing work plan. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 / FYIP #2 | Project manager; IT director | General fund |

Goal 10-2

EXETER HAS A NEW TOWN HALL AND A NEW COMMUNITY CENTER.

POLICIES

- Support building a new town hall.
- Support building a new community center.

Goal 10-2 / Strategy A

Design and build a new town hall, including community meeting space.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Select an architectural firm to develop a plan, design, and cost estimate for a new town hall.**
- *Include community process in developing needs and evaluating concepts.*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|----------------------------|--|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Town Planner | ARPA funds; PILOT funds; General fund; bonding |

ACTIONS

- ii. Build the new town hall**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|--|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Town planner; construction project manager | ARPA funds; PILOT funds; General fund; bonding |

ACTIONS

- iii. Invite a committee of residents representing varying demographics and interests for a short-term process to develop priority needs for a community center.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|--------------|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Town Planner; volunteers | General fund |

ACTIONS

- iv. Identify a staff project manager for the community center.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|---|
| FYIP #2 | Town Planner; project manager; committee | RIDEM grant funds; PILOT funds; volunteer fundraising |

ACTIONS

- v. Develop a concept plan for the community center design, financing, and operational approach.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|--|
| FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Project Manager; committee | RIDEM Grant funds; PILOT funds; volunteer fund raising |

Goal 10-2 / **Strategy A** (continued)

Design and build a new town hall, including community meeting space.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|---|---|
| vi. Hire an architect and build the community center. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #2 to long term | Town Council; Town Planner; Project Manager | RIDEM Grant funds; PILOT funds; bonding; volunteer fund raising |

Goal 10-3

EXETER HAS EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR TOWN ASSETS AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

POLICIES

- Support establishment of cost-effective asset-management systems.

Goal 10-3 / **Strategy A**

Establish an asset-management system over time and train town staff to use it.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| i. Create an asset-management system and implement it incrementally, including with GIS. | | |
| • Begin using the system with the new town hall project and existing maintenance plans | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW, with training of other staff | General fund |

Goal 10-4

EXETER EMPLOYS STORMWATER BEST PRACTICES THAT PROTECT THE TOWN'S GROUNDWATER AND SURFACE WATER QUALITY.

POLICIES

- Promote good stewardship of Exeter's exceptional water resources with stormwater best practices.

Goal 10-4 / Strategy A

Promote stormwater best management practices for public and private property owners.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Use best management practices in town construction and drainage projects.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|-------|--------------|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW | General fund |

ACTIONS

ii. Promote an onsite wastewater-management education campaign that showcases best management practices for homeowners and businesses.

- Provide educational resources on the Town website, in the Library, and in Town Hall.
- Take advantage of excellent existing educational resources from RIDEM, neighboring towns, and other sources.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW; Town planner | General fund |

Goal 10-5

THE TOWN OF EXETER AND THE VOLUNTEER FIRE DISTRICT/FIRE DEPARTMENTS COLLABORATE TO ENSURE CONTINUING PUBLIC SAFETY OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS.

POLICIES

- Enhance communication between Town Hall and the Fire District/Fire Departments.
- Identify and plan for future needs.

Goal 10-1 / Strategy A

Organize a system of regular meetings between Town government and Fire District/Fire Departments to share information about conditions and future needs.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Develop a system of Town/Fire Department meetings two or three times a year to share information

- Collaborate to promote recruitment of volunteer firefighters.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Fire Marshal/Chiefs; Town Council | General Fund |

ACTIONS

ii. Consider creating a Five-Year Plan for the volunteer fire-rescue program.

- See the VCOS Strategic Plan, [<https://www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/1vcos/vcosstrategicplan.pdf>] for information and ideas

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Fire Marshal/Chiefs | The Volunteer & Combination Officers Section (VCOS) of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (www.iafc.org/about-iafc/sections/vcos/about) has many resources for volunteer departments |

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Sustainability:

CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE, ENERGY & HAZARD MITIGATION

Municipal planning has always included **local hazard mitigation**—preparation for the potential negative impacts of natural hazards caused by forces of nature on people, property, and places.

“Hazard mitigation reduces disaster damages and is defined as sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk to human life and property from hazards. Outreach programs that increase risk awareness, projects to protect critical facilities, and the removal of structures from flood hazard areas are all examples of mitigation actions.”¹ In order to qualify for federal funding for disasters and for hazard mitigation, states and localities must create their own hazard-mitigation plans by identifying risks and strategies to manage and reduce those risks.

Today, in addition to traditional hazard-mitigation efforts, communities must incorporate planning for **climate change resilience**. Climate change is already occurring today; it’s not a condition for the future. The State of Rhode Island’s Climate Resilience Action Strategy (2018), *Resilient Rhody*, defines climate

¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Local Mitigation Planning Handbook*, March 2013, p. 1-1. www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/fema-local-mitigation-planning-handbook_03-2013.pdf. See also *FEMA Resources for Climate Resilience*, December 2021. www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_resources-climate-resilience.pdf

resilience as “ as the capacity of individuals, institutions, businesses, and natural systems within Rhode Island to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what chronic stresses and weather events they experience. While the effects of climate change are felt across the state, these impacts are not equally distributed. Effective climate resilience requires a focus on environmental justice and equity to support local leadership for sustained interaction between community, business, and government.” ² Resilient communities anticipate risks, plan to limit their impacts, and adopt strategies that integrate all community systems—civic, environmental, social, and economic—to mitigate and support recovery from extreme events while providing a good quality of life.

² *Resilient Rhody*, <https://climatechange.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur481/files/documents/resilientrhody18.pdf>, page 6. See also *Resilient Rhody Three Year Impact Report*, www.flipsnack.com/B6D5BFAA9F7/resilient-rhody-impact-report/full-view.html



Exeter wildfire 2023 [Source: Elizabeth Turley and Sarah Doiron, “DEM: Exeter brush fire was RI's largest since 1942,” WPRI.com]

Preparing for hazard mitigation and climate change resilience are important aspects of the broader underlying concept of **sustainability**, which brings together policies and practices that result in meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet *their* needs. Sustainability includes promoting healthy environmental systems and habitats and supporting conditions for continued ecosystem services. Ecosystem services are the benefits to humans provided by a healthy ecosystem—for example, food and water, flood and disease control, and nutrient cycling.

Sustainability, resilience, and **hazard mitigation** link policies and practices that affect many aspects of community planning: the natural systems, housing, waste systems, transportation systems, food systems, and economic development that are discussed in other elements of this comprehensive plan. This element will include a greater focus on another system that is foundational to climate change resilience and sustainability—energy.

Exeter as a community both contributes to Rhode Island sustainability and participates in practices that undermine sustainability.

- On a community-wide scale, Exeter contributes to sustainability through recycling; its participation in local food systems; and maintenance of high-quality surface and groundwater, large forest systems that include some core forest areas, and wildlife corridors.
- The less sustainable aspects of Exeter as a community include development patterns that can fragment habitat and natural resources, and contribution to greenhouse gas emissions through high dependence on fossil fuel vehicles, among other energy practices. There is very little oversight of wastewater systems and nonpoint-source pollution of water resources that are not protected by conservation land. While the town's forests contribute to water quality and provide climate-change benefits, some forest areas (public and private) are not well managed. Wildfire risk appears to be rising, increasing hazards and reducing climate-change benefits.

SOURCES: PAGE 11-1, 2024 FLOODING AT FISHERVILLE BROOK WILDLIFE REFUGE, AUDUBON SOCIETY OF RHODE ISLAND. PAGE 11-2, EXETER WILDFIRE, WJAR.COM.

A. SUSTAINABILITY, CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCY, ENERGY AND HAZARD MITIGATION

We contribute to sustainability and climate change resilience and a transition to renewable energy by fostering excellent ecosystem management, adapting to extreme weather events, and serving resident needs for new energy opportunities.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|--|---|
| 11-1 Exeter is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a transition to renewable energy for Town buildings, facilities, and services. • Promote energy efficiency and renewable-energy options for residents and businesses. |
| 11-2 Exeter has a Municipal Resilience Plan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a community-driven plan for climate-change resilience. • Implement resilience priorities. |
| 11-3 Exeter considers a community electricity aggregation program as a way to provide lower electricity costs and provide renewable energy sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support exploration of community electricity aggregation as an option for Exeter. |
| 11-4 Exeter maintains an updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and provides public information about risk mitigation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update and implement the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan regularly and keep it in force. |

C. WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID

Exeter residents are supportive of aspects of sustainability in the sense of valuing Exeter's natural environment, including its water resources and wildlife. However, the term "sustainability" appeared in the comments only twice—in relation to the importance of a sustainable agricultural sector. "Climate change" was mentioned as having a potential negative impact on the Queen's River aquifer and as "a challenge to maintain elements of a rural town while being realistic about population change, growth, climate change response, and supporting all residents."

In the public opinion survey and other comments, residents did not specifically articulate concerns about potential climate change impacts such as extreme weather events (drought, flooding, heat, and so on) except for wildfire, which is a concern for some property owners. Renewable energy was mentioned as part of the community's discussion about the impacts of large solar installations: many dislike the idea of utility-scale solar installations on forest land, pasture land, or environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands; some support bringing clean energy to town and feel that property owners should be able to do what they want with their land; others voiced support for solar installations in conjunction with farming that could help farmers survive financially.

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change impacts in Rhode Island

Resilient Rhody, the State's climate change resilience plan, identifies the principal impacts

of climate change in Rhode Island that will affect Exeter as warming air temperatures, warming water temperature, higher storm frequency and intensity, changing biodiversity, precipitation, and inland flooding. Sea level rise is a major impact for coastal Rhode Island, of course, but it does not affect Exeter directly even though it can have indirect effects over time.³ Future impacts of climate change are based on models that are subject to assumptions, such as whether greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will be sufficiently reduced to affect temperature increases. Discussions of climate change impacts among the general public often tacitly assume incremental change over time, but scientists and scholars are also discussing tipping points and "cascading" impacts across interrelated natural and human systems that can bring abrupt, accelerated, or unanticipated change.

- **Temperature.** Temperatures in Rhode Island have risen almost 4°F since the beginning of the 20th century. By 2070–2090, New England climate is projected to be similar to today's climate in the region from the mid-Atlantic states to North Carolina.
- **Precipitation.** Annual precipitation in Rhode Island has increased since 1895. Extreme precipitation has increased since 1950, with the highest number of extreme events occurring during the 2005–2014 period. Continued increases in frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events are projected.
- **Flooding.** Over the past 80 years, Rhode Island and southern New England have experienced a significant increase in both flood frequency and flood severity, including a doubling of the frequency of flooding and an increase in the magnitude of flood events. Intense rainfall events (heaviest 1% of all daily events from 1901 to 2012 in New England) have increased 71% since 1958.

³ *Resilient Rhody: An Actionable Vision for Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change in Rhode Island, 2018.* <https://climatechange.ri.gov/resilient-rhody>; see also *Resilient Rhody 3 Year Impact Report, 2021.* <https://www.flipsnack.com/B6D5BFAA9F7/resilient-rhody-impact-report/full-view.html>

- **Sea level rise.** Since 1930, sea level has risen more than 9 inches at Newport, faster than the global average.

State Policy Plans

Exeter has an important role to play in contributing to state policy on sustainability, especially of forest lands and agriculture; climate change resilience; and hazard mitigation. The State has released multiple studies and plans on climate change impacts and resilience:⁴

- *Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan*, 2016, updated 2022
- *Resilient Rhody: An Actionable Vision for Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change in Rhode Island*, 2018; *Three-Year Impact Report*, 2022
- *Rhode Island 2021 Act on Climate*. On April 14, 2021, Governor Dan McKee signed into law the 2021 Act on Climate, which sets mandatory, enforceable climate-emissions-reduction goals leading the state to achieve net-zero emissions economy-wide by 2050. The law updates the previous 2014 *Resilient Rhode Island Act*, positioning the state to boldly address climate change and prepare for a global economy that will shift to adapt to clean technology.
- *The Road to 100% Renewable Electricity by 2030 in Rhode Island*, 2020
- *State Hazard Mitigation Plan Update*, 2018
- *Rhode Island State Energy Plan: Energy 2035*, 2015
- *Greenhouse Gas Action Plan* 2002

The role of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions

Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, contribute to climate change by trapping the heat around the earth and raising temperatures. Excess GHG emissions can exceed the Earth's natural ability to absorb the gases from the atmosphere, leading to changes in climate. Removing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere ("decarbonizing") to reduce

greenhouse gases is a central goal of climate change mitigation efforts. In 2020, the State of Rhode Island set a goal to meet 100% of its electricity demand with renewable energy by 2030. This has affected Exeter and other more rural areas in Rhode Island by encouraging efforts to install medium- to large-scale solar panel projects on forest or agricultural land, rather than on locations where the land has already been disturbed, such as brownfields, gravel pits, and so on. How to balance state priorities for preservation of forests and agricultural lands with renewable energy goals was a top environmental discussion in the 2023 legislature, which passed a law (2023-H5853A) that protects "core forest" areas from ground-mounted solar installations. Core forest is defined as blocks of unfragmented and undeveloped forest land in single or multiple parcels of at least 250 acres which are at least 25 yards from mapped roads. (See the Core Forest Map, Fig. 4-5 in Element 4.)

Incorporating land use and forests for net GHG measurements

Exeter's role as home to some of the most extensive forest land in Rhode Island is now recognized on the state level through the development by RIDEM of a method to include the carbon-sequestration impact of forests

Rhode Island's GHG inventory in 2019

- Transportation: 39.7%
- Electricity: 18.99%
- Residential heating: 19.3%
- Commercial heating: 8.7 %
- Industry: 9.5%
- Waste: 2.1%
- Agriculture: 0.5%
- Other: 1.3%
- LULUCF [carbon sequestration]: -7.2%

(SOURCE: RIDEM 2019 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS INVENTORY)

⁴ <https://climatechange.ri.gov/state-actions/ri-executive-climate-change-coordinating-council-ec4>

in the GHG inventory. Carbon sequestration is the storage of carbon dioxide in vegetation such as forests. However, when plants die, the carbon is transferred to the soil and remains sequestered, or it is released into the atmosphere. When forests burn in wildfires, they no longer store carbon but become sources of carbon, contributing to greenhouse gases.

- “Whereas most inventory years between 1991 and 2018 recorded gross GHG emissions totals only, DEM included carbon sequestration from Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) for the 2019 inventory. This allowed the 2019 inventory to include a net emissions total, which was important for an apples-to-apples comparison to the Act on Climate’s 1990 baseline. Carbon sequestration, or removal, is the process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide. The DEM Division of Agriculture and Forest Environment assisted in development of an in-house methodology to estimate carbon removed by forestland. To properly account toward the Act on Climate’s net-zero emissions mandate by 2050, all new inventories will include a LULUCF sector.”⁵ Agency staff calculated that forests store the equivalent of 7.2% of gross emissions.

Forest contributions to climate change mitigation and sustainability

In addition to carbon sequestration, forests contribute in other ways to climate change resilience and sustainability:

- Forests help maintain water quantity and quality by filtering sediment and pollutants, slowing stormwater velocity, buffering water bodies, and mitigating flooding.
- Trees absorb pollutants through leaf stomata and intercepting particulate matter on tree surfaces, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, lead, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter.

⁵ *State of RI 2019 GHG emissions inventory results December 14, 2022.*

- Forests at all ages provide wildlife habitat which has an essential role in ecosystem services that benefit humans and the landscape.

Climate change impacts on Exeter resources

Increasing temperatures, more precipitation, more intense storm events, and other impacts can have a variety of impacts on natural resources and agriculture.

- More frequent and intense nor’easters and “bomb cyclones” can be as damaging as hurricanes. The big March 2010 storm and flooding occurred after decades of increasing temperatures, the warmest March on record, and three high-precipitation storms in quick succession.⁶
- At the same time, episodic severe drought is more likely. July 2022 ranked as the second driest July on record (1893–2022) in Rhode Island.
- Water resources—quality, quantity, and aquatic ecosystems—are highly vulnerable to impacts from warming water temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, greater storm water runoff, flooded wetlands, and increasing impacts on cold-water habitats. Exeter has a number of cold-water streams with habitat for fish such as trout, smallmouth bass, and walleye. “In 2013, water temperatures in the Wood River exceeded the preferred temperature (<20°C) for native Brook Trout... for a full month.”⁷
- Agriculture is vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperatures shift plant hardiness zones, cause heat stress for livestock and crops, bring new invasive species and pests, and may result in more droughts, water limitations, and weather volatility. The effect of changing temperatures may vary for specific crops.

⁶ *Tom Boving, University of RI, WPWA Board, “The Great RI Flood of 2010: A Hydrological Assessment” <https://www.wpwa.org/documents/The%20Great%20RI%20Flood%20Hydrological%20Assessment.pdf>*

⁷ *Resilient Rhody, p. 13.*

ENERGY

In 2022 National Grid's electric and natural gas business in Rhode Island, including Exeter, was acquired by a new company, now operating as Rhode Island Energy. The company's website offers information and sign-up opportunities on outages and repairs, how to prepare for storms, registering life-sustaining equipment, and so on (www.rienergy.com/RI-Home/Storm-Safety/). Exeter does not participate in the Rhode Island Energy Aggregation Program for municipalities.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy in Exeter

The Town has not performed a baseline assessment of energy usage for municipally-owned buildings, vehicles, and equipment, nor is there an explicit energy conservation policy. Exeter regulates solar renewable energy installations through the zoning ordinance. Wind energy is not listed as a permitted use in the ordinance.

Electric vehicles

- According to RIDEM, 56 electric vehicles were registered in Exeter as of June 2023. Between 2022 and 2024, twenty-two buyers have benefited from the state's rebate program, Drive EV, for electric and hybrid vehicles. Two electric bicycles have also received state rebates.
- There is one public charging station: Ocean State HD DC Fast (Route 3) Exeter at 435 Nooseneck Hill Road.⁸

Regulation of ground-mounted solar installations

Installation of ground-mounted solar installations has been controversial in Exeter since renewable energy projects began to appear in more rural areas of Rhode Island. Zoning for utility-scale solar has changed several times

Solar energy facility definitions in the Exeter zoning code

- **Small scale:** occupies 1,600 sf of area or less
- **Medium scale:** occupies between 1,600+ sf and 40,000 sf
- **Large scale:** occupies between 40,000+ sf and 220,000 sf
- **Utility scale:** occupies more than 220,000 square feet
- **Solar canopy:** located to provide shelter to a parking area, driveway, or walkway underneath

since 2015. Over the following four years, town leaders and residents worked on several different iterations of zoning to regulate solar installations. The current ordinance permits building-mounted solar in all districts except OS/PL (Open Space/Public Land) and allows solar canopies in non-residential districts and planned districts.

- Under the current renewable-energy ordinance (Article XI), ground-mounted solar facilities of any size are required to undergo development plan review and other review, if larger; have limits on lot coverage; and must meet other requirements.
- Medium- and large-scale solar facilities are permitted in commercial districts but require special permits in RU-3 and RU-4 residential districts.
- Utility-scale solar projects are not permitted in residential districts.
- Among the requirements for all solar facilities are screening to minimize aesthetic impacts, limited lighting, and decommissioning standards.
- All solar facilities are subject to decommissioning requirements within 180 days of discontinued operations, including removal and recycling of materials, legally-compliant disposal of all waste, and stabilization and re-vegetation of the site.

⁸ RI Office of Energy Resources, *DRIVE EV Rebate Statistics*, updated 6/30/2023. <https://drive.ri.gov/program-statistics>

As of early 2023, ground-mounted solar facilities are as follows:

- Two existing ground-mounted solar projects built under the original 2015 ordinance.
- Three vested projects in permitting, one final and two preliminary (under iterations of the 2018 ordinance).
- Approximately eight or nine projects in litigation (under the 2018 ordinance).
- A small number of small- or medium-scale projects in permitting that require a special use permit (under the current ordinance).

2023 State legislation on solar siting

The history of Exeter's efforts to regulate ground mounted solar installations indicates how contentious this issue had become in many Rhode Island communities among residents and environmental organizations. "Greenfield"—unbuilt—sites are less expensive for development of solar farms than sites that have already been disturbed and developed. The practice of cutting down trees for solar farms was seen as particularly objectionable for both aesthetic and environmental reasons. In 2023, the legislature passed a law (2023-H5853A) that made core forest areas ineligible for State solar siting incentive programs for ground mounted solar development. Core forest is defined as blocks of unfragmented and undeveloped forest land in single or multiple parcels of at least 250 acres which are at least 25 yards from mapped roads.

Unfragmented forest blocks of 250 to 500 acres in Exeter were mapped by RIDEM in 2020. While many of these blocks are already in conservation areas, significant blocks east of I-95 may fall under the new solar siting statute for ground-mounted solar installations.

Municipal vulnerability assessment

Exeter does not have an up-to-date community vulnerability assessment related to future natural hazards and long-term climate change. The US Climate Resilience Toolkit rates Exeter's risks from hazards such as extreme heat, drought, wildfire, and flooding as "relatively low" in comparison to other places in the United States.⁹ However, risks have traditionally been calculated based on historical occurrences and trends, yet prospective judgments of risk for climate-change impacts that we have already begun experiencing relies on modeling assumptions that may not be able to foresee cascading and accelerating effects. It is worthwhile for Exeter to identify potential risks and plan for risk mitigation or adaptation.

HAZARD MITIGATION

Local hazard mitigation

Exeter has an Emergency Management Director who coordinates with first responders and others. Information for residents on hurricane preparation is on the Town's website. The Town's last local hazard-mitigation plan was adopted in 2005 and expired in 2010.

Information from the 2018 update to the state hazard-mitigation plan can give some insight into natural hazards and risk in Exeter.¹⁰ The state plan reviewed the hazards scored in local plans that were in force in 2018. The hazard mitigation plans of nearby, comparable communities, such as Richmond and West Greenwich, are likely to reflect hazards in Exeter at that period (Figure 11-1, next page). The higher hazard levels are related to storms, wind, and precipitation. Today, wildfires are also seen as a high risk. Current zoning requires all new subdivisions or development projects of five or more homes

⁹ *US Climate Mapping for Resilience and Adaptation and US Climate Resilience Toolkit hazard report* <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/assessment-tool/explore/details> -

¹⁰ *Rhode Island State Hazard Mitigation Plan 2018 Update.*

FIG. 11-1 2018 Hazards Identified in Neighboring Communities

| HAZARD | RICHMOND | WEST GREENWICH |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------------|
| Hurricane | MEDIUM | MEDIUM |
| Earthquake/geologic | LOW | LOW |
| Wildfires/conflagration | LOW | MEDIUM/HIGH |
| Winter storms | MEDIUM | HIGH |
| Tornadoes | LOW | |
| Wind storm/wind-related | | HIGH |
| Nor'easter | MEDIUM | HIGH |
| Hail | | LOW |
| Heavy rains and floods | | MEDIUM |
| Lightning | MEDIUM | MEDIUM |
| Flooding | HIGH | MEDIUM |
| Dam failure | MEDIUM | |
| Severe thunderstorm | MEDIUM | |
| Drought | MEDIUM | |

SOURCE: RHODE STATE HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN UPDATE, 2018

to install underground water tanks for fire protection (Appendix B *Land development and Subdivision Regulations*, Sec. 13.3, *Standards for the installation of fire water tanks*.)

Because I-95 passes through Exeter, the town is also at risk from accidents involving chemical and biological hazards. In the case of any fuel spills larger than 5 gallons, Exeter will immediately contact the state RI DEM hazardous materials office, and notify the Hope Valley hazmat team to determine the type of response needed to mitigate the incident. Clean-up of any spills or leaks would be determined in concert with the on-scene Incident Commander, and DEM hazmat if necessary. All proper notifications would be made in accordance with state and federal guidelines. Evacuations would be determined in concert with the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

In the case of more serious incidents (Level II or higher), assistance and guidance would be requested from the state emergency response commission through the state EOC.

As of spring 2022, a new Emergency Management Director applied for funding from the state Emergency Management Agency for a consultant to prepare a joint, multi-jurisdictional Exeter-West Greenwich Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. Once funded, the plan will be completed in approximately 18 months. It is expected to include wildfire as a high hazard and incorporate climate change and its impacts on other high hazards such as wind, heat, drought, and extreme storms.

Flood risk

Figure 11-3, *Hydrology and Floodplains*, shows the floodplains for 1% and 0.2% floods, meaning that there is a 1% or 0.2% probability of such a flood in any one year. The flood maps are based on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs). RIGIS compiles data collected for federal flood insurance analysis and published by FEMA to identify areas with a 1% annual chance of flooding, and a 0.2% annual chance of flooding. While in the past these probability profiles have been popularly known as “100-year floods” and “500-year floods,” in recent years floods have been occurring more often in some locations, leading to updates of the flood



Flooding from Parris Brook on Old Voluntown Road in March 2010. (Source: Exeter Historical Association; photo by Sheila Reynolds-Boothroyd)

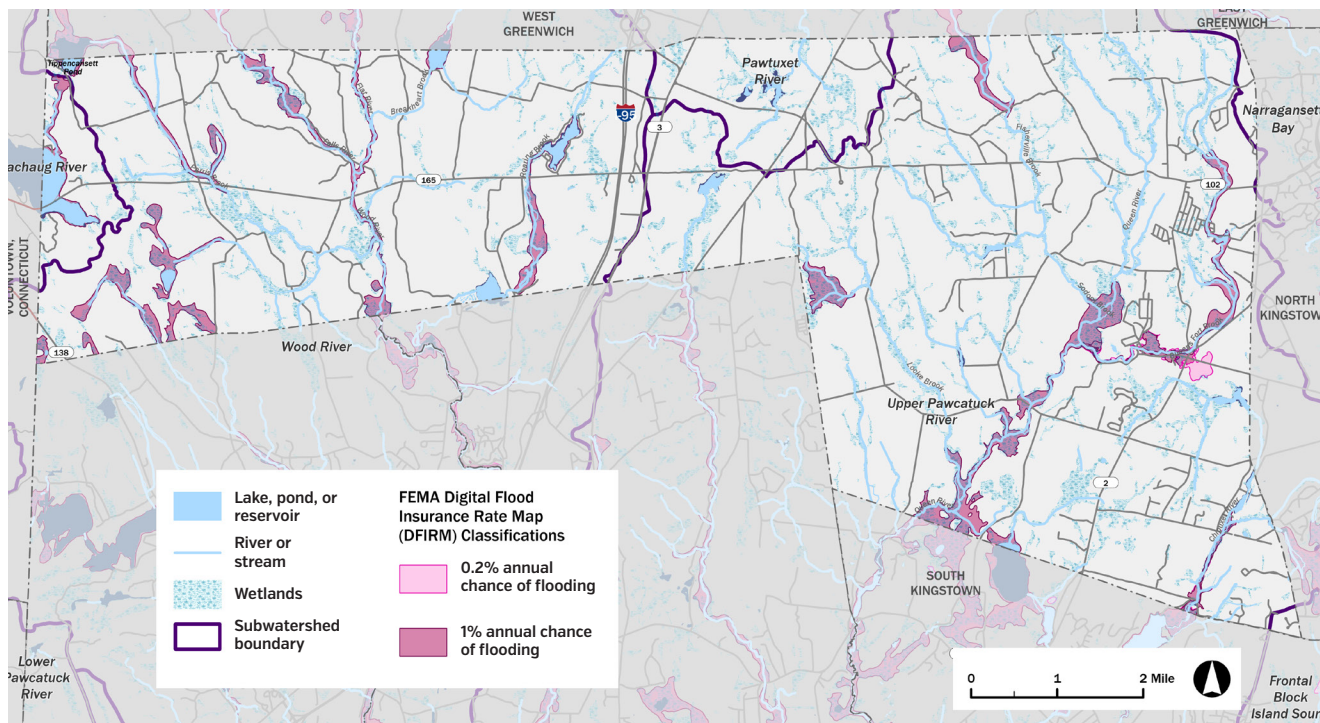


Fig. 11-2 Hydrology and Floodplains. (Data source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

insurance maps. In the past, flood maps were based on historic flooding, but changing climate impacts are affecting flood frequency and extent. FEMA announced in 2021 that it will now include future catastrophic modeling from climate change, including sea level rise, drought, and wildfires in its programs. It is not clear to what extent this modeling was included in creating the most recent Exeter flood maps, approved in June 2022.

Exeter is not directly affected by sea level rise, but it is vulnerable to extended rain events from extreme storms, hurricanes, or nor'easters. However, while many areas along river and stream corridors show a likelihood of flooding, these areas tend to overlap with forested wetlands that may help absorb floodwater:

- Roads and developed areas near the Queen River and the Queen's Fort Brook in eastern Exeter present vulnerability to flood waters. In particular, the junction of South County Trail and Exeter Road shows a large area within the 0.2% flood zone that could threaten local businesses, residents, and infrastructure.

- Additionally, high hazard dams at Boone Lake and Metcalf Wildlife Marsh may be vulnerable to floods.

CHALLENGES

RESILIENCE

Resilience planning in Exeter

Lacking an up-to-date hazard mitigation plan or a community vulnerability assessment, Exeter does not have any explicit assessments or planning for resilience to climate change impacts. Compared to other Rhode Island municipalities, the town has a small number of town buildings and facilities, though it also has limited resources.

The likely high-priority natural hazards and climate change trends are:

- **Wildfire.** In April 2023, Exeter experienced a wildfire affecting some 576 acres, according to the Fire District. This was the largest wildfire in Rhode Island in nearly 80 years. Luckily, it

Wildfire Risk in Exeter

Exeter's Fire Department leadership commented on wildfire risks: "...the State of Rhode Island's Arcadia Management Area, and other large tracts of conservation areas, which have received little to no attention for brush clearing, maintenance of access roads/fire trails, access to natural water sites or installation of strategic underground water tanks, are a serious concern for wildfires. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the term wildland-urban interface (WUI) is defined as the area where houses and other structures are built within or close to wildland vegetation. The term is used in the context of wildfire to identify settlements that are potentially at risk from fire. As

evidenced by Exeter's 2023 Queens River Fire, at 576 acres the largest wildland fire in R.I. since the 1950s, this type of fire requires extraordinary resources to combat and extinguish. If the State of Rhode Island does not take steps to clear the undergrowth and open access points, this type of situation may well occur again within the next 20 years. While no houses or business buildings were impacted in the 2023 fire, given the unknown growth of the Town over the next 20 years, it would not be unexpected to see serious casualties in either or both categories should there be a future conflagration." [See the Fire Department's communication in Element 10 for this comprehensive plan.]

didn't affect any people, dwellings, or other structures. In recent years, Exeter's forest resources, both public and private, have been affected by insect damage, extended drought, and other conditions. Limited resources have constrained management of public forest lands, and management of private forests varies according to the knowledge and commitment of the owners. Increasing average temperatures and droughts that are expected to accompany climate change also affect wildfire risk. RIDEM has developed a new prescribed-burning program to mitigate risk in state-owned forest lands. Exeter's large expanses of private woodlands, however, are also inadequately managed in many cases and can present risks to people, animals, and buildings. During the 2023 legislative session, after the April 2023 wildfire, the Rhode Island House passed a resolution (H6342) to create a legislative study commission to evaluate and provide recommendations on forest management. Moreover, in 2023, voters approved significant funding to DEM for management plans and implementation on all DEM lands. In addition to potential harm to

people, animals, and structures, large wildfires release greenhouse gases. Burning and the resulting release to the atmosphere of carbon captured by Exeter forests would undermine the town's contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

- **Extreme storm events and flooding.** Extreme storm events, which are becoming more frequent and linked to climate change, present risks. The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association has prepared a Resiliency Management Plan that includes recommendations for all the towns within the watershed. The information sheet for Exeter is at the end of this section and is based on their assessment of 63 stream crossings and 11 dams.
- **Changing temperatures.** The potential of the outdoor recreation economy for Exeter is part of the economic development strategy discussed in Element 8—*Economic Development*. In addition to impacts on forests, higher temperatures will affect aquatic environments in Exeter's cold-water streams, threatening habitat for game fish such as trout, smallmouth bass, and walleye.¹¹

¹¹ *Resilient Rhody*, p. 13.

- **Agriculture is vulnerable to climate change.** As noted earlier, rising temperatures shift plant hardiness zones, cause heat stress for livestock and crops, bring new invasive species and pests, and may result in more weather volatility.

OPPORTUNITIES

As a community that values environmental values, Exeter has an opportunity to deepen commitment to these values by incorporating sustainability and resilience principles into town government practices. This will clarify Exeter's identity as a community of rural character and environmental principles that contributes to state goals for high quality of life through a resilient response to climate change.

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from municipal government operations through energy efficiency and renewable energy.

- **Commission a greenhouse gas inventory for Exeter town government and the community as a whole.**
 - > **The Local Greenhouse Gas Inventory Tool**, created by the US Environmental Protection Agency, is a free, interactive spreadsheet to provide a quick and simple GHG inventory. With two modules, one for municipal government only and one for the community as a whole, the Tool can be modified to fit Exeter conditions. Exeter might be able to work with a URI class or student to create the inventory. <https://www.epa.gov/statelocalenergy/local-greenhouse-gas-inventory-tool>
- **Incorporate energy efficiency and renewable energy into municipal facilities and practices** to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save energy costs.
 - > **Perform an energy audit of municipal facilities.** Rhode Island Energy provides free energy assessments for up to five public

facilities. <https://energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/public-entities/request-energy-assessment>

- > **Deploy energy-efficient design and renewable energy in new municipal buildings or other facilities.** The new town hall and community center expected to be built within the next 10 years should incorporate energy-efficient design and solar energy.
- > **Seek State assistance through programs and financial support from the RI Office of Energy Resources under the state's Lead by Example program.** This can include technical assistance to install renewable energy systems and electric vehicle chargers, purchase electric or hybrid vehicles for the town fleet, and manage energy costs with Portfolio Manager, a free online tool from US EPA. In addition to the energy audit referred to above, examples of assistance include:
 - ◆ *Rhode Island Efficient Buildings Fund*, a revolving loan fund. <https://energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/public-entities/rhode-island-efficient-buildings-fund-riebf>
 - ◆ *High-Efficiency Heat Pump Program (HHPP)* community incentive program available for public buildings. <https://energy.ri.gov/heating-cooling/high-efficiency-heat-pump-program>

Encourage and promote energy efficiency and use of renewable energy by residents and businesses in Exeter.

- **Make information on incentives and opportunities available to the public** through the town website, the library, and other means. The Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources has extensive information on incentives and resources available to private individuals, businesses, and organizations, as well as public entities and farms.
- **Promote energy efficiency and renewable energy for farm operators** by making

information available on a variety of clean energy programs for farms (<https://energy.ri.gov/incentives>). Examples include:

- > The RI Agricultural Energy Grant Program provides grants up to \$20,000 for clean energy projects on Rhode Island farms.
- > Renewable Energy Fund Small-Scale or Commercial-Scale Solar programs.
- > Rural Energy for America program is a federal program that provides loans and grants.
- > Federal Investment Tax Credit for total installed project cost.

Promote electric vehicles.

- **Make residents aware that Rhode Island residents can receive up to \$1,500 for qualified electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids.** Additional incentives are available for income-eligible individuals.

Plan for climate change resilience.

- **Participate in the Municipal Resilience Program.** The Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank sponsors the Municipal Resilience Program (MRP), a community-driven workshop process that helps municipalities identify climate-change-related hazards, challenges, and strengths. Through the workshop process, participants identify priority projects and strategies to improve resilience to all natural and climate-related hazards. After completing this process, municipalities become eligible to apply for dedicated MRP action grants to implement identified projects. Exeter is one of seven communities that has not yet participated but is expecting to apply for the next round. (<https://www.riib.org/solutions/programs/municipal-resilience-program/>)
 - > After successful participation in the MRP, action grants can include dam repair and removal; road elevation; hardening or elevation of pump stations, berms and levies; culvert repair; green stormwater

infrastructure; solar and battery storage back-up power; energy efficiency; watershed restoration; tree planting; and coastal erosion control.

Encourage energy efficiency audits for residents and businesses.

- **Promote the availability of free energy audits to residents and businesses**
 - > <https://energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/residents>
 - > <https://energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/businesses>
 - > <https://energy.ri.gov/resources/property-assessed-clean-energy-pace>
 - > <https://www.rienergy.com/RI-Business/Energy-Saving-Programs/>

Promote energy efficiency programs for agricultural operations.

- The Agricultural Energy Grant Program provides grants of up to \$20,000 for eligible energy efficiency and renewable energy projects located on farms throughout Rhode Island. <https://energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/farmers> or <https://goodenergy.com/rhode-island/>

Explore a community electric aggregation program for Exeter.

- Community electric aggregation is a program that uses the collective purchasing power of the community to purchase electricity supply in a way that helps manage electricity costs, increase the use of renewable energy, and reduce emissions of GHG. Rhode Island Energy continues to distribute electricity and is responsible for responding to power outages, and customers continue to receive a bill from Rhode Island Energy.
- Seven Rhode Island communities, including neighboring South Kingstown, have created a program authorized by R.I. Gen. Laws § 39-3-1.2. South Kingstown began its program in July 2020, and it started operating in May

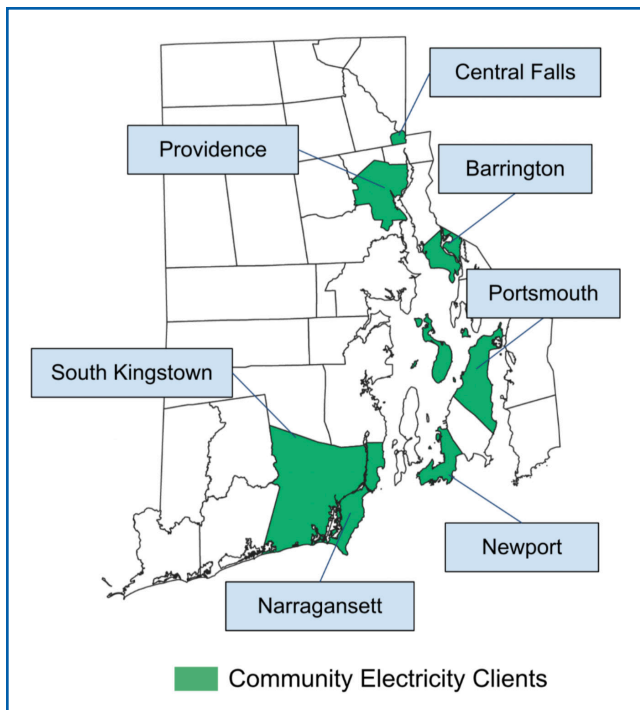


Fig 11-3 Community Electricity Aggregation. The program is now operating in seven communities statewide. [Source: goodenergy.com/rhode-island/]

2023. Exeter could join these six communities in an existing program. (<https://electricity.southkingstownri.com/>) An additional two communities have approved the plan, Middletown and Bristol, and others are considering it.

- Customers are enrolled in the community-electricity program by default with any existing benefits such as discounts, budget billing, net metering credits, and so on. Moreover, they can leave the program or change to another program option at any time.¹²

¹² Alex Kuffner, "Get a notice about a community electric program in the mail? Here's what to know about it," *Providence Journal*, March 9, 2023.

Update and maintain the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

- Exeter's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan has been out of date since 2010. The newly appointed Emergency Management director has submitted a grant application to produce a combined Exeter-West Greenwich Local Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Provide public education about wildfire risk mitigation.

- Resources on wildfire risk and safety include:
 - > FEMA's checklist for home owners, *Avoiding Wildfire Damage* <https://www.fema.gov/pdf/hazard/wildfire/wdfrdam.pdf>
 - > The US Forest Service's Wildfirerisk.org
 - > Fire adapted communities self-assessment tool <https://fireadaptednetwork.org/resources/fac-assessment-tool/>
- CalFire <https://www.fire.ca.gov/>

Explore and consider the need for regulations to protect against wildfire risk. Because Exeter has no public water supply, zoning regulations already provide that subdivisions must provide water sources for firefighting. Example regulations include requiring defensible space, providing an adequate water supply, home hardening material, appropriate access, and others.

Recommended Actions Summary

Town of Exeter, RI

The **Wood-Pawcatuck watershed** is vulnerable to flood-related damages, as evidenced by the devastating flooding that occurred in 2010. The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, working with the watershed municipalities and partner agencies, has developed a **watershed-based management plan** to enhance the resiliency of the watershed communities to future flooding and protect river and stream ecosystems, including water quality and habitat. The following is a **summary of key findings and recommendations** of the watershed plan for the Town of Exeter.

Quick Facts - Exeter

- 91% of town within watershed
- Includes portions of the Chipuxet, Chickasheen, Beaver, Usquepaug, Wood, and Queen Rivers and their watersheds
- 63 stream crossings assessed
- 11 dams assessed

Road Stream Crossings

- 25 crossings are hydraulically undersized
- 30 crossings have high geomorphic vulnerability
- 6 crossings have high flood impact potential
- 9 crossings limit or restrict aquatic passage

Recommendations:

- Replace and upgrade priority crossings (see table below) to meet flood resilience and aquatic organism passage (AOP) goals
- Consider other upstream and downstream crossings and dams on the same river system
- In general, replace downstream crossings first
- Perform site-specific data collection, geotechnical evaluation, hydrologic and hydraulic evaluation, and structure type evaluation to support design

Highest-Ranked High Priority Stream Crossings (Listed by Priority Ranking)

| Road | Stream | Crossing Type |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---|
| Deer Brook Lane | Unnamed | 36" Concrete Circular Conduit |
| Tarbox Drive | Queens Fort Brook | 48" and 24" Concrete Circular Conduit (Total 2) |
| Mail Road | Unnamed | 12" Concrete Circular Conduit |
| Purgatory Road | Unnamed | 24" Concrete Circular Conduit |
| Wolf Rocks Road | Chipuxet River | 5.3' x 5.9' Concrete Box Culvert |
| Yawgoo Valley Road | Chipuxet River | Triple 48" Concrete Circular Conduit |
| William Reynolds Road | Unnamed | 12" HDPE Circular Conduit |
| Liberty Road | Unnamed | Triple 18" HDPE Circular Conduit |
| Punchbowl Road | Unnamed | 18" CMP Circular Conduit |

Dams

- 5 high hazard dams, 1 significant hazard dam, and 5 low hazard dams
- Several dams provide recreational or other uses and are undergoing or were recently repaired
- Several dams are recommended for repair or removal due to poor condition and lack of maintenance

Recommendations:

Breakheart Pond Dam (Breakheart Brook)

- Located within Arcadia Management Area
- Downstream watercourse has obstructions to fish passage
- Dam is in poor condition and repairs are therefore recommended

Browning Mill Pond Dam (Roaring Brook)

- RIDEM owns the dam and operates a hatchery downstream
- Browning Mill Pond has significant public recreational value
- Repairs are recommended for this deteriorating dam

Edward's Pond Dam (Queen River)

- Owned by Exeter Country Club
- No apparent active uses of impoundment
- Consider dam removal



Breakheart Pond Dam

For the complete project plan please visit http://wpwa.org/flood_resiliency.html

Project funding was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Competitive Grant Program



FUSS & O'NEILL

Fig 11-4 Watershed Plan—Recommended Actions for Exeter. [Source: wpwa.org/flood_resiliency.html]

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 11-1

EXETER IS REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS..

POLICIES

- Make a transition to renewable energy for town buildings, facilities, and services.
- Promote energy efficiency and renewable-energy options for residents and businesses.

Goal 11-1 / **Strategy A**

Reduce emissions through energy efficiency and use of renewable energy.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Secure a GHG inventory for municipal and community-wide emissions.

- Use the EPA Local GHG Inventory Tool for a basic inventory.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|------------------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 (2024-2025) | Town Council; Planner; assistance from URI | https://www.epa.gov/statelocalenergy/local-greenhouse-gas-inventory-tool ; local volunteers; URI faculty or students |

ACTIONS

ii. Request a free energy audit of municipal facilities from Rhode Island Energy..

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|------------------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 (2024-2025) | Town Council; Planner; Rhode Island Energy | Free from Rhode Island Energy for up to five public facilities; https://energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/public-entities/request-energy-assessment |

ACTIONS

iii. Develop relationships with the RI Office of Energy Resources for assistance.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| FYIP #1 (2024-2025) | Town Council; planner | State Lead by Example program for technical assistance and funding |

Goal 11-1 / **Strategy A** (continued)

Reduce emissions through energy efficiency and use of renewable energy.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| iv. Incorporate energy efficiency and renewable energy into design and construction of new facilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design the new town hall and the community center to be energy efficient.• Use renewable energy, such as a solar roof. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing– TOWN HALL design 2024–25; construction 2025–30. COMM. CENTER design by 2028; medium-term construction | Town Council; planner | State funding assistance such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rhode Island Efficient Buildings Fund, a revolving loan fund. https://energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/public-entities/rhode-island-efficient-buildings-fund-riebf• High-Efficiency Heat Pump Program (HHPP) community-incentive program available for public buildings. https://energy.ri.gov/heating-cooling/high-efficiency-heat-pump-program |
| ACTIONS | | |
| v. Update land development and subdivision regulations to require EV chargers in new parking lots and expansion of existing lots by 50% or more. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Planning Board; Town Planner | Examples from state and municipal sources. |

Goal 11-1 / **Strategy B**

Encourage and promote energy efficiency and use of renewable energy by residents and businesses

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|---|
| i. Raise public awareness about opportunities and incentives through the town website, the library, social media and so on. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| <i>FYIP #1 and ongoing</i> | <i>Town Council; Library; Director of Social Services; NK News reporter</i> | <i>Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources extensive information online</i> |
| ACTIONS | | |
| ii. Promote energy efficiency and clean energy project assistance for farm operators. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Develop models of clean energy projects in agricultural contexts through consensus building with residential interests.</i> | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| <i>FYIP #1 and ongoing</i> | <i>Planner; economic development coordinator (see Element 8)</i> | <i>RI Office of Energy Resources grant program; federal Rural Energy for American Program</i> |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iii. Encourage resident and business participation in free energy efficiency audit programs for residents and businesses. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| <i>FYIP #1 and ongoing</i> | <i>Town Council; Library; Director of Social Services; NK News reporter</i> | <i>RI Office of Energy Resources provides energy-efficiency audit information online, e.g., energy.ri.gov/energy-efficiency/residents</i> |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iv. Make available information on EV incentives for individuals, businesses, and nonprofits through the town website, the library, social media and so on. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| <i>FYIP #1 and ongoing</i> | <i>Town Council; Library; Director of Social Services; NK News reporter</i> | <i>Drive EV rebate programs; drive.ri.gov</i> |

Goal 11-2

EXETER HAS A MUNICIPAL RESILIENCE PLAN.

POLICIES

- Support a community-driven plan for climate change resilience.
- Implement resilience priorities.

Goal 11-2 / **Strategy A**

Participate in the state's Municipal Resilience Program.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Apply for and participate in the Municipal Resilience Program.

- Hold staff and stakeholder workshop to identify climate-change-related hazards, challenges, strengths, and priority projects.
- Identify priority projects that ideally bring multiple benefits.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| 2023 application; 2024 or 2025 participation | Emergency Management Director; Library | Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank |

ACTIONS

ii. Implement priority projects.

- Apply for MRP Action Grants.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Emergency Management Director; Planner; DPW | Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank |

Goal 11-3

EXETER CONSIDERS THE COMMUNITY ELECTRICITY AGGREGATION PROGRAM AS A WAY TO PROVIDE LOWER ELECTRICITY COSTS AND PROVIDE RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES.

POLICIES

- Support exploration of community electricity aggregation as an option for Exeter.

Goal 11-3 / Strategy A

Investigate and evaluate the existing multi-municipality model for possible benefits for Exeter.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Research how community electricity programs are working in Rhode Island and elsewhere [such as Massachusetts].**
 - *Work with South Kingstown to see how the program, begun in May 2023, functions for them in the next year or two.*
 - *Consider joining the seven municipalities now in the program as a group*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------|---------------------|---|
| <i>FYIP #1</i> | <i>Town Council</i> | <i>Municipal members of the program</i> |

Goal 11-4

EXETER MAINTAINS AN UPDATED LOCAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN AND PROVIDES PUBLIC INFORMATION ABOUT RISK MITIGATION.

POLICIES

- Update and implement the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan regularly and keep it in force.

Goal 11-4 / Strategy A

Create a joint Local Hazard Mitigation Plan with West Greenwich.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Seek funding for a consultant to prepare an updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan jointly with the Town of West Greenwich.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|-----------------|---|---|
| FYIP #1 2024 | Emergency Management Director; Town Council | RI Emergency Management Agency; Town of West Greenwich |

ACTIONS

- ii. Prepare and adopt the plan.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| FYIP #1 2024-2025 | EMA Director; consultant; Town of West Greenwich; stakeholders | RI Emergency Management Agency |

ACTIONS

- iii. Use assessment tools, such as the Fire Adapted Communities Self Assessment Tool, to update wildfire risk assessment.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| FYIP #1 2024-2025 and ongoing | EMA Director; residents and stakeholders | RIEMA, FEMA, US Forest Service, CalFire publications |

ACTIONS

- iv. Update the plan every 5 years to keep it in force.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| FYIP#1, FYIP#2, and long-term | Town Council; EMA Director | RI Emergency Management Agency |

Goal 11-4 / **Strategy A** (continued)

Create a joint Local Hazard Mitigation Plan with West Greenwich.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|--|
| v. Implement the plan as needed. Review zoning, subdivision, and land-use regulations to evaluate if any additional safety and risk-management regulations are needed. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1; 2024-2025 | Town Council; Planning Board; Planner; EMA Director | FEMA and RI Emergency Management Agency guidance |

Goal 11-4 / **Strategy B**

Raise awareness and provide public education about natural hazards and risk mitigation.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| i. Update the town website information on natural hazards (currently on the EMA Department page) to include more than a hurricane planning guide. <ul style="list-style-type: none">For example, provide information about wildfire risk mitigation, such as from wildfirerisk.org. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1; 2024-2025 | EMA Director; Planner; IT staff | FEMA, RI Emergency Management Agency, and other organization resources. |

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Land Use

Every comprehensive plan contains a **land use** section and **future land use map (FLUM)**. In Rhode Island, the future land use map in a comprehensive plan governs land use decisions, a point made explicit in bills the General Assembly enacted in the 2023 legislative session. Moreover, the new law governing comprehensive planning requires municipalities to set an 18-month deadline for a municipality to bring its zoning map into compliance with the future land use map in its comprehensive plan. This same law requires that the FLUM govern all municipal land use decisions and that the plan contain an implementation program and strategic plan, reviewed annually by the municipality. It also requires municipalities to fully update and re-adopt the comprehensive plan within 12 years of the date of the previous plan's adoption. For the first time, the new law removes a municipality's ability to use the comprehensive plan to deny a development application if the plan is not fully updated and re-adopted within that 12-year period.

This land use element and the FLUM set out the policy framework for the physical development of the Town of Exeter. The FLUM is not a zoning map. It shows the distribution of general land use categories over the town. The

ELEMENT 12 : LAND USE

land use categories in the map may be represented in the zoning code by more than one zoning district if finer distinctions and nuances are needed to shape development. In most communities the FLUM inevitably incorporates existing land uses, reflecting established land uses that are not subject to change by statements of purpose and policy actions contained in the corresponding comprehensive plan. A plan's land use element is also required to include a map that identifies locations where existing zoning must be changed to make it consistent with the FLUM.

Land Use and Zoning

Land use patterns and decisions are shaped by population and economic growth (which both create market demand), transportation access and opportunities, the availability of infrastructure, environmental constraints, and the quality-of-life potential reflected in school quality, parks and recreational opportunities, and amenities. The private sector makes most development decisions, but those decisions occur within a land use framework created by the comprehensive plan, the zoning ordinance and other development regulations, and influenced by public investments, incentives, and disincentives. These regulatory and incentive frameworks cannot, by themselves, cause development of a specific type to happen, but they can encourage or discourage it.

Land use and zoning are not the same thing. "Land use" is the general term referring to the actual uses or activities that occur on a parcel of land at any given time, be they residential, commercial, industrial, recreational or something else. Land use is not permanent and can change over time. For example, in nearly three centuries, the same Exeter parcel may have had agricultural, mill industry, commercial, residential, or other uses. "Zoning" is the tool a municipality uses to regulate what can be built on a parcel of land, including dimensional

ELEMENT 12 : LAND USE

characteristics, how it may be developed or redeveloped, and how it can be used. Land uses can be “nonconforming,” meaning that they do not conform with zoning because they existed when the land was zoned for another use or before zoning was enacted. Nonconformance—by use, dimension and/or land area—is “grandfathered” in. Like land use, zoning can change over time.

The topics discussed in other elements of this comprehensive plan influence land use and zoning. For example, sustainability, natural and cultural resources and environmental conditions, housing markets and housing needs, economic-development conditions, town services and facilities, transportation, and hazard management affect what can happen on the land. How the community balances its values and goals for these various areas can be seen in decisions about land use.

2023 State Legislation that Affects Land Use and Zoning

As noted in some of the previous elements of the plan, in 2023 the Rhode Island legislature amended state laws affecting land use and zoning. This element of the comprehensive plan discusses the changes that affect Exeter and actions that the Town must take to bring its ordinances into compliance with state law. Additional changes affecting the comprehensive plan may be forthcoming in future years, because two special legislative commissions established in 2021—to study housing affordability and to study the entire area of land use, preservation, development, housing, environment, and regulation—have been extended to June 2025.

A. LAND USE IN THE EXETER 2044 VISION

Exeter remains a peaceful and welcoming small town with a strong sense of community, a rural tradition, and a landscape of space and privacy. Residents cherish its forests, fields, and wildlife, streams and ponds, historic places, and the conservation lands and working lands—farm and forest enterprises—that anchor the town’s rural character. We protect environmentally sensitive places, wildlife corridors, and our clean water sources. To help preserve our open space tradition, new residential development within the landscape is primarily focused in hamlets, villages or conservation subdivisions. At the same time, we welcome balanced nonresidential development in designated areas that enhances our tax base and respects our natural resources and the general character of the community.... We are committed to pursuing balanced economic growth policies that strengthen the town’s tax base, build on our assets, and enhance small scale businesses that serve residents. We promote the economic viability of our farm and forest enterprises, recognizing their importance as both heritage and continuing assets.... In the transition to new generations of leadership in Exeter, the town is committed to preserving the essential elements of our community’s unique heritage by managing the impacts of changing environmental, economic, and social conditions while seeking innovative solutions.

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|---|--|
| 12-1 <i>Land use regulations are used to protect water quality, prevent flooding, maintain farms/forests and preserve environmentally sensitive lands in connected networks.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to use land use regulations to protect groundwater and surface water, wildlife habitat and corridors, most important forests, and open space. • Promote the use of conservation subdivisions in new development to encourage preservation of open space and avoid impacts on wetlands and water quality to create connected corridors for habitat and recreation, and to preserve community character. |
| 12-2 <i>Exeter preserves opportunities for the financial sustainability of agricultural and forestry land uses.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue municipal support for the FFOS tax-incentive program. • Continue support for agriculture and forestry uses in rural zoning districts. • Re-examine regulations to provide accessory use options that enhance the financial sustainability of agricultural and forest land. Revisit a 2017 Exeter study and draft ordinance as a starting point to assess appropriate regulations to allow small-scale accessory business options for farm and forest landowners. |
| 12-3 <i>Exeter encourages growth in planned districts that can support more density to provide balanced housing, economic development, or community services.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to pursue options for development of a walkable multi-use village in the vicinity of Route 2 and Exeter Road. • Support planning and construction of a modern town hall and a community center at a planned development [or renovation of an existing building] Municipal Center location within a multi-use environment including other supportive uses to create a sense of place that hosts community activities and gatherings, connects residents with programming and resources, and enhances a sense of community. • Support restoration of old Town Hall and its relocation to the Municipal Center. • Consider opportunities to purchase properties adjacent to the Municipal Center that could support government operations in the immediate and medium terms. • Continue to work with the State on a joint land-use and infrastructure master plan for the Ladd Center Area that includes a percentage of land area dedicated to workforce, senior and/or low/mod housing; and on a memorandum of understanding with the Town about a development-review process, including public hearings for the State-controlled Ladd Center Area to include a public institutional zone. • Consider a public institutional (PI) zoning district, to replace the PD district, governed by a master plan and memorandum of agreement between the State and Town for the Ladd Center Area to include a public institutional zone. • Support a Route 2 Corridor Area Master Plan compatible with the plans for a village center and any other nearby planned districts. • Support a planned district for the Yawgoo Valley recreational area based on an area master plan with community participation. |

B. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|--|--|
| 12-4 <i>The Route 3 corridor is revitalized as an attractive area with a mixture of uses, especially for tax-paying non-residential development in a gateway to I-95, and a visitor gateway to the Arcadia Management Area.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-imagine the Route 3 corridor with an area master plan that takes advantage of quick access to I-95; provides for an enhanced visitor hub as a gateway to the Arcadia Management Area; and promotes improved road conditions with bicycle and pedestrian facilities in part of the corridor. Include design standards and land uses that support the local economy, reflect community character and are in balance with the surrounding natural resources. Avoid future heavy industry, junkyards, and similar land uses with potential impacts that can cause irreparable harm to area groundwater and natural subsystems. • As part of the Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan, pursue an Interstate Floating Overlay District to regulate potential economic development uses for properties with access to I-95. • As part of the Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan, pursue a Route 3 Enhancement Floating Overlay District to regulate the potential for economic development uses and multifamily housing along Route 3. • Work with RI Commerce to enroll appropriate Route 3 corridor properties in the RI Ready program. |
| 12-5 <i>The Exeter zoning ordinance complies with State legislation.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amend the zoning ordinance to comply with 2023 state legislation and in a timely manner with any future requirements. |
| 12-6 <i>Exeter has a new, modern zoning ordinance.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a rewrite of Exeter's zoning ordinance over the medium and long terms to make it more user-friendly and functional. |

Exeter residents' opinions about land use issues have been explicit or implied in the summaries found in the various topic elements drawing on the results of the public opinion survey, the agriculture focus group and survey, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) and Economic Development Task Force (EDTF) discussions, and the community open house.

- *Low density, low population, large lots...lack of public water and sewer, open raw undeveloped land and conservation areas....no large attractions or shopping centers, no police station....*
- *Open spaces, trees, clean water, clean air, wildlife, lack of development.*
- *Keeping us rural. Letting land owners develop solar to produce a modest income and generate more tax revenue for the town without bringing in more people, therefore lowering the tax burden of the residents.*
- *Ample forested land....Limited industry. Ample farm land. Limited traffic.*

- *...be future oriented first and listen to what the opportunities might be for Exeter to grow yet retain the country life many folks move here for.*
- *Balancing growth with the desire to remain more rural.*
- *Managing change! Including changes in demographics, economic conditions, and the expense of staying rural.*



that we want, and that there are circumstances beyond the control of the town that our plan needs to account for. I'm not pro-development and think I want the same thing as everyone else that's pro-rural, but I'm also pro-reality.

- *Generating taxes without commercial enterprise is difficult. While needed, it should be properly placed and designed to fit the aesthetics of the community.*
- *Not enough businesses, no tax base, business/commercial zones being used to build houses and condos.*
- *Broader tax base. Lack of industry/business puts a lot of pressure on homeowners. Thoughtful business expansion is key.*
- *...creating a small "downtown" area would make Exeter feel more like a community rather than just a huge area where you barely know your neighbors.*
- *Exeter should not/does not need to be like other RI suburban towns. We and probably tons of other Exeter residents moved here to get away from all that. Keep us in the woods and businesses away! If something has to come in, put it on rt 3. The business ctr on rt 2 is fine. One is enough.*
- *I think Exeter's future looks bleak unless more businesses are brought in, or there is an alternative source of income...solar?*
- *If we do this selectively, there's no reason we can't allow bigger businesses into our town, on the edges, with minimal impact to our core way of life. This town is stagnant, we need some change.*
- *Exeter has many small businesses that operate in the town, often below the radar. The town is so bent on keeping residential and business separate in its zoning code that it forces businesses to go underground....Business and residential do not need to be mutually exclusive and completely separating them has detrimental side effects....If Exeter wants to maintain any semblance of "Rural Character," it needs to figure out how to keep its current businesses viable.*

D. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

FINDINGS

1. EXISTING LAND USE

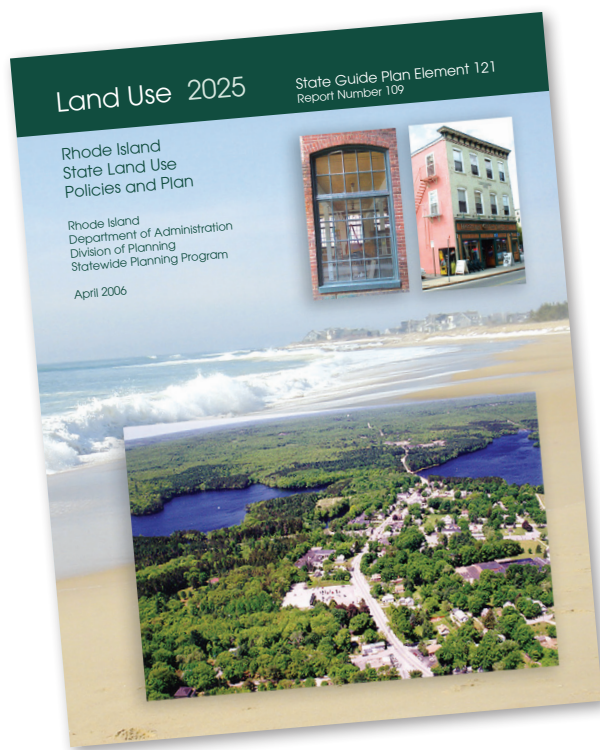
The State 'Land Use 2025' plan and Exeter

The *State Land Use Plan 2025* established a vision for Rhode Island. All Rhode Island municipalities must be consistent with this vision according to the RI Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act. The "plan envisions Rhode Island as a constellation of community centers connected by infrastructure corridors and framed by greenspace." This plan called for an innovative urban/rural approach where future growth would be concentrated within an urban services boundary where development could be adequately served by supporting infrastructure. Most of Exeter is outside the urban services boundary.

- **"Rural approach:** In the more rural areas of the state a strategy that accommodates residential and recreational land use while preserving natural resources and open spaces should avoid sprawl and promote clustering development and greenway connections." This rural approach was further defined as "A thinly settled, forested band in the western third of the state will conserve essential resources and support resource-based economies. Farmland and forests will surround centers that are infused with greenways and greenspace."

The Future Land Use Map in the State plan contained the following policies for lands outside the urban services boundary:

- **"Future Use Potential areas** also include lands more suited for conservation uses and lands outside the urban services boundary that are not needed to accommodate the state's growth needs. In these categories, it is recommended that growth and development not be encouraged or supported."



The *Land Use Plan* also had clear policies for municipalities to protect drinking water supplies and avoid the negative environmental impacts of development.

- In 2008 the RI Statewide Planning Program conducted an analysis, in Technical Paper 160, of where higher-density residential development was suitable for each city and town statewide. This analysis identified no sites to support high residential densities in Exeter, primarily because Exeter did not have public water or sewers and is mostly outside the urban services boundary. This plan also defined low density as lot sizes greater than 2 acres.
- To be consistent with the State land use plan, Exeter has adopted conservation development, rural residential compounds, and a village overlay zoning. All three provide options from large-lot zoning and help to cluster and guide future growth to minimize impacts on water quality, loss of important natural areas, and preserve greenspace. These techniques also minimize impervious cover to avoid impacts on surface water and wetlands, and to reduce flood damage from extreme precipitation events that have become increasingly

common. As previously discussed in *Element 4—Natural Resources*, Exeter must stay below an impervious cover of 10 percent to continue to protect water quality. A minimum lot size of 3 acres is needed to stay below the 10 percent threshold. Exeter’s residential lot sizes are consistent with the State land use plan definition for low density. (For more information on the need to reduce impervious cover and the relationship to lot size and clustering of development see *Element 4—Natural Resources*.)

Exeter land use and development patterns

Exeter has a mixture of land use and development patterns that give it a rural character in the Rhode Island context. Development is located within a matrix of forests, wetlands, streams, and agricultural lands and most development is located east of I-95. Limited business and industrial development can be found predominantly in the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors. Agricultural and rural industry villages died out in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries so that Exeter, unlike many New England towns, does not have a historic town center or villages.

- **Conservation lands.** The town has more than 13,500 acres of permanently protected land, which represents 35% of all land within the town boundaries. This protected land is owned by the State or by nonprofit conservation groups. Eighty percent of the protected land is managed by the State; conservation groups such as The Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society manage most of the remainder.
- **Tax-incentive lands.** In addition to the permanently protected land, 14,300 acres of privately-owned lands in 266 parcels (8.3% of all parcels and 39% of town land) were enrolled in 2022 in a tax- incentive program, the Farm, Forest, and Open Space (FFOS) program. The State sets eligibility requirements (see the box on page 12-11) and land owners opt in to the

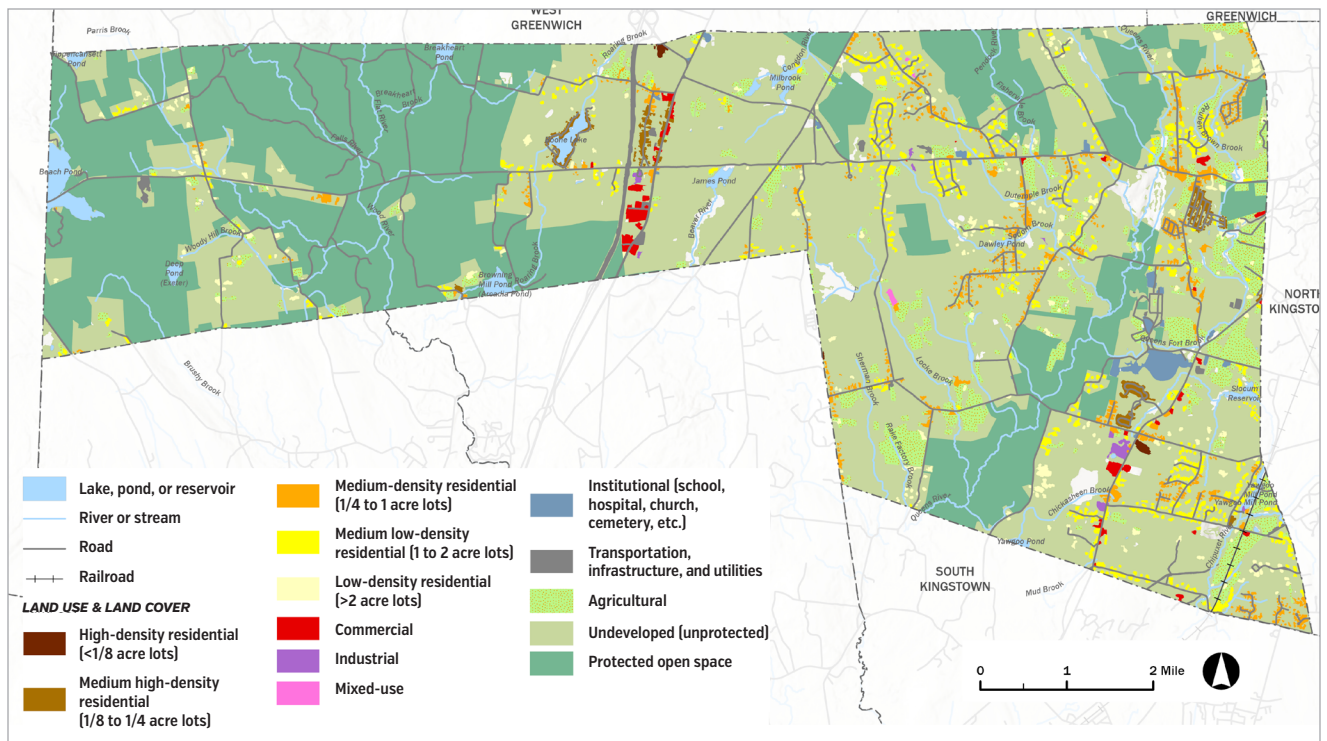


Fig. 12-1 Existing Land Use. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

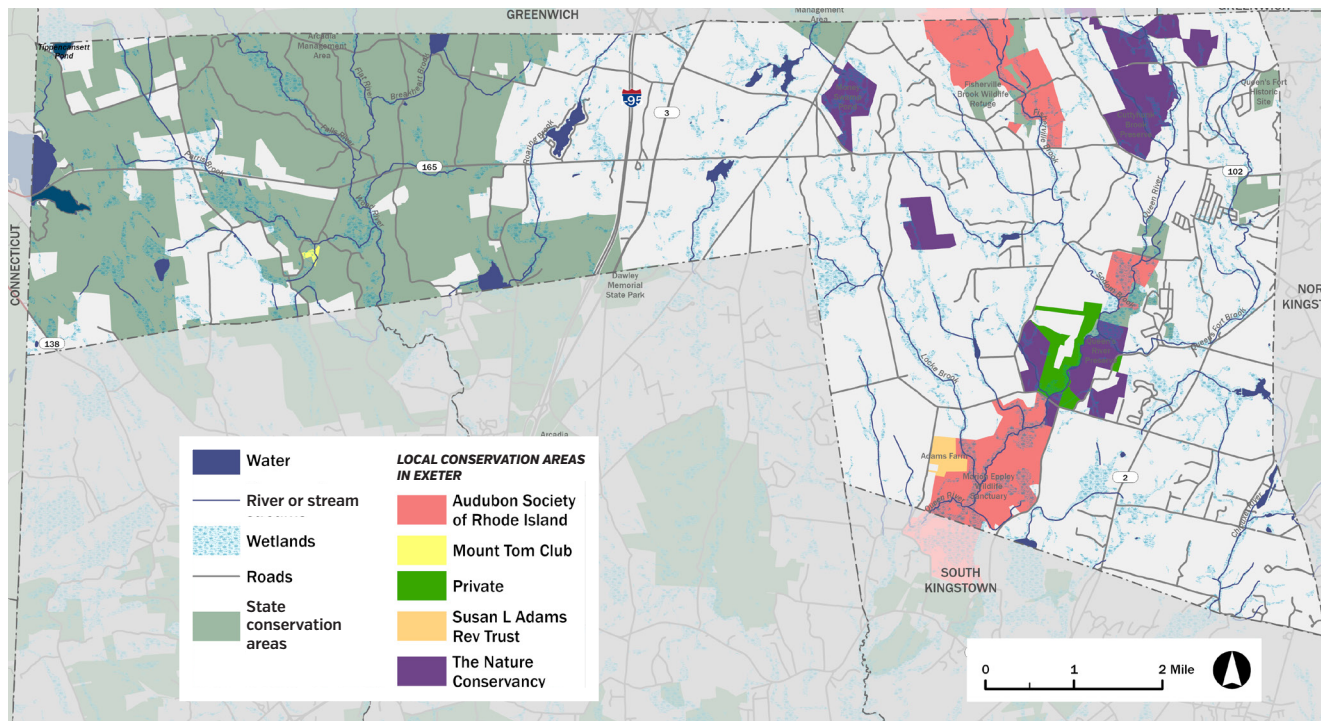


Fig. 12-2 Protected Open Space. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

Rhode Island's Farm, Forest, and Open Space (FFOS) Program

The Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program, enacted by Rhode Island General Laws Chapter 44-27, allows landowners who set aside property as farmland, forest or wetlands, or open space, to be taxed for the land's current use, not for its assessed development value.

- Eligible properties must meet conditions for size, use, and condition of the land in order to qualify.
- Every enrolled property must set aside five acres for a house site for the owner.
- Farms [5-acre minimum] require a Farm Conservation Plan approved by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and must have produced at least \$2500 in income in one of the last 2 years [or be a subsistence farm whose operator is otherwise income eligible].
- Forest land [10-acre minimum] requires

a stewardship plan that is approved by RIDEM.

- Open space [10-acre minimum] where undeveloped land enhances agricultural values or natural land that protects environmental values; requires a soils map.

Participating properties may withdraw from the program during the first six years of enrollment with a land-use-change tax of 10% of the land's fair market value, and during any year after that with a tax rate that diminishes by 1% each year until the 16th year, when no land-use change tax is due. More information on the FFOS Program appears on Exeter's Town website and at RIDEM's website, <https://dem.ri.gov/natural-resources-bureau/agriculture-and-forest-environment/agriculture/farmland-preservation/farm>.

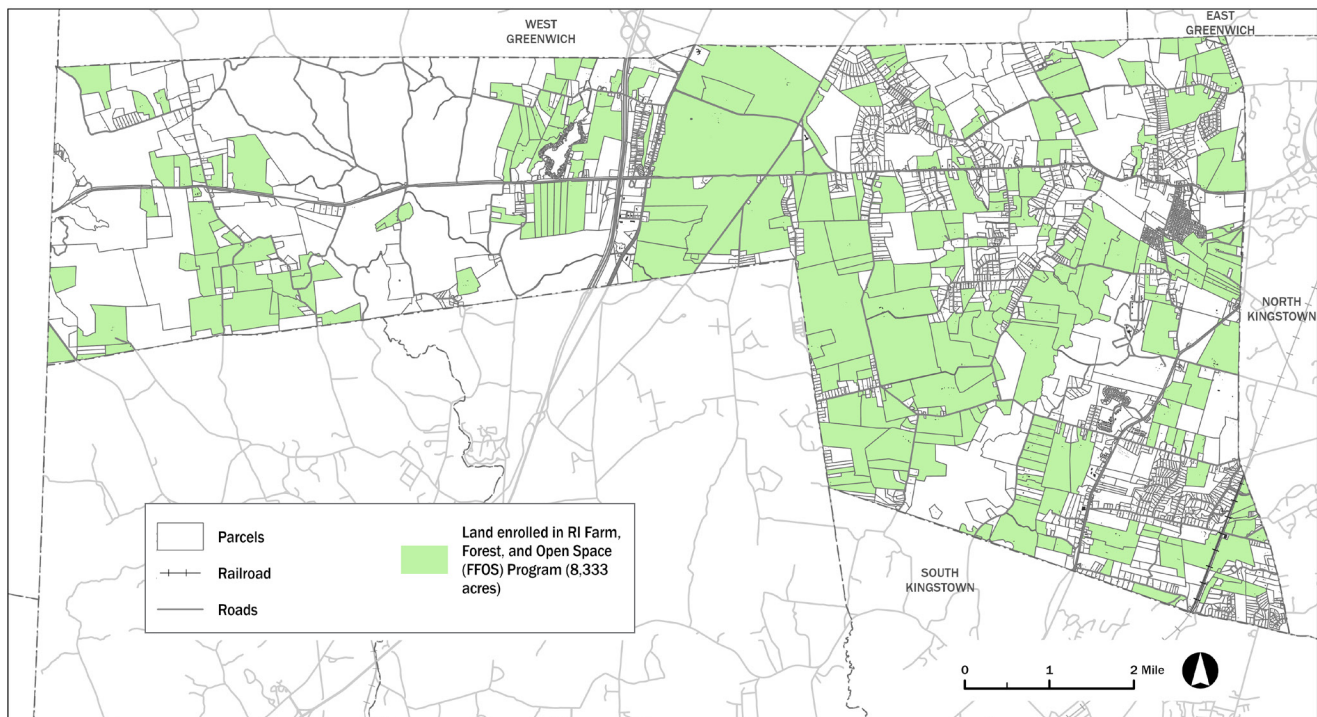


Fig. 12-3 Land in the Farms, Forest, and Open Space program. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

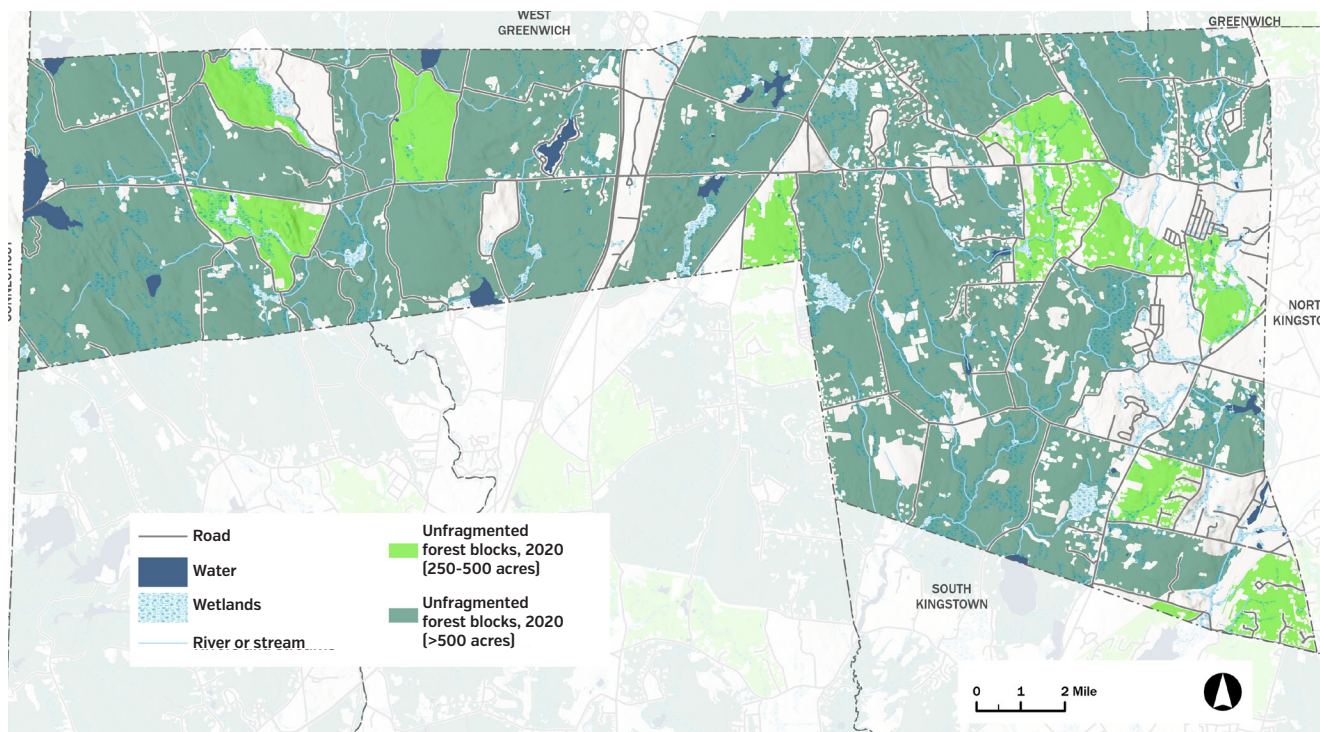


Fig. 12-4 Core Forest Areas. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

Fig. 12-5 Summary of Land Uses in Exeter, 2022

| LAND USE | TOTAL PARCELS | TOTAL ACRES | VACANT DEVELOPABLE ACRES | VACANT DEVELOPABLE ACRES |
|---|---------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| All Uses | 3,199 | 36,455.7 | 358 | 1,689.0 |
| Residential | 2,625 | 7,822.5 | 337 | 1,520.9 |
| Commercial | 109 | 855.0 | 15 | 104.6 |
| Industrial (including Utility) | 25 | 265.4 | 6 | 63.5 |
| Exempt: Government, Conservation, Cemetery, Church, Charitable | 174 | 13,229.5 | — | — |
| Special: Farm, Forest, and Open Space* | 267 | 14,300 | — | — |

* Land enrolled in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Tax-Incentive Program does not include all lands used for agriculture or forestry.

SOURCE: EXETER ASSESSOR'S DATA

program, taxing land at its current use rather than its development value. Property enrolled in the FFOS Program in 2022 was taxed at a rate of \$115 per acre, in contrast to the “excess land” rate of \$2,000 per acre, which may vary depending on market values, land conditions, and other factors.

> Just over half of FFOS land is enrolled as forest land, 37% is enrolled as open space, and 11% as farmland. While approved plans are required for forest and farm lands, the open space category requires no conservation plan.

> When factoring in the five acres each enrolled property must set aside for residential use, the amount of land actually dedicated to farming, forestry, or open space is lower, about 13,500 acres. (Eleven parcels enrolled in the program overlap with state and local conservation areas, including Arcadia Management Area, Adams Farm, the Marion Eppley Wildlife Sanctuary, and privately-owned land, accounting for between 500 and 900 acres of the FFOS land).

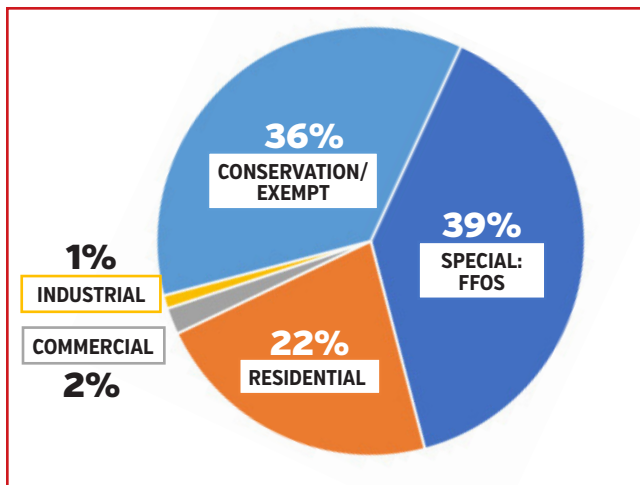


Fig. 12-6 Land Use By Category. (Source: Dodson & Flinker)

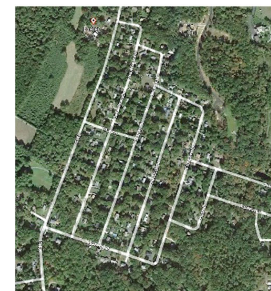
- > Because the “highest and best use” from a real estate value point of view is often to sell farm, forest and open space parcels for development, the FFOS program helps property owners avoid having to sell these lands by moderating their taxes. Many landowners in Exeter prefer to keep these lands in rural uses and open space. However, the FFOS is not a permanent land-preservation program and circumstances may result in a sale of the land for residential or other purposes over time.
- **Residential development patterns.** The majority of privately-owned land in Exeter is located east of Route 3/Nooseneck Road and is primarily in residential use. A few other uses can also be found in this area, such as agriculture (allowed in residential zoning districts), home businesses, a few grandfathered small-scale businesses, and recreational uses. During the 2010-2020 decade, the number of housing units grew ten times faster (5.4%) than the number of people in the town (0.5%), a condition often viewed as an indicator of sprawl development, although this condition is mitigated in Exeter by the overall small amount of development and the addition of affordable housing. The majority

of residential uses are single family housing units. It is not uncommon for property-owners to have a parcel with their home and also own adjacent parcels in forest, farm, or open space uses.

Different housing patterns are embedded in a matrix of forests and, to a lesser extent, fields.

- > **Small-lot development.** There are a few locations within Exeter with small-lot residential development. Assessor’s data show that 82 lots in town are smaller

than ¼ acre and 514 lots are between ¼ acre and 1 acre in size. Cedar Grove and a comparable subdivision off South Road are subdivisions developed before zoning was established in Exeter and reflect suburban development patterns of the 1970s and 1980s with many ranch-style houses. Properties have relatively small lots (typically one-quarter to one-half an acre) and are laid out in a small, connected



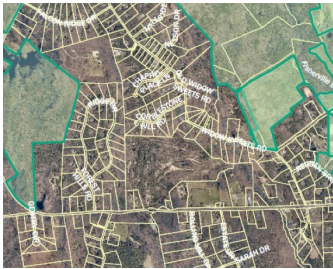
Cedar Grove development pattern
(source: Google Pro)



Boone Lake development pattern
(source: RIGIS)

street network. Boone Lake, like many New England ponds or lakes, was the site of a mill village in the second half of the nineteenth century and later became a summer cottage colony for people who lived in Connecticut or New York. Owners began to winterize the cottages at the end of the 1940s and today there are about 220 houses around the lake, mostly on 50-foot-wide lots. Another location with smaller residential lots is Black Plain Road, just east of I-95.

- > **Large lot development.** After the establishment of zoning in 1977, residential



Large-lot development pattern
(source: RIGIS)

development began to take on large-lot qualities, characterized by 2-to-5-acre lot minimums that accommodate private wells and septic systems.

The State began encouraging large lots to protect onsite wells from onsite waste water systems in the late 1970s.

- > **Traditional rural enterprise-style properties.**



Traditional large rural properties
(source: RIGIS)

Exeter still has a number of large properties that include activities such as forestry, agriculture, or hunting in addition to residential uses, typically enrolled

in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space tax-incentive program.

- > **Mobile home parks.** There are two mobile home parks in Exeter in which residents



Split Rock Mobile Home Park
(source: Google Pro)

own the mobile homes and rent the land: Split Rock Mobile Park, on South County Trail, which has 66 lots and Mobile Village on Victory Highway, which has 50 lots. Mobile

homes can also be found on individual lots where individuals own both the land and the mobile home.

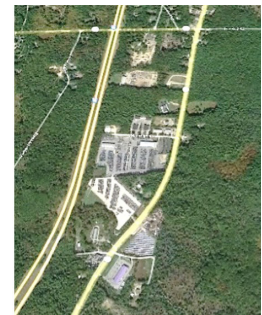
- > **Multifamily development.** There are 89 structures with 2 to 5 units in Exeter and only one with 6 or more units (Yawgoo Valley

Apartments, with 56 units). In addition, Pine View is a newly constructed multifamily development, 40 affordable apartments for income-eligible tenants located in 10 clustered buildings off Route 2/South County Trail just south of the Oak Harbor retail center.

- **Commercial and industrial development patterns.** Most businesses (other than home businesses) are located in the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors. As of 2022, there were 1,120.3 acres in these uses out of a total of 36,455.7 acres, of which 168.1 acres (15%) are vacant and developable. Most businesses (other than home businesses) are located in the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors.

- > **Commercial and industrial development.**

There is very little commercial and industrial development in Exeter, and it is often found mixed with residential development. For example, although Route 3 is predominantly commercial, it also includes a few residential buildings, and Black Plain Road, located between



Route 3 business development
(source: Google Pro)

Interstate 95 and Route 3, is predominantly small-lot residential with a smattering of businesses. Similarly, the southern end of Route 2 in Exeter has a mixture of business types at different scales of development, including a few office buildings and retail at Oak Harbor Village.



Black Plain Road and Route 3 business development
(source: RIGIS)

- > **The Ladd Center.** The former Ladd School property on 331 acres in eastern Exeter, including the Rhode Island Veteran's

Cemetery site, operated as a state institution for developmentally disabled people (with many controversial practices and conditions) until closing in 1993. The buildings have been demolished over time. After closing the school, the State proposed several redevelopment plans, such as a research and technology park, which was never built. It is currently a residential-training site for Rhode Island Job Corps, with 175 residents; the Rhode Island Fire Academy and Fire Marshal's Office; and a privately-owned residential addiction rehabilitation center with 84 beds (as of summer 2023) operated by Zinnia Health. The Ladd Center area is the only part of Exeter that has a public water supply. The system is sensitive because it is based on the Queen's River sole-source aquifer. (See *Section IV—Town Systems*) A joint State-Town master plan for the Ladd Center area is planned.

- **Private recreational uses.** There are two major recreational land uses in Exeter along with several hunting clubs and a camp.
 - > The Exeter Country Club on Ten Rod Road is a privately-owned 18-hole golf course open to the public, encompassing 331 acres.
 - > Yawgoo Valley Ski Area and Water Park, with 42.45 acres at 160 Yawgoo Valley Road, is the only ski area in Rhode Island and operates as a water park in the summer. Looking ahead to the potential impacts of climate change, the owners are considering new approaches to the recreational uses on their property which could include possible supportive hospitality, restaurant and agricultural uses.
 - > The Canonicus Camp & Conference Center is located on Exeter Road.
 - > Hunting clubs include the Warwick Sportsman's Association on Hog House Hill Road, Raccoon Hunters on Stony Lane, and the Narragansett Gun Club on Austin Farm Road.

- **Institutional and government uses**

- > As noted in *Element 10—Facilities, Services & Infrastructure*, Exeter's municipal government has few facilities and the two Volunteer Fire Departments own four fire stations, including one Dispatch center.
- > State-owned and operated institutional uses are located at the former Ladd Center land (the State Fire Marshal and Training Area, Job Corps residential training facility, and the Rhode Island Veteran's Cemetery) and in the Arcadia Management Area (RIDEM facilities.)

- **Utility-scale solar land uses**

- > Like many rural communities throughout New England, Exeter supports renewable energy and provides for rooftop and smaller-scale renewable solar energy. (See *Element 11.*) However, the Town does not want to see large areas of forest, farmland, or open space transformed into cleared sites for ground-mounted utility-scale solar farms.
- > Under Exeter's current renewable energy ordinance (Article XI), ground-mounted solar facilities of any size are required to undergo development plan review, and other review, if larger; have limits on lot coverage; and must meet other requirements.
- > Utility-scale solar projects are not permitted in residential districts.
- > Among the requirements for all solar facilities are screening to minimize aesthetic impacts, limited lighting, and decommissioning standards.
- > As of early 2023, Exeter contained these ground-mounted solar facilities:
 - ◆ Two existing ground-mounted solar projects built under a 2015 ordinance now superseded.
 - ◆ Three vested projects in permitting, one final and two preliminary (under versions of a 2018 ordinance).
 - ◆ Approximately eight or nine projects in litigation (under the 2018 ordinance).

- ◆ A small number of small- or medium-scale projects in permitting that require a special-use permit (current ordinance).

2023 State legislation included a new law (2023-H5853A) to protect “core forest” areas from ground-mounted solar. Core forest is defined as blocks of unfragmented and undeveloped forest land in single or multiple parcels of at least 250 acres that are at least 25 yards from mapped roads. Unfragmented forest blocks of 250 to 500 acres in Exeter were mapped by RIDEM in 2020 are shown in Figure 12-4. While many of these blocks are already in conservation areas, significant blocks east of I-95 may fall under the new prohibition of ground-mounted solar installations.

- **Controlled Environment Agriculture Greenhouse Uses**

- > As a result of a proposal to transform a highly visible traditional farming site (Schartner Farms) into 25 acres of Controlled Environment Agriculture Greenhouses, the Town developed a new approach to greenhouse agriculture in a 2023 zoning amendment. This project, RI Grows, would be a hydroponic tomato farm using automated systems, solar energy, and recycled water. CEA is increasingly established around the country, provides benefits for regional food systems, and is also part of the technological modernization of agriculture that improves its economic viability. However, although there is greenhouse production in smaller farms in Exeter, including a CEA-style operation, the scale and visibility of this proposal raised concerns. The town in 2023 adopted a zoning amendment to regulate certain types of agricultural greenhouses in three tiers corresponding to size and materials, uses, and technology.
 - ◆ Tier I (less than 2 acres under cover): Traditional greenhouses of a specified range of materials with less advanced heating, technology, and automated processes and no floor area dedicated to administration, warehousing, distribution, or loading docks.
 - ◆ Tier II (2 to 4 acres under cover): Greenhouses of a specified range of materials where the area under cover is limited to cultivation or protection of plants.
 - ◆ Tier III (greater than 4 acres under cover): For Controlled Environment Agriculture Facilities on eligible single-lot sites of at least 40 acres, in a RU-3 zoning district, and on Routes 2, 3, or 102 arterials. There are limits on removal of tree canopy, and the site must have previous agricultural use for at least 5 years.
- > CEA greenhouses are commercial structures, including related equipment and appurtenances that combine engineering, horticultural science, and computer management techniques to optimize hydroponics, plant quality, and food production efficiency from the land’s water for human or livestock consumption. Unlike Tier I or Tier II greenhouses, CEA generally has the following characteristics:
 - ◆ Advanced and intensive forms of hydroponically-based agriculture and automation to optimize horticultural practices in sophisticated climate-controlled buildings.
 - ◆ Often using rooftop rainwater.
 - ◆ Climate-controlled environment to make data-driven adjustments to maximize crop productivity, efficiency, and reduce production losses.
 - ◆ Often including floor area dedicated to administration, employees, washrooms, harvesting, grading, warehousing, and distribution alongside structured parking and loading docks.
- > Development standards include Dark Sky compliant, light pollution mitigation to

eliminate 99 % of supplemental grow lighting; a groundwater impact assessment; a water recycling plan; a traffic impact study; and plans for public safety, noise, order, waste management, operations and management

- > CEA sites contribute a Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) fee of \$10,000 per acre of greenhouse annually to a Town account to be used for new town buildings; conservation land acquisition; capital improvements to historic buildings owned by the Town; matching funds for RIDEM open space and recreation grants or similar uses.

2. EXISTING ZONING

Approaches to zoning

Communities today use a variety of zoning approaches to regulate development and achieve their goals for quality of life. Although Exeter uses conventional zoning for the most part, it has also found it useful to incorporate additional zoning tools and approaches in specific circumstances.

- **Conventional zoning.** Conventional zoning

separates land uses deemed incompatible and is prescriptive, in that it specifies land uses and required maximum or minimum dimensions, parking, and so forth. It is easy to implement both by governments and by property owners. Variances, conditional uses, special exceptions, bonuses and incentives, planned developments, and similar devices are intended to allow development to be more closely tailored to particular conditions and desired results. Many of these strategies exist in the Exeter Zoning Ordinance, such as the conservation subdivision ordinance.

- **Performance standards and zoning.**

Performance zoning has its origins in industrial performance standards that identified limits on measurable industrial impacts such as noise, vibration, light, dust, smells, and so on, and that were incorporated into zoning codes for industrial land uses. This idea was expanded in performance zoning to regulation of the effects of the built environment. The Exeter Zoning Ordinance contains performance standards for certain kinds of land uses, such as the new CEA greenhouse zoning.

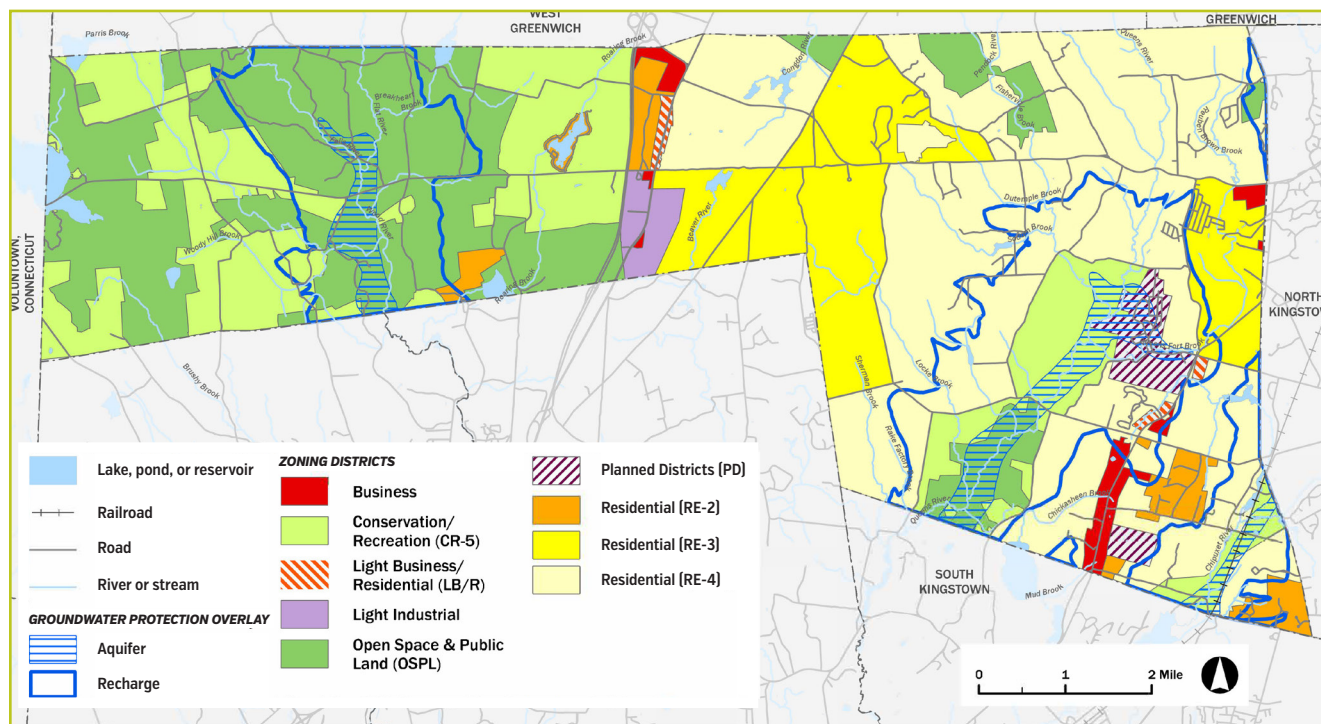


Fig. 12-7 Zoning and Overlay Districts. (Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

- **Form-based zoning.** Form-based zoning focuses more on building form than on land uses. Form-based zoning uses many visuals to give a positive vision of what is desired, rather than focusing on what should be excluded and usually includes a design-focused community process. Exeter's Planned Village Overlay District zoning includes aspects of form-based zoning.

A. Types of zoning districts in Exeter

Exeter has several types of zoning districts: base districts, overlay districts, planned districts, and a floating overlay district. According to Article II, Section 2, of the Exeter zoning ordinance, the boundaries of all zoning districts, including all overlay districts, are shown on the official zoning map. However, by definition, this is not the case for the floating overlay district.

- **Base zoning** is a district established in the zoning code that prescribes basic regulations governing land use and site development standards, such as dimensions.
- **Overlay zoning** districts superimpose an additional set of regulations over an existing base zoning district, or multiple zoning districts. Overlay districts are frequently used to protect sensitive environmental features, prevent development on unstable or vulnerable land features, or promote specific types of development. Like other zoning regulations, overlay districts can control building codes and design, permitted land use, density, and other factors. They impose standards and requirements that may be more or less restrictive than the base zone requirements.
- **Planned districts** are districts with special zoning controls for projects with special characteristics that need more controls than the base zoning. As defined in the Exeter zoning ordinance "the purpose of this [planned districts] zone is to provide control for the future business and industry, and special sites including the Ladd Center and Dorset Mill.

Included in this [planned districts] zone are village center districts, planned business and light industrial development districts. An additional purpose of this [planned districts] zone is to foster development given the unique nature of these zones as sites for future mixed-use development and sensitive environmental constraints. Any proposed use in this [planned districts] zone shall require a special use permit and be subject to development plan review requirements." Exeter's zoning ordinance contains several mapped planned districts that do not currently have specific uses detailed in the zoning table of uses or other development requirements..

- **Floating overlay districts** are unmapped zoning overlay districts adopted within the zoning ordinance that are added to the zoning map only on approval of an application for development that meets the floating-zone application requirements. The Planned Village Overlay District is the only floating overlay and has detailed eligibility, use and development requirements.

B. Base zoning districts and development alternatives

Residential zoning. Exeter's base zoning is predominantly residential and rural, with 2- to 4-acre lot minimums, in zones Residential (RE-2), Rural (RU-3), and Rural (RU-4). Residential uses with a 5-acre minimum are located west of I-95 in a Conservation/Recreation (CR-5) zoning district surrounded by state conservation land. Some non-residential uses, such as farming, forestry, and recreational uses, are also allowed in residential districts, whose purposes are:

- **RE-2:** provide adequate land suitable for residential development with densities to maintain an adequate water supply and suitable soil for individual septic disposal systems. This zone includes a few older developments with higher densities on lots smaller than 2 acres.
- **RU-3:** provide adequate land suitable for low-density (minimum 3-acre) residential rural

development blended with forestry, farming and recreational activities.

- **RU-4:** protect land now used for forestry, farming and related activities and natural habitat and wildlife and to preserve the area's rural character; suitable for low-density (minimum 4-acre) residential development and reserves land for future farming, forestry, conservation practices and recreational uses.
- **CR-5:** established as a separate district to preserve and protect an area abundant with natural resources, landscapes and sensitive soils having severe limitations, and to provide for a natural mixture of residential (minimum 5-acre) and recreational uses.

Alternative residential development zoning.

Exeter has also established other development options designed to offer alternatives to the base large-lot zoning and to reduce development impacts. These include provision for rural residential compounds, conservation subdivisions, and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). The village overlay should also be included in this section. The primary development within the proposed village will be a mixture of residential types.

- **Rural Residential Compounds.** This zoning allows flexibility for siting of low-density development, according to the uses in the base zoning, on large parcels in relation to the

natural, historic, and rural characteristics of the land. The minimum density is one lot per ten acres and at least 50 percent of the total land area must be designated as permanent open space. There are a few rural residential compounds in Exeter.

- **Conservation Developments.** Similarly, conservation developments are intended to promote conservation of environmentally sensitive, rural, and historic lands and characteristics. However, depending on the amount of open space provided, the ordinance allows for some increase in density. There are two conservation developments in Exeter.
- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).** ADUs are permitted in Exeter, with some restrictions, but there are very few existing ADUs. New state legislation passed in 2022 will require modification of the Exeter ordinance and the state legislature will be studying potential additional changes in the 2024 session.

Business zoning. Business zoning is found predominantly in the Route 2 and Route 3 corridors.

- **Business District B:** Areas for business and commercial activities to serve town residents, the community as a whole, and contiguous areas. Each business must contain, within its own lot, the wellhead protection for the well supplying all its water.
- **Light Business/Residential LB/R:** Area allowing the development of low-density commercial uses including residences by special use permit, home occupations and light business. It is intended to provide a buffer to the existing adjacent business uses. All uses are subject to development plan review requirements.
- **Light Industrial LI:** Areas that are geographically and topographically suitable for existing and future light industrial and allied uses with a maximum building capacity of 250 persons. Each industry must contain, within its own lot, the wellhead protection for the well supplying all its water.

Growth Management Ordinance and Impact Fees

In 2002 a growth management ordinance was adopted that limits the number of residential building permits per quarter and imposes impact fees related to school expenses (with exceptions for affordable and elderly housing). The ordinance was extended in 2012 and 2022. The Planning Board reports that there have never been enough residential permit applications in a quarter to activate a waiting list.

Conservation and recreation zoning

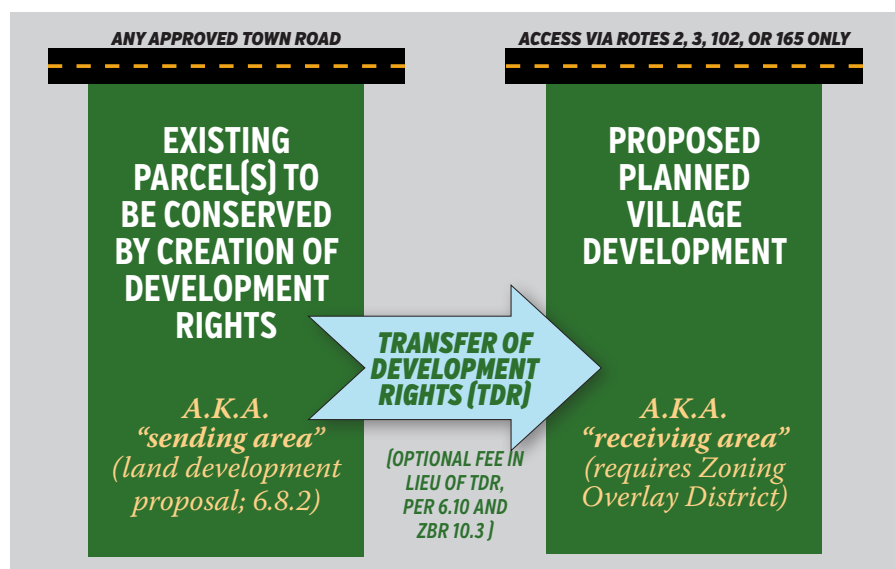
- **Open space and public land, OSPL:** State lands and other lands held for recreation, conservation and public access purposes and to afford future protection against the conversion of these lands to another use inconsistent with that now in existence.

Overlay districts

- **Groundwater protection overlay district, GWOL.** The GWOL zones are mapped overlays that show aquifer protection areas and recharge areas in order to preserve, protect and maintain the quality and quantity of groundwater supply and groundwater recharge areas of the Town of Exeter. The overlay districts require special permits for certain uses that “prove by clear, convincing and scientifically valid evidence that the proposed use will not result in concentrations of pollutants in the groundwater that will adversely affect the groundwater as a source of potable water.” Performance and design standards regulate drains, storage tanks, venting systems, loading areas, and waste areas. A groundwater protection plan is required. (See Article VII—Groundwater Protection Overlay District)
- **Transfer of Development Rights Sending Area(s) Overlay District (TDR).** This is a mapped overlay district that includes land related to Exeter’s purchase of the development rights to preserve farmland on the Bald Hill Nursery and for which the receiving area is land in North Kingstown. No other lands have yet been mapped as a TDR Sending Area Overlay District, though TDR from B, RE-2, RU-3, RU-4 and CR5 base districts is part of the

development process required in the Planned Village Overlay, which is a floating zone described below. (Also see Zoning, Article IV, Sec. 4.8)

- **Planned Districts.** The purpose of Planned Districts, as described in Article 2, Section 2.1.10 of the zoning ordinance “is to provide control for the future business and industry, and special sites.” The Ladd Center (including RI Veterans Cemetery), Dorset Mill, and an area east of South County Trail (740A and 740B South County Trail) are mapped on the zoning map as Planned Districts. These districts do not show base zoning and the ordinance states that all uses in Planned Districts require a special permit. The zoning use table does not provide any uses for these areas except for kennel businesses, solar energy, and marijuana cultivation/compassion centers. In contrast, the Planned Development Village Overlay District (PVOD) is a floating district with detailed standards and regulations in Article X of the zoning ordinance.
- **Planned Village Overlay District.** The Planned Village Overlay District is the only Planned District for which there are specific development requirements in the ordinance. It is a floating zoning district, designed to be established when



In a transfer of development right, the rights to develop one parcel are purchased and transferred to another site, preserving the original parcel in its undeveloped state. (Source: Town of Exeter)

there is a viable project for which boundaries are proposed. The purpose of the PVOD according to the ordinance is to implement the 2011 vision for compact development in any of three potential areas studied in the *A Vision for Exeter* study with pedestrian friendly, mixed-use development compatible with traditional New England village patterns. The PVOD concept is also dependent on a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) system, requiring TDR rights for any use that would increase residential development beyond what is allowed in base zoning. The idea was to encourage density in appropriate locations with the funds generated from the extra density via a TDR program to be used to purchase priority open space in Exeter. This would also reduce development pressure on Exeter's farms and forests. All undeveloped or agricultural properties in the B, RE-2, RU-3, RU-4 and CR5 districts could serve as sending zones. Moreover, a sufficient water supply for the village-level densities was expected to be negotiated with the State from the Ladd Center drinking water system.

3. COMPOSITE RESOURCE PRIORITIES

The analysis in Elements 4-6 covering natural resources, conservation, open space, recreation, and cultural resources, shows areas in Exeter that are already protected in combination with potential priority areas to protect important ecological, cultural, and recreational corridors. These locations, shown in Figure 12-8, should be taken into account in future land use planning.

4. BUILDOUT: ESTIMATED FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY UNDER EXISTING ZONING

Exeter's buildout analysis uses existing Census data, parcel data, geographical and environmental data, and relevant state and local regulations to project the maximum number of housing units that can be built in town (under base zoning), along with the estimated total population and year by which the buildout is complete. Following Rhode Island's *Comprehensive Planning Guidance Handbook*,¹

¹ RI Division of Statewide Planning (2021). *Comprehensive Planning Guidance Handbook Revised and Abridged. Appendix C, Sample Build-Out Methodology 2: Spatial Assessment.*

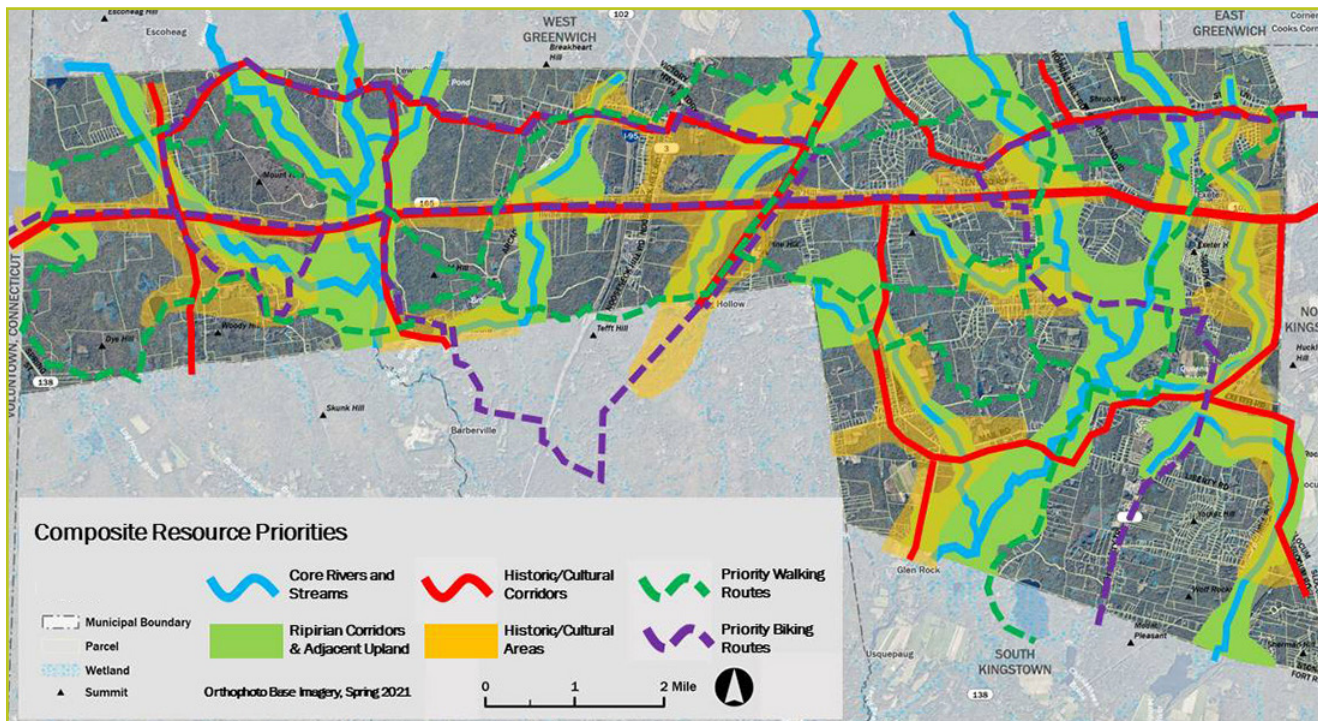


Fig. 12-8 Composite Resource Priorities: environmental, historic and cultural, and walking routes (Source: Dodson & Flinker)

the analysis starts with Exeter's total acreage for all parcels and follows a subtractive process to eliminate parcels that cannot be developed due to the existing land use and other physical and regulatory conditions. This is a buildout for base zoning and does not include potential discretionary uses such as density bonuses. The methodology used for the buildout analysis groups parcels together for an aggregate acreage for each zoning district, which assumes subdivision across parcel lines and likely exaggerates the total number of new units. Other methodological limitations may have increased or decreased the total number of new units, and findings should be taken with caution.

A. Key findings

- Under current base zoning, Exeter's total buildout would produce **2,404 new units, for a total of 5,051 units and a population of 13,143 by the year 2197, based on projecting existing development trends.** The pace of development in recent years has been modest and does not include growth potential that might occur by discretionary uses. When looking at buildout numbers, it is important to keep in mind that it is difficult to predict development trends in the future, and communities almost never reach full buildout because there are always some vacant properties for development or redevelopment.
- New units can be built on **10,879 acres** of unconstrained land on **532 parcels, representing about 29% of the town's total acreage and 17% of parcels.**
- **Nearly 60%** of this unconstrained land for the Buildout **is already developed and would need to be subdivided** for further development.
- The **remaining 42% is vacant land or land with a low improved value**, which may be redeveloped.
- **More than three-quarters** of Buildout land is currently enrolled in Rhode Island's **Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program (FFOS)**, which incentivizes owners not to develop their land, but which is non-binding and has no penalties for development after 10 years of enrollment in the program.

B. Definitions

- **Buildout.** The hypothetical state at which a municipality has developed all potentially developable land (given existing conditions and constraints) under existing zoning for residential use.
- **Committed Uses.** Parcels that are restricted from other uses by deed or are otherwise unlikely to change use. These may include land with conservation restrictions (Protected Land, see below); parcels unlikely to change use; and developed parcels that cannot be subdivided.
- **Developable.** A parcel considered to have no significant structure in use for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes (see also "Undeveloped"). For Exeter's Buildout analysis, developable land may include parcels otherwise identified as vacant or having an improved value of \$0. Parcels with an improved value between \$0 and \$100,000 (representing low-value improvements), may be considered "Developable" or "Redevelopable."
- **Developed.** A parcel considered to have a significant structure in use for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes. For Exeter's Buildout analysis, a parcel's status as "developed" is based on an improved value of \$100,000 or more.
- **Development Constraint.** A land use or physical or regulatory condition that may limit or prohibit development by increasing costs or technical difficulty beyond feasibility or by making it illegal. For Exeter's Buildout analysis, development constraints include committed uses, non-conforming undeveloped parcels, and physical and regulatory constraints.
- **Physical constraints:** Wetlands; hydric soils (soils that do not drain water well); steep slopes (greater than 25% incline); FEMA Q3 Flood Zones; rights-of-way for public roads, railroads, or utilities

- **Regulatory constraints:** Wetland Jurisdictional Areas ²
- **Eligible Developable or Redevelopable Parcels.** Parcels with potential for development or redevelopment based on having low improved values, no committed uses, and conforming with minimum lot size requirements. For Exeter’s Buildout analysis, “Eligible Undeveloped or Redevelopable Parcels” refer to parcels identified by preliminary subtractions of committed uses and non-conforming parcels, but before subtraction of development constraints.
- **Improvements or Improved Land.** A structure or other built addition to a parcel; the value of a parcel that is not attributed to the land itself.
- **Non-Conforming.** A parcel whose use and/or dimensions do not meet standards defined in Zoning regulations. For Exeter’s Buildout analysis, non-conforming parcels do not meet minimum lot size requirements defined in Zoning Table 2.4.2 Dimensional Regulations.
- **Protected Land.** Land that is restricted from development in the parcel deed (see “Committed Uses”)
- **Redevelopable.** A parcel that may have an existing structure, but whose improved value is low enough that it may be redeveloped for other use. For Exeter’s Buildout analysis, redevelopable parcels are considered to have an improved value of less than \$100,000 but are not considered to be vacant.
- **Subdividable.** A parcel with an area that is at least two times the size of the minimum lot size defined in Zoning regulations. The threshold for subdividable parcels is determined by Zoning Table 2.4.2 Dimensional Regulations.
- **Unconstrained.** Land that does not have any development constraints
- **Undeveloped.** A parcel considered to have no significant structure in use for residential,

commercial, or industrial purposes (see also “Developable”). For Exeter’s Buildout analysis, undeveloped land may include parcels otherwise identified as vacant or having an improved value of \$0. Parcels with an improved value between \$0 and \$100,000, may be considered “Undeveloped” or “Redevelopable”.

- **Vacant.** A parcel identified by land use codes as having no development in use. For Exeter’s Buildout analysis, vacant land is identified by land use codes assigned by the Tax Assessor.

C. Buildout maps

Calculations for the total housing units at Buildout in Exeter are based on a methodology outlined in Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Planning Guidance Handbook, using a combination of spatial and mathematical analysis. ³ The analyses start with Exeter’s total acreage for all parcels and follow a subtractive process to eliminate parcels that have committed uses or are otherwise constrained from development by physical or regulatory conditions.

D. Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program and buildout potential

Of the 10,879 acres of unconstrained land considered possible for Buildout, 77% belong to parcels enrolled in Rhode Island’s Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program (FFOS). Figure 12-13, below, shows the high percentage of buildout area currently enrolled in the program. Because FFOS parcels are not permanently protected, it would be valuable for the Town to engage with landowners to discuss options such as conservation programs and Transfer of Development Rights.

³ *RI Division of Statewide Planning (2021). Comprehensive Planning Guidance Handbook Revised and Abridged. Appendix C, Sample Build-Out Methodology 2: Spatial Assessment.*

² *RI Code of Regulations (2023). Title 250–DEM, Ch 150 – Water Resources, Subchapter 15–Wetlands, Part 3–Rules and Regulations Governing the Administration of the Freshwater Wetlands Act, 3.5.2 Jurisdictional Area*

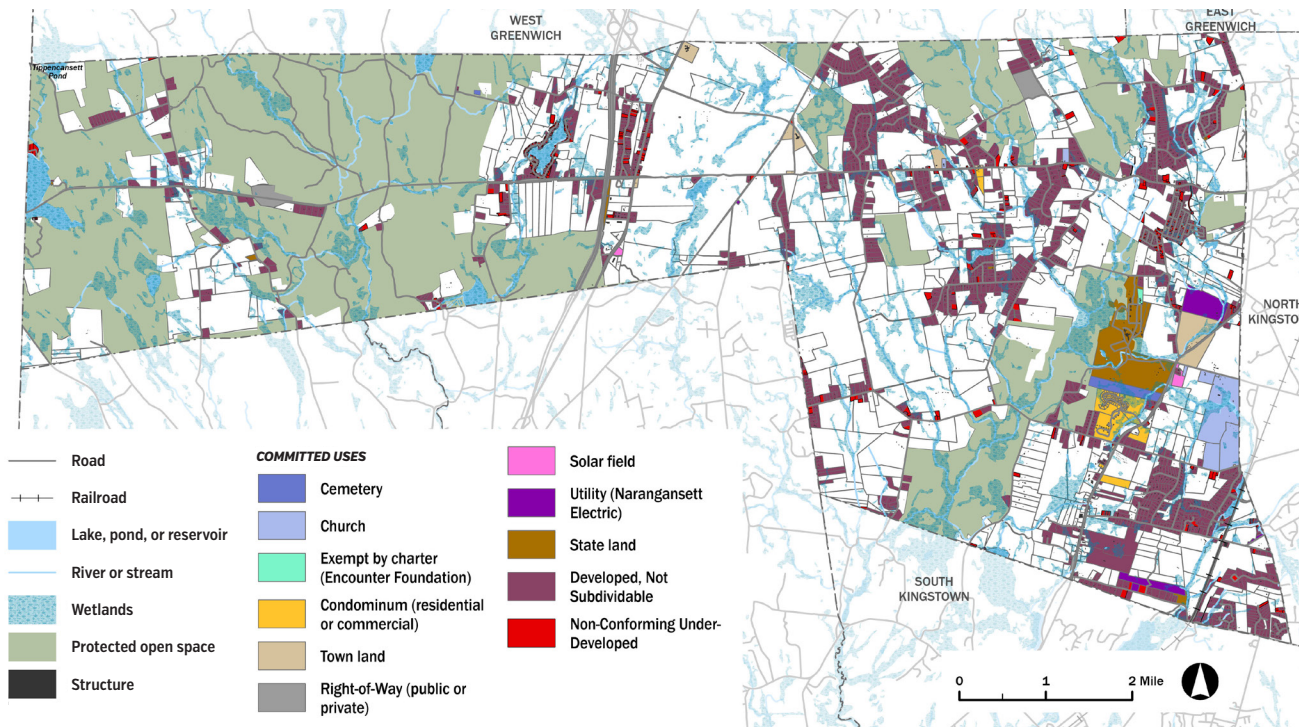


Fig. 12-9 Committed Uses. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

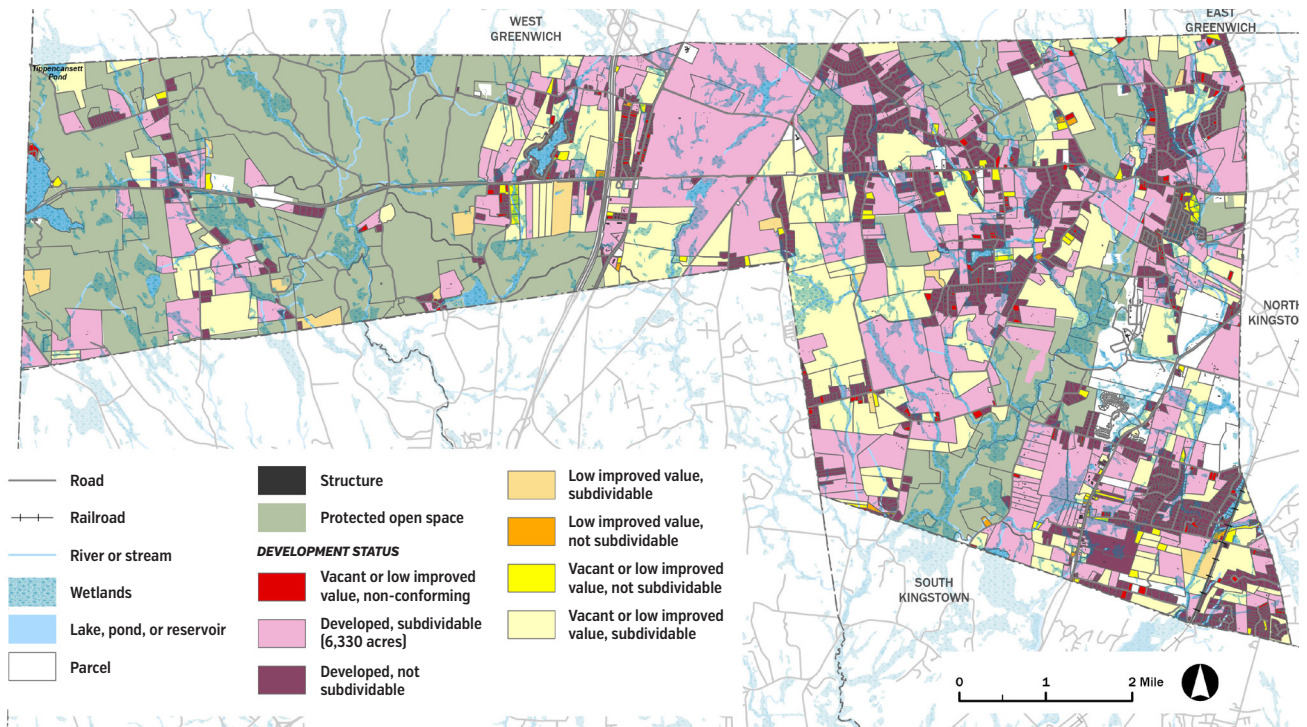


Fig. 12-10 Development Status. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

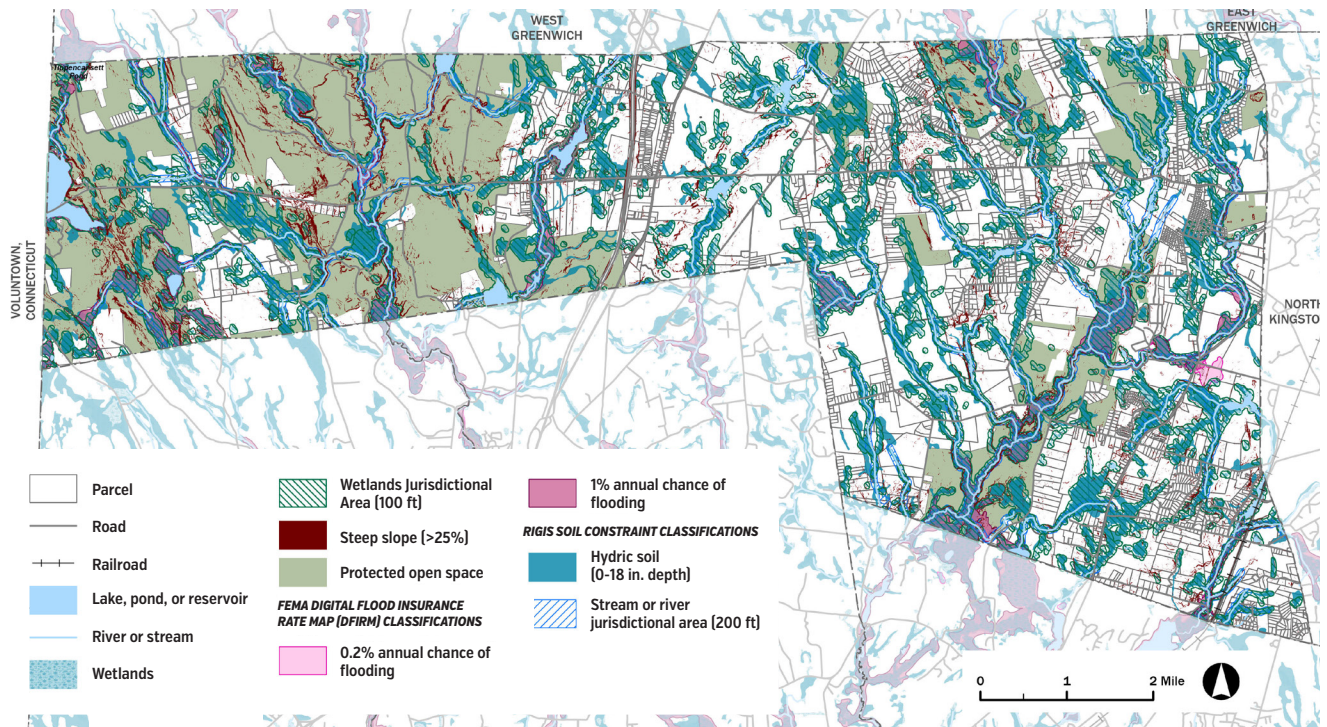


Fig. 12-11 Development Constraints. (Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

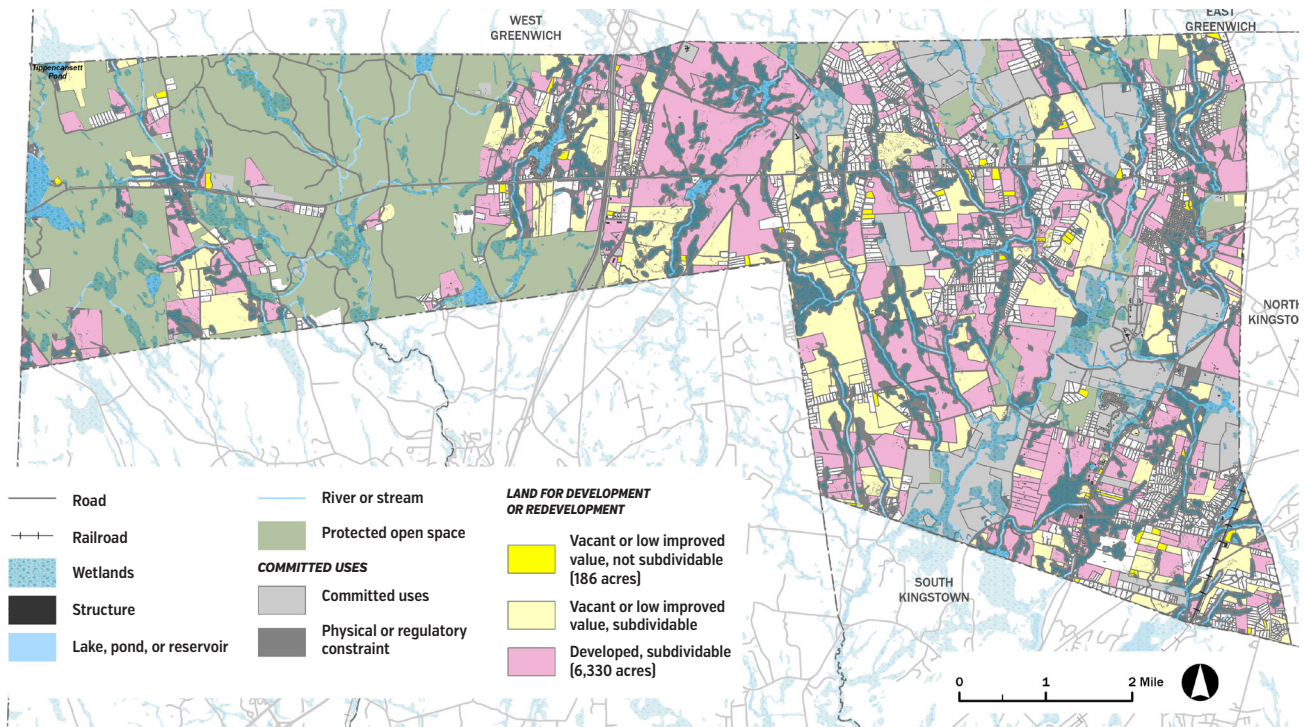


Fig. 12-12 Buildout. (Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center | Map: Dodson & Flinker)

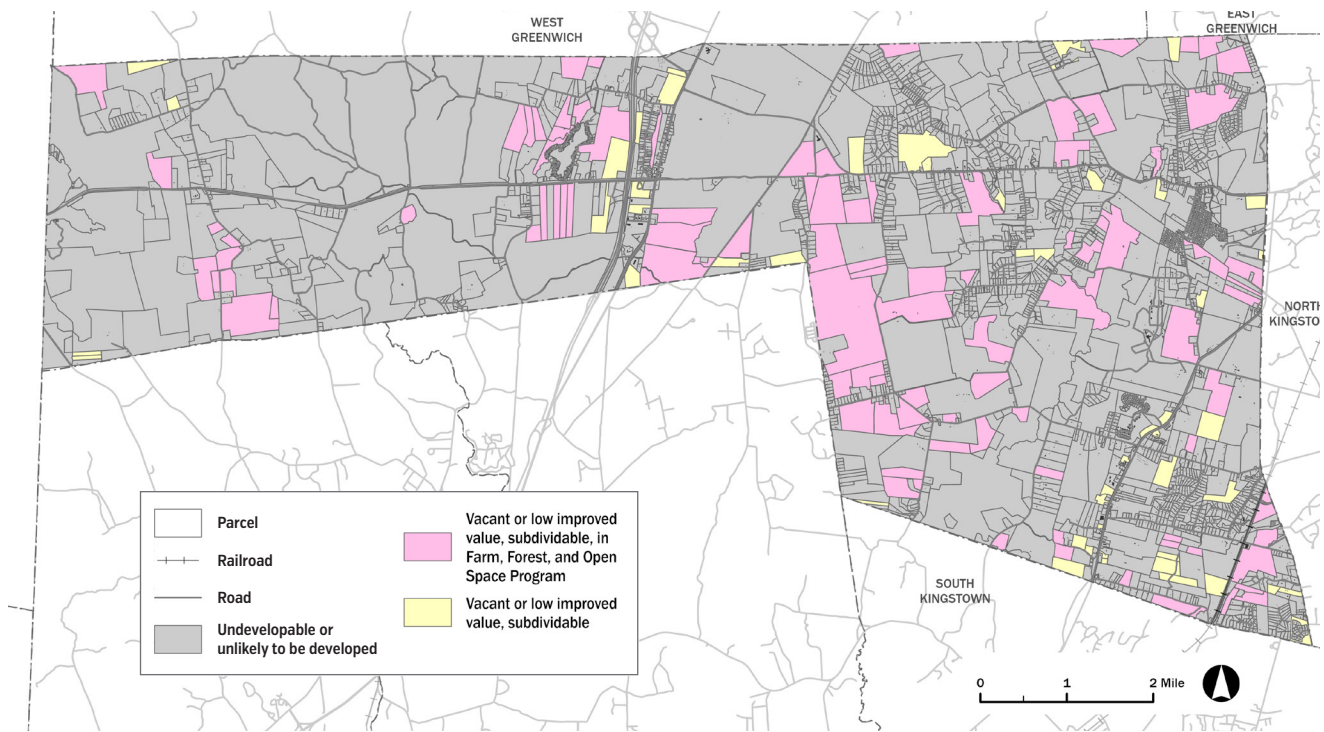


Fig. 12-13 Developable Land in the State's Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

CHALLENGES

1. COMPLIANCE WITH 2023 LEGISLATIVE CHANGES AFFECTING LAND USE

The 2023 state legislative session focused on policies and legislation intended to promote housing development and other statewide land use policy changes. The legislature established affordable housing and land use commissions and working groups on zoning, comprehensive planning, and subdivisions. The commissions have been continued into 2025 and may result in additional changes in the future.

In Exeter's case, the adoption of the Exeter 2044 comprehensive plan is expected to coincide with the effective dates of the State legislation. Towns are also required to make their zoning codes consistent with any changes on their comprehensive plan Future Land Use Map within 18 months of adoption. For a small community like Exeter, this will constitute a significant time

burden on the Planning Board and Exeter staff, and consistency with state legislation will take priority.

The legislation with impacts on Exeter includes the following.

A. Amendments to the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act

- Comprehensive plans shall include "specific goals, implementation actions, and time frames for development of low- and moderate-income housing." (See Element 7—*Housing*)
- The comprehensive plan implementation program must include a five-year strategic plan for timely implementation and annual review of the strategic plan. (See Element 13—*Stewardship and Implementation*)
- There is a deadline of 18 months to bring the zoning map into compliance with the future land use map in the comprehensive plan.
- The amended Act provides explicitly that the future land use map in a valid comprehensive plan shall govern all local municipal land use decisions.

- The future land use map governs all municipal land use decisions. Comprehensive plans must be fully updated and re-adopted within 12 years in order for the plan to serve as the basis of a denial of a development application.
 - **Effects on Exeter:** Exeter will need to schedule actions to comply with these changes. The implementation program of this comprehensive plan is organized into two five-year strategic plans and a set of longer-term implementation actions for the final ten years of the plan's 20-year planning horizon that continues to be required for the comprehensive plan. The Planning Board will be required to perform an annual review of the strategic plan. (This could occur simultaneously with an annual report to the Town on Planning Board activities, as discussed in *Element 10—Public Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure*.) The Act still requires a five-year implementation report to the State Planning Office, though there is no penalty for failing to comply. It should be easy to compile a five-year report from annual reviews. (Since 2011, the State approval period for comprehensive plans has been ten years.) With this new legislation, if Exeter wants the comprehensive plan to be used as a basis for denial of a development application, the Town must prepare for updating and re-adopting the plan by 2036.
- B. Amendments to the Zoning Enabling Act**
- Standards for granting a dimensional variance are more flexible, so that it is no longer required to demonstrate that the hardship basis for a variance is not primarily financial; that the relief granted is the least relief necessary; and clarifies some language about minimal relief.
 - Requires municipalities to allow the granting of a special use permit in conjunction with a variance.
 - Requires that every use that requires a special use permit provide explicit "specific and objective criteria." Otherwise the use becomes a permitted use.
 - Requires municipalities to provide for the issuance of dimensional modifications, allowing up to 15% of dimensional modification; 15-25% dimensional modifications may be allowed. The standards and public notice requirements for granting a modification have also been changed.
 - Municipalities must provide a procedure whereby a use that is not specifically listed in the zoning ordinance can be presented to the zoning board of review or the zoning official for review and approval.
 - Provides for reduced dimensional requirements for nonconforming lots, and prohibits automatic merger of lots in some cases
 - **Effects on Exeter:** Compliance with the new state requirements will require a review of Exeter's use of special permits and requirements for dimensional modifications. In the Exeter zoning ordinance, a set of general criteria are listed for Planning Board and Zoning Board evaluation of special use permits, such as no adverse impacts on neighboring uses and environmental conditions, use of best practices, and consistency with the comprehensive plan. Considerations include, but are not limited to, soil erosion, water supply protection, stormwater runoff, wastewater disposal, wetland protection, traffic limitation, safety and circulation. (Article I, Sec. 1.3F.) Fifty-nine of the permitted 77 uses listed in the zoning use table include special permit designations for these uses in at least one zoning district. Specific and objective criteria are not spelled out except for groundwater protection overlay zones, for cell/communications towers, and in the Planned Village Overlay District zoning. A possible approach to the special permit issue is to organize the use definitions into use categories rather than individual uses.

C. Amendments to the Development Review Act

- The amendments significantly alter the review and approval process for all application types (Development Plan Review), subdivisions, and land development projects).
- Municipalities are required to adopt unified development review, the Planning Board is empowered to grant zoning relief, and appeals of Planning Board decisions go directly to Superior Court (rather than the Zoning Board). A development may no longer be subject to both DPR and land development project review for the same application.
- The legislation defines and standardizes the process for development plan review (DPR) and more decisions can be made on the administrative level (administrative officer to the Planning Department).
- Definitions for subdivisions and land development projects are standardized:
 - > Minor subdivision/land development projects:
 - ♦ 9 or fewer housing units
 - ♦ 7,500 or fewer gross square feet new commercial, manufacturing or industrial development
 - ♦ 50% expansion of existing nonresidential structure up to 10,000 sf
 - ♦ mixed-use development up to 6 dwelling units and up to 2,500 sf commercial space
 - ♦ multifamily residential or condominium of 9 or fewer units
 - ♦ adaptive reuse in a residential zone resulting in fewer than 9 units
 - ♦ up to 7,500 gross square feet of floor area of new commercial manufacturing or industrial development
 - ♦ change in use with no extensive construction
 - ♦ adaptive use projects up to 25,000 sf in a commercial zone with no exterior new construction
 - > Major subdivision/land development project: projects that exceed the thresholds for minor subdivision/land development projects (e.g., subdivisions with 10 or more housing units).
- Review procedures:
 - > Minor subdivisions/land development projects have a two-stage review (no master plan stage) with an administrative final review.
 - > Major subdivisions/land development projects have a three-stage review: master plan (with public hearing), preliminary plan review, and final plan review.
- **Effects on Exeter.** Exeter will need to make changes to definitions, procedures (unified development review will be a new procedure), dimensional modifications, and new thresholds in relevant locations in the ordinance. The changes in the thresholds for minor and major projects have the potential to make a difference in development character should there be more development demand in Exeter than has been the case over the last ten to fifteen years.

D. Amendments to the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act

- The new legislation includes changes to the appeal process, procedural changes, and changes to the definition of municipal subsidy relative to density
- Inclusionary zoning rule changes are extensive:
 - > Minimum threshold no more than 10 units
 - > More units per acre for all projects subject to inclusionary zoning
 - > At least 25% of total units must be affordable
 - > Definitions and minimum thresholds for density bonuses (at least 2 market rate units for each affordable unit and no requirement to seek relief from the minimum lot area per dwelling unit), zoning incentives, and municipal subsidies (previously undefined)

- > Payment of fee in lieu of affordable units is not eligible for density bonuses
- > In lieu payments to the municipality to be used within 3 years of collection under ordinance process or funds go to RI Housing (previously two years)
- > Requires municipalities to pass by ordinance the process it will use to allocate in-lieu payments.
- **Effects on Exeter.** Exeter has an inclusionary zoning ordinance that has different rules. Municipalities are not required to adopt inclusionary zoning. Exeter's former inclusionary zoning ordinance would require significant changes to comply with the new state legislation. The Town elected to revoke its inclusionary zoning ordinance. Because the changes to the inclusionary zoning elements of the Low and Moderate Income Act are interrelated and interacting, they must be evaluated to determine potential development effects, particularly given Exeter's lack of public water and wastewater services. In addition, the Town is working on facilitating low- and moderate-income housing development in minor subdivisions, where most development is actually occurring in Exeter.

2. THE FUTURE OF LARGE PARCELS OF LAND

Two-thirds of potential buildout land is enrolled in the FFOS tax-incentive program. There remain significant properties composed of hundreds of acres in Exeter. In many cases, a generational change in ownership is likely to occur in the next few decades. The land is often property owners' major asset for retirement and to pass on to heirs. In many cases however, heirs may not want to keep the land for a variety of reasons. As a financial asset, the land is worth more for development than as farm or forest land. Rhode Island has some of the most expensive farm

land in the country and limited government and nonprofit funding for farm or forest preservation. While some owners have a transition plan for their land, others do not.

The Town must give consideration to how these changes may affect the character of Exeter and how the Town can work with property owners to preserve priority resources and landscapes valued by most people in Exeter. At present, there is no entity in Exeter that engages with owners of large properties in town about plans and options for generational transitions that respect the interests of all groups, treatment of development rights, affordable housing, conservation opportunities and so on. Lacking a Conservation Commission with responsibility for developing an open space plan and monitoring development in relation to priority environmental resources means there is no proactive approach to preserving "rural character," the one value strongly espoused by the majority of residents

3. PLANNED VILLAGE OVERLAY

The plan for a mixed-use village was intended to accomplish two aims: give Exeter a walkable center like the historic town centers found in most New England towns, and drive development to this center by combining it with a Transfer of Development Rights program that would protect rural character in traditionally agricultural and open space lands. The hoped-for village center has not attracted developer interest for a variety of reasons mentioned earlier, many of which the Town cannot directly control. However, it is worth reviewing the site design standards, development framework and process to see if there are ways to make the development more attractive to investors and less complex while preserving the town's goals. There may be opportunities for more flexibility that could

attract interest when the drinking-water question is resolved and market conditions are right. (See Element 7— *Housing* and Element 8—*Economic Development*.)

4. TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

The village ordinance does not describe how the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) process is expected to work, nor does the Town's separate TDR ordinance. The Town's TDR language, while well-intentioned, has resulted in a complex and confusing process that may hinder its effectiveness. It is suggested that the TDR ordinance be revised to simplify and enhance its user-friendliness, thereby improving its overall efficiency. Similarly, revision is needed to the village zoning and to Section 6 of the Exeter Land Development and Subdivision regulations, which includes procedures on how to create and measure development rights in terms of detached single-family units (yield), determination of a TDR land value score, a transfer ratio for sending-area lands score related to number of housing units allowed, sending-area deed restrictions, and procedures for transferring rights to a receiving area. According to the Planning Board, the village development process does not explicitly appear in the Exeter Code of Ordinances but was intended to work as follows: If a developer wants more density, they pay a fee commensurate with the extra density. The funds would go to the Rural Land Preservation Trust to be leveraged with State and federal sources to buy important open space. The land trust currently has no source for matching State and federal open-space-preservation funds. The TDR program could supply this critical match to allow the land trust to be more active in acquiring land.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is based on the current Existing Land Use Map and is consistent with *Land Use 2025*, the State plan. Except for a small area in southeast Exeter, the town lies outside the Urban Service Boundary and has no public water or sewer service except for the state-owned water system at the Ladd Center. That water system is managed by the Quonset Development Corporation, which operates, inspects, and maintains the various components of the water supply, treatment, and distribution systems for both the Quonset Business Park and Ladd Center public water systems (PWS) on the former Ladd Center property.

Because of Exeter’s rural character and its lack of public drinking water and wastewater infrastructure (except for the Ladd Center), it makes sense to continue the existing approach to distribution of general land use categories while providing for certain other land uses or more intense land uses through alternative development options meeting eligibility criteria within the overall land use categories. Exeter has provided for some of these alternatives through rural compound and conservation subdivision zoning, and the floating Village Overlay District zoning. The additional existing “planned district” zoning designation, which is mapped in some cases, is inadequate because criteria and requirements are not specified.

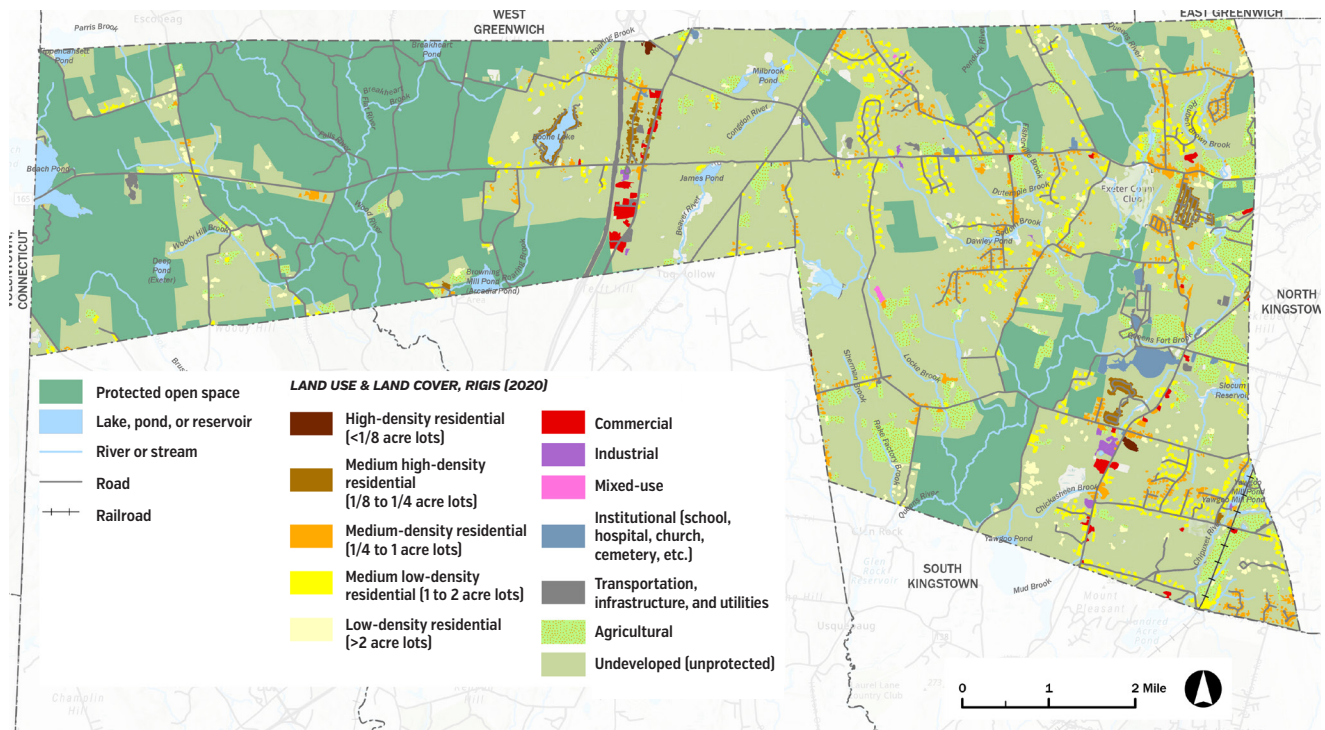


Fig. 12-14 Future Land Use. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

A. Zoning consistency with the FLUM

The Zoning Consistency Map shows that FLUM geographies for desired land use and base zoning category boundaries do not differ from the Existing Land Use Map. The map mirrors the Existing Land Use Map and the FLUM in residential uses by density, rural uses (agriculture and forestry, conservation and open space uses, and commercial and industrial uses. The distribution of desired land use categories remains in place. Prospective regulatory changes during the 20-year horizon of this comprehensive plan focus on providing more specific and nuanced approaches to development in areas that are existing mapped planned districts or eligible to be unmapped floating planned overlay districts. These areas are shown on the map of Proposed Area Master Plans.

To provide these specific and nuanced regulatory approaches, mapped and overlay planned districts need to undergo more detailed and community-based planning processes from which proposed additional zoning may emerge that could require amendments to the comprehensive plan and the zoning ordinance. To accomplish these planning projects and write the appropriate zoning will require more time than is available in the 18-month window following plan approval for the kind of zoning boundary changes envisioned by state legislation.

B. Special issues and areas

1. ACCESSORY USES FOR FARM AND FOREST LANDOWNERS

Unlike other towns in Rhode Island that continue to have agricultural uses (such as Richmond, Hopkinton, South Kingstown, and Glocester), Exeter does not allow some accessory uses that help support the financial sustainability of farm and forest lands. The agriculture survey and focus group indicated interest in more accessory uses and some other issues, such as dimensions of farm stands. Exeter initiated a study in 2017 to

assess an ordinance to allow small-scale business uses for farm and forest landowners. These would be subordinate to and in conjunction with agricultural, horticultural, or forestry use and might include limited activities, festivals, events, farmers market, retail sales, garden center, game preserve, farm-to-table dinners, and secondary processing of agricultural, horticultural, and silvicultural products. Bed-and-breakfast, campground, boarding camp, country inn, and rural resort would not be allowed.

Exeter should revisit the work that has been already done as a starting point and work with farm and forest land owners to craft an ordinance that works for Exeter and would be applicable to agricultural and forest enterprises located in rural residential zoning districts.

2. SPECIAL ZONING: OVERLAY ZONES, FLOATING ZONES, AND SPECIAL PLANNED DISTRICT ZONES

“Planned Districts” give the town an opportunity to plan for special kinds of development to make sure that they benefit the town while balancing development with protecting the overall preferred rural character in most of the town. “Planned Districts” should be governed by their own area master plans. However, in the zoning ordinance they are currently set up as a zoning district with a few separate uses, as noted earlier. Except for the Planned Village Development Overlay District, the existing PD zones do not provide enough guidance and specificity in the zoning ordinance. All area master plans must include a robust participation program for landowners, residents and businesses, and other stakeholders.

- **Create a separate definition of Floating Zones.** As currently written, the Exeter Zoning Ordinance does not explicitly distinguish between mapped Overlay Districts and Floating Zones. The Exeter Zoning Ordinance should contain a separate definition for

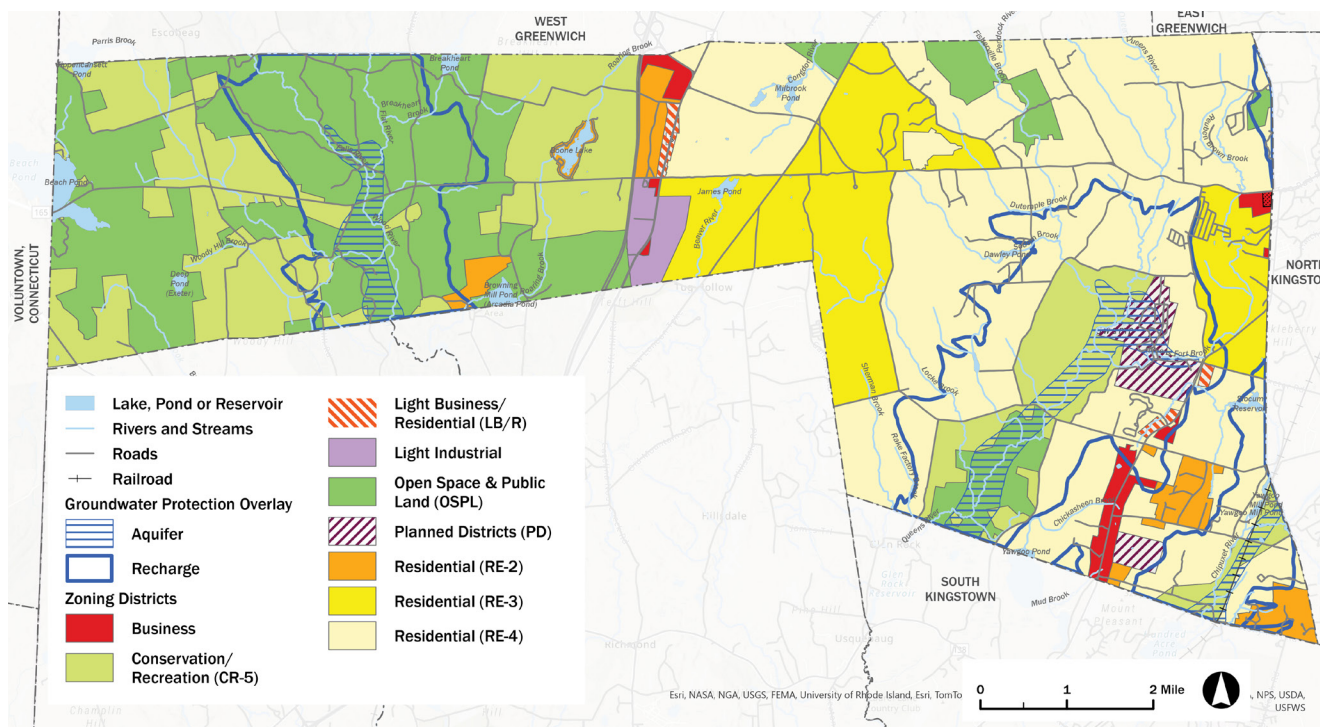


Fig. 12-15 Zoning Consistency. [Source: Town of Exeter; RIGIS | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

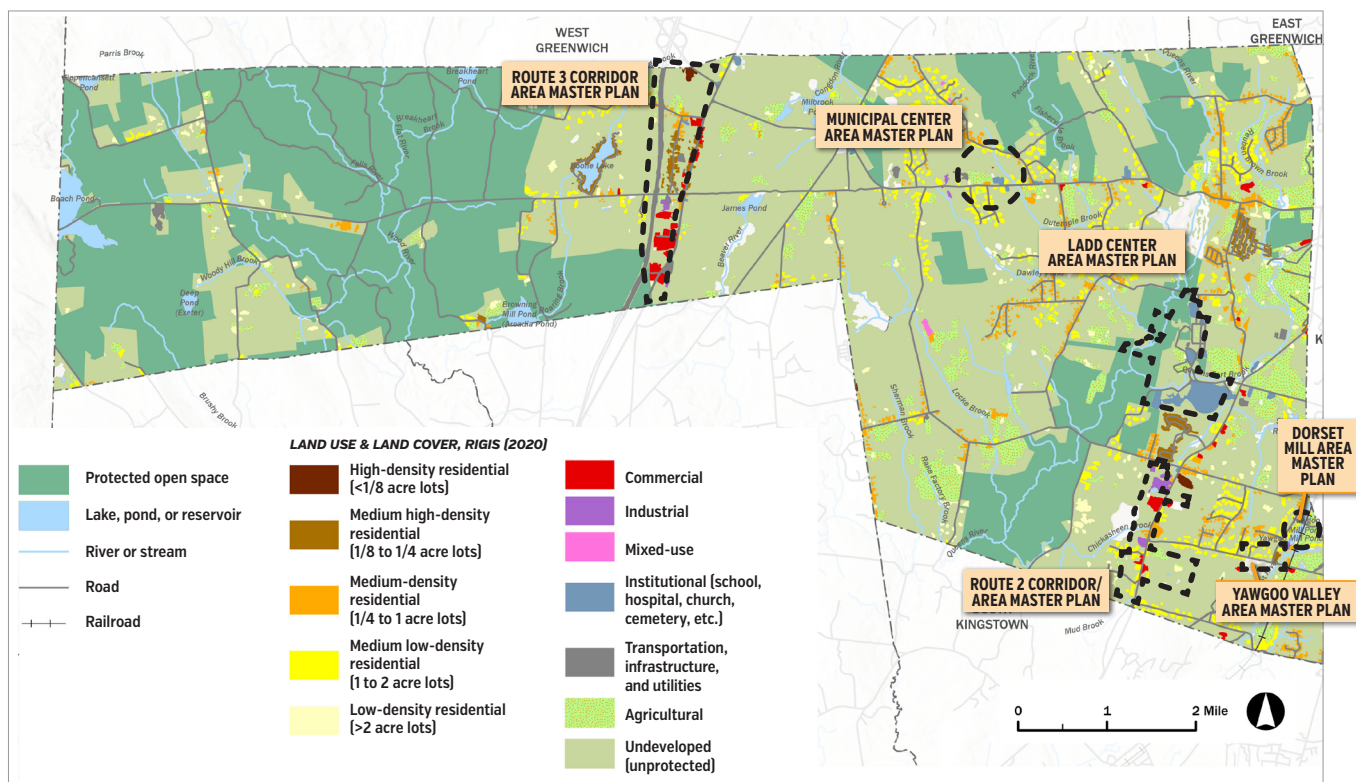


Fig. 12-16 Future Area Master Plans. [Source: LBA; Town of Exeter; RIGIS | Map: Dodson & Flinker]

Floating Zones (to comply with state law). An example is the language found in the Newport zoning ordinance: “Floating Zone means an unmapped zoning overlay district adopted within the Ordinance that is established on the zoning map only when an application for development, meeting the floating zone application requirements is approved” followed by language on the floating zone’s being subject to Planning Board review and approval.

- > **Existing Floating Zones.** The only existing floating zone is the Planned Village Overlay District. The PVOD designation should be retained but reviewed for possible future enhanced flexibility.
- > **New Floating Zones.** This comprehensive plan proposes a Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan that could result in two new floating zones to accommodate certain types of development: an Interstate Floating Overlay District (see Element 8—*Economic Development*) and a Route 3 Floating Enhancement District to cover the Route 3 corridor from Austin Farm Road to the Town of Richmond border to include a mixture of uses and serve as a visitor gateway to nature recreation in the Arcadia Management Area. This area master plan would combine multiple goals in one project: economic development and commercial area improvement, multifamily housing, and creation of an outdoor recreation hub; light industrial businesses to take advantage of excellent I-95 access; and transportation improvements (a road diet—conversion to two travel lanes and one turning lane—plus bicycle and pedestrian facilities, as outlined in the RIDOT Bicycle Plan). The area master plan would require participation by property owners, residents and business owners, and state agencies, as well as Town government.

Fig. 12-14 Example Use Table

| SPECIAL PLANNED DISTRICTS | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| SPD1: <i>Dorset Mill</i> | SPD2: <i>Ladd Center</i> | SPD-3: |

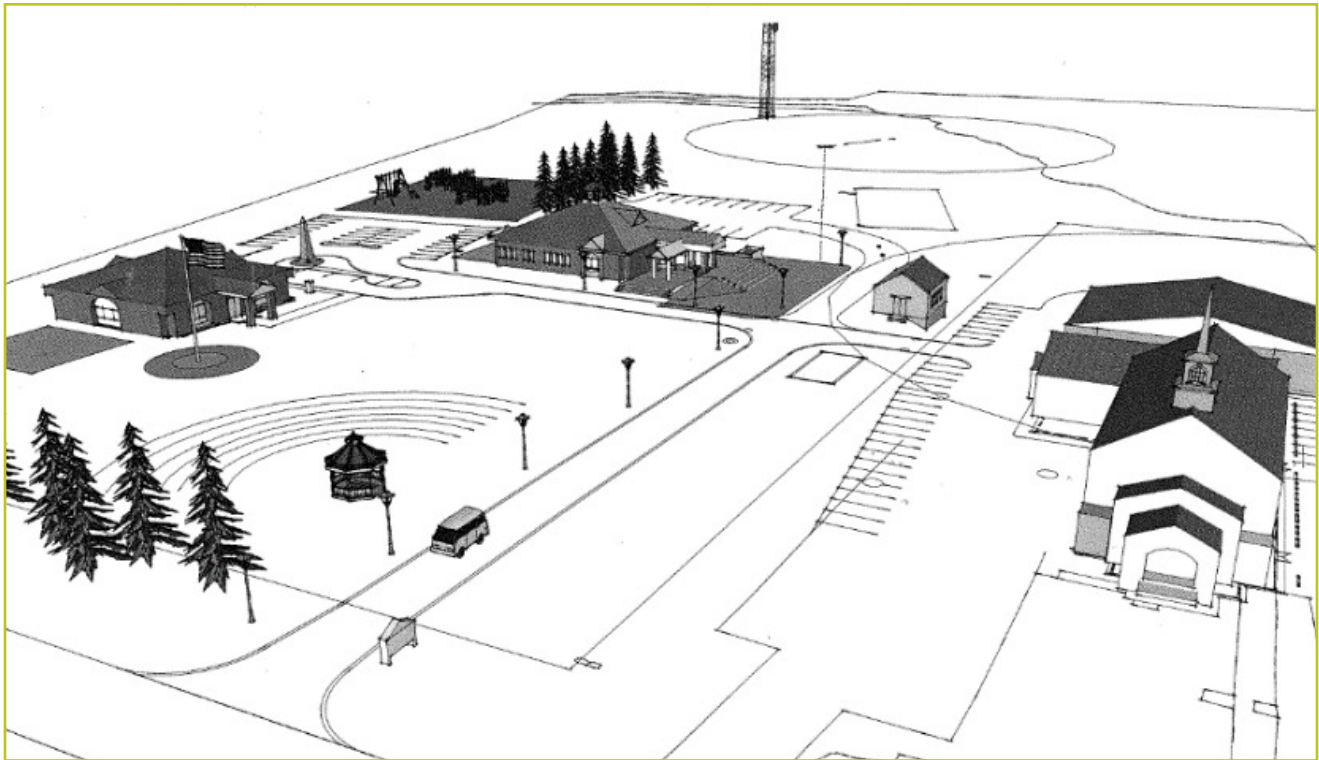
- **Create a new definition: Special Planned Districts.**

Rename the Planned District category as “Special Planned District.” The existing Planned District Zones will require an Area Master Plan. Study existing mapped Planned District zones to identify the uses, criteria, and design standards appropriate for the kind of development desired by the Town. Amend the current ordinance to assign a yes, no, or special use permit to every use category in the PD district and work to refine the PD districts that can be numbered and named within the use table: for example, SPD 1 Dorset Mill, SPD 2 Ladd Center, and so on, as subcategories of the PD zoning district.

- > **Existing mapped Planned Districts**

- ♦ The Ladd Center Planned District is an existing mapped planned district. A joint State-Town Area Master Plan is underway to include a mixture of uses and infrastructure planning. New base zoning may be suitable, such as an underlying zoning district called Public Institutional (PI) zoning
- ♦ Review the purpose of the existing mapped planned district adjacent to Route 2 and, if





Sketch plan for the Municipal Center. [Source: Exeter Planning Department]



Yawgoo Valley Ski and Water Park all-seasons concept plan [Source: Ski Pro, Inc.]

appropriate, develop specific and objective criteria for development to achieve the purpose. There is no current information on the original intentions behind creating this mapped planned district. This should be done in conjunction with a corridor master plan for the southern end of Route 2.

- ♦ The current uses in the existing mapped Dorset Mill Planned District are appropriate. Rename it a Special Planned District and provide specific and objective criteria for planned uses and design standards in order to have review of any future applications to change the character and uses.
- > **New Special Planned Districts**
 - ♦ Create a Municipal Center Special Planned District linked to an area master plan in the Library area. A new Town Hall is being proposed for this location, including potential purchase of property across Ten Rod Road, moving the historic Old Town Hall to this area, and possibly a new community center, which is also being discussed for that general location. The master plan would provide specific and objective criteria and design standards for this area. This location is technically already part of the PVOD as a possible site for the town center.
 - ♦ Create a Yawgoo Valley Special Planned District by working with the owners in their development of a new master plan for the continued future viability of this Exeter institution and economic resource. Linked to the master plan, the special planned district would provide specific and objective criteria and design standards for this area.

3. REWRITING THE ZONING ORDINANCE

Zoning ordinances and development regulations need updating and reorganizing from time to time, particularly after adoption of a comprehensive plan. Incremental amendments over the years can introduce inconsistencies, ambiguity, and confusion—and sometimes produce disappointing outcomes. As communities change, so do their land use goals. Unanticipated consequences of previous decisions may need to be corrected. The Exeter Zoning Ordinance needs to be updated, modernized, and reorganized to make it more user-friendly and functional with cross references, modern use categories, and improved design standards clarified with diagrams and illustrations as well as to bring it in compliance with the laws the General Assembly enacted in the 2023.

The zoning rewrite should include several phases within a context of community engagement and stakeholder involvement:

Phase I: Audit of the existing ordinance.

- A technical analysis and evaluation of existing regulations including:
 - > How well the zoning districts match existing land uses and future land use policies
 - > How well the regulations implement established Town policy, and how well the regulations integrate with other ordinances and initiatives and meet public expectations
 - ♦ An analysis of structure, organization, clarity, and usability
 - ♦ Summary of “best practices” for key issues
 - ♦ Audit actual use table Audit PD shortfalls

Phase II: Develop and approve the text and illustrations.

- The ordinance will include conventional zoning where continuity is desired and appropriate; alternative residential options to preserve rural character and environmentally sensitive resources; and overlays, floating zones, and special planned districts that may have aspects of performance and form-based zoning for mixed-use and non-residential areas. Ensure compliance with the laws the General Assembly enacted in the 2023.
- Add unified development-review language.
- Provide simple, clear diagrams that illustrate key concepts and requirements. Strengthen design standards by making them direct, clear, and objective, and provide illustrations for key concepts.
- Refine the list of definitions.
- Cull old uses and add modern uses. Simplify and modernize the allowable-use tables by creating more generalized use categories to allow for emerging and new uses, for example “retail goods establishment” rather than specific types of stores. Other potential category changes could include :
 - > Specialty food production and commercial kitchens
 - > Industrial design, including creation of prototypes
 - > Artisanal industrial businesses such as intensive crafts, small-scale metalworking, glassblowing, furniture making, pottery, leathercraft, screen printing, and related activities
 - > Microproduction of alcohol, such as beer, wine, spirits, and cider, possibly with tasting rooms, restaurants and retail areas for beverages manufactured on site
 - > Research and development
 - > E-commerce warehouse, distribution and fulfillment
- Determine the process for review of uses not listed in the use table.
- Review all special-use permit categories and establish specific standards of review and performance for each one.
- Correct and amend overlay, floating, and planned-district zone language.

E. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 12-1

LAND USE REGULATIONS ARE USED TO PROTECT WATER QUALITY, PREVENT FLOODING, MAINTAIN FARMS/FORESTS AND PRESERVE ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS IN CONNECTED NETWORKS.

POLICIES

- Continue to use land use regulations to protect groundwater and surface water, wildlife habitat and corridors, most important forests and open space.
- Promote the use of conservation subdivisions in new development to encourage preservation of open space and avoid impacts to wetlands and water quality. Create connected corridors for habitat and recreation, and to preserve community character.

Goal 12-1 / Strategy A

Use land use regulations to ensure protection of sensitive environmental resources and rural character.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Protect groundwater drinking supplies, recharge areas, and surface waters.

- **Protect groundwater drinking supplies, recharge areas, and surface waters.**
- **Continue to enforce aquifer protection and recharge areas through the zoning code**
- **Continue to maintain low-density residential development and use conservation development and residential compounds to minimize impacts on water quality.**
- **Continue to evaluate and apply performance standards to address groundwater as part of Land Development Plan project review.**
- **Continue to implement, and update as needed the required Stormwater Management Plan for the regulated MS4 area. (See Element 10.)**
- **Promote stormwater Best Management Practices in all Town construction and drainage projects and promote them to private property owners through education and regulation. (See Element 10.)**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board; DPW; Administrative Officer, Zoning inspector; Building inspector | RI DEM; Staff and volunteer time |

Goal 12-1 / Strategy A (continued)

Use land use regulations to ensure protection of sensitive environmental resources and rural character.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|--|
| ii. Protect environmentally sensitive lands and connected corridors by providing guidance in design standards for development. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Planning Board | Staff and volunteer time; Conservation Commission open space plan; nonprofit partners |

Goal 121-1 / Strategy B

Promote open space protection in major subdivision design.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|---|
| i. Review and update conservation development and rural compound ordinances and standards as needed. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board | RI DEM; Staff and volunteer time; General fund |

Goal 12-2

EXETER PRESERVES OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY LAND USES.

POLICIES

- Continue municipal support for the FFOS tax-incentive program.
- Continue support for agriculture and forestry zoning in rural zoning districts.
- Reexamine regulations to provide accessory use options to enhance the financial sustainability of agricultural and forestry land. Revisit a 2017 Exeter study and draft ordinance as a starting point to assess appropriate regulations to allow small-scale accessory business options for farm and forest landowners.

Goal 12-2 / Strategy A

Allow accessory uses for agricultural and forestry enterprises that contribute to those uses' economic sustainability in Exeter.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Develop a set of allowed farm and forest accessory uses to help support large land owners.**
- Review the Town's 2017 study and draft ordinance and other resources.
 - Work with farmers and others in the community to identify and resolve conflicts.
 - Contact communities such as Richmond, Gloucester, Hopkinton, and South Kingstown about how their ordinances have functioned.
 - Write and pass a zoning amendment.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|---|
| FYIP #1 | Town Council; Planning Board; farm and residential representatives | 2017 Study and draft ordinance; DEM Study; Farm accessory use amendments from other communities; staff and volunteer time |

Goal 12-2 / Strategy B

Continue to support land use policies and ordinances that provide space for agricultural and forestry uses.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|--|
| i. Continue to support the FFOS tax-incentive program. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| Ongoing | Town Council | Tax Assessor |
| ACTIONS | | |
| ii. Create a means of communicating with property owners in the FFOS program, such as a simple annual survey, to keep informed about potential future development of FFOS properties. This can also serve as a means of informing owners about sale or transfer of development rights, conservation easements, estate planning, and similar options to preserve land from development. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Planning Board ; Tax Assessor; Tax Collector | Staff time; online survey supplemented with mail surveys; presentations on preserving these lands from development; mail supplement included with tax-bill mailing |

Goal 12-3

ENCOURAGE GROWTH IN PLANNED DISTRICTS THAT CAN SUPPORT MORE DENSITY TO PROVIDE BALANCED HOUSING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, OR COMMUNITY SERVICES.

POLICIES

- Continue to pursue options for development of a walkable multi-use village in the vicinity of Route 2 and Exeter Road.
- Support planning and construction of a modern town hall and a community center at a planned development (or renovation of an existing building) Municipal Center location within a multi-use environment, including other supportive uses to create a sense of place that hosts community activities and gatherings, connects residents with programming and resources, and enhances a sense of community.
- Support the restoration of old Town Hall and moving the building to the Municipal Center.
- Consider opportunities to purchase properties proximate to the Municipal Center that could support government operations in the immediate and medium terms.
- Continue to work with the State on a joint land use and infrastructure area master plan for the Ladd Center Area that includes a percentage of land area dedicated to workforce, senior and/or low/mod housing; and a memorandum of understanding with the Town about development review process, including public hearings for the state-controlled Ladd Center
- Consider a public institutional (PI) zoning district to replace the PD district governed by an area master plan and memorandum of agreement between the State and Town for the Ladd Center.
- Support a Route 2 Corridor Area Master Plan compatible with the plans for a village center and any other nearby planned districts.
- Support a planned district for the Yawgoo Valley recreational area.

Goal 12-3 / Strategy A

Revise and reorganize definitions and categories in the zoning ordinance for better distinguishing zoning tools for planned districts to help create the conditions for high-quality development in special locations.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Amend the zoning ordinance to improve planned district issues.

- *Separate definitions for overlay and floating zones.*
- *Special Planned Districts linked to master plans with uses and special permit criteria.*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|-------------------------|--|
| FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board | Staff and board time; property owner and resident stakeholders |

ACTIONS

ii Pursue PVOD development proactively with innovative developers.

- *Review PVOD zoning for opportunities for flexibility and amend as needed.*
- *Create a Town role in organizing and marketing the TDR system.*
- *Revise the TDR system to make it more user friendly.*

Goal 12-3 / Strategy A (continued)

Revise and reorganize definitions and categories in the zoning ordinance for better distinguishing zoning tools for planned districts to help create the conditions for high-quality development in special locations.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|---|
| FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; proactive group; possible consultant | Staff and volunteer time; Developers and host communities of innovative new towns; general fund |

ACTIONS

iii. Create a Municipal Center Special Planned District with identified uses and specific and objective criteria.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|
| FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | Staff and volunteer time; general fund |

ACTIONS

iv. Develop a joint State/Town master plan for the Ladd Center as a Special Planned District, with public institutional (PI) zoning district.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|
| FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | State funding; staff and volunteer time; |

ACTIONS

v. Develop a master plan for the southern end of Route 2, including the currently mapped Planned District.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|--|
| FYIP #2 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council; resident and business group; possible consultant | Staff and volunteer time; general fund |

ACTIONS

vi. Create a mapped Planned District for the Yawgoo Valley recreational area.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|-----------------|
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Planner; Planning Board; owners; neighborhood representatives | Staff and board |

ACTIONS

vii. Develop specific and objective criteria for the mapped Dorset Mill Planned District.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|---|---------------------------|
| FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; Dorset Mill owners and tenants | Staff and volunteer time; |

Goal 12-4

THE ROUTE 3 CORRIDOR IS REVITALIZED TO SERVE AS AN ATTRACTIVE AREA WITH A MIXTURE OF USES, ESPECIALLY FOR TAX-PAYING NON-RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN A GATEWAY TO I-95 AND A VISITOR GATEWAY TO THE ARCADIA MANAGEMENT AREA.

POLICIES

- Create a Route 3 corridor plan that takes advantage of quick access to I-95 and provides for an enhanced visitor hub as a gateway to the Arcadia Management Area while promoting improved road conditions with bicycle and pedestrian facilities in part of the corridor. Reimagine the corridor with design standards and land uses that support the local economy, reflect community character, and are in balance with the surrounding natural resources. Avoid future heavy industry, junkyards, and similar land uses with potential impacts that can cause irreparable harm to area groundwater and natural subsystems.
- As part of the Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan, pursue an Interstate Floating Overlay District to regulate potential economic development uses for properties with access to I-95.
- As part of the Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan, pursue a Route 3 Enhancement Floating Overlay District to regulate the potential for economic development uses and multi-family housing along Route 3.
- Work with RI Commerce to enroll appropriate corridor properties in the RI Ready program.

Goal 12-4 / Strategy A

Work with State agencies to create an integrated plan for the Route 3 corridor.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Develop a Route 3 corridor area master plan.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---|--|
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; consultant; business interests; | Site-Ready Study incorporated in Exeter 2044; RI Commerce assistance; staff and volunteer time; general fund; state grants |

ACTIONS

ii. Establish an Interstate Floating Overlay District for areas with access to I-95.

- Establish an overlay district for nonresidential and for higher-density workforce and low/mod housing.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 | Town Planner; Planning Board; RI DOT and RI Commerce; business interests; consultant; owners; housing advocates and nonprofits | Site-Ready Study incorporated in Exeter 2044; RI Commerce; staff and volunteer time; general fund; state grants |

Goal 12-4 / Strategy A [continued]

Work with State agencies to create an integrated plan for the Route 3 corridor.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|--|
| iii. Seek enrollment in the RI Ready program (RI Commerce) for the site at Routes 102/3. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 | Town Planner; Planning Board; RI DOT and RI Commerce; business interests | Staff time; Site-Ready Study incorporated in Exeter 2044; RI Commerce; |

Goal 12-4 / Strategy B

Create a plan for a mixed-use Enhancement Floating Overlay District (Arcadia Main Street) between Austin Farm Road and Ten Rod Road, with transportation improvements and visitor amenities.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|---|
| i. Develop an area master plan for a mixture of uses (including small-scale multifamily residential and neighborhood-serving retail and services), and recruit business to serve the outdoor-recreation economy. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a Special Planned District to accommodate appropriate zoning. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; consultant; business interests; property owner and resident stakeholders | Staff and volunteer resources; recreational businesses; RI Commerce; seek state funding |

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|--|--|
| ii. Advocate for implementation of the RI DOT road diet planning concept for the corridor. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A road diet reduces a road with two lanes in each direction to one lane in each direction and a single turning lane in the middle. It provides more space for safe pedestrian and bicycle facilities, including safe crossing options. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; RI DOT and RI Commerce; business interests | Site-Ready Study incorporated into Exeter 2044; RI Commerce; |

Goal 12-5

THE EXETER ZONING ORDINANCE COMPLIES WITH STATE LEGISLATION.

POLICIES

- Amend the zoning ordinance to comply with 2023 state legislation and in a timely manner with any future requirements.

Goal 12-5 / Strategy A

Review requirements for compatibility with state legislation and amend the Exeter zoning ordinance to comply.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Amend the zoning ordinance for compliance with 2023 state laws.

- Hire a consultant to assist.
- Review needed changes and study potential impacts on Exeter.
- Make timely changes consistent with state law and with the comprehensive plan.
- Amend the land development regulations.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|--|---|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Consultant; Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council | Staff and volunteer time; State planning office; general fund; state grants |

Goal 12-6

EXETER HAS A NEW, MODERN ZONING ORDINANCE.

POLICIES

- Support a rewrite of Exeter's zoning ordinance over the medium to long term to make it more user-friendly and functional.

Goal 12-6 / Strategy A

Create a modern, functional and user-friendly zoning ordinance.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

i. Rewrite the Zoning Ordinance to reflect contemporary best practices in administration and user-friendliness and to be consistent with the comprehensive plan.

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------|--|--|
| FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council; consultant | Staff and volunteer time; general fund: over the life of the Comp Plan allocate a small amount of funds to the capital fund every year; statewide planning; state grants |

Stewardship & Implementation

The purpose of planning is to take action. This comprehensive plan is designed to be a “living plan” that keeps the plan useful and current, incorporating it into day-to-day decision making, assessing progress, and making any amendments so that the plan can evolve with unforeseen opportunities and challenges over the next 20 years.

Planning work is not over when the plan is adopted: no plan is self-implementing. This element focuses on putting the plan to work by organizing systems to ensure that it is consulted regularly in the day-to-day work of the Town; integrating capital improvements with the plan; and providing for a high level of communication, transparency, and participation by residents and other stakeholders in implementing the plan. In a small town with limited government and civic organizations, this means inspiring residents to work together actively to achieve the goals of the plan.

In some cases, making progress on achieving comprehensive plan goals will require funding and investments. The Town will need to prepare to make grant proposals to the State and others to advance comprehensive plan

ELEMENT 13 : IMPLEMENTATION

implementation. In addition to new tax revenue (existing and potential), this element also includes a list of potential funding resources. Finally, at the end of the element, a summary implementation matrix for each goal, strategy and action indicates a responsible party, a timeline (Five-Year Plan 1, Five-Year Plan-2, and Long-Term), and potential resources.

Stewardship of The Plan

The Planning Board and the Town Council are the stewards of the Comprehensive Plan, but the success of the plan also depends on how much it is understood by staff and other elected officials, by residents and businesses, and by government and nonprofit partners. The plan should guide decision-making and, as required by state law, it should be evaluated regularly to see if strategies are working and if the plan continues to reflect community goals. A small Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee made up of resident volunteers appointed by the Planning Board can support the Town in evaluating implementation progress.

With its 20-year horizon, this comprehensive plan includes many goals, strategies, and implementation actions. Some can be implemented quickly; others may require new levels of organization, collaboration, transparency, and funding. The zoning and other regulatory tools discussed in Chapter 12 are important tools for implementing the plan. The plan also calls for volunteer committees to work proactively to make progress on town goals. Although the focus is on actions that Town government can take to implement the plan, many actions also call for the participation of volunteers as well as state, federal, private sector, and nonprofit partners.

The Exeter 2044 Comprehensive Plan and State Requirements

This comprehensive plan meets the requirements of Rhode Island General Law Chapter 45-22.2, the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, as amended. The law requires a twenty-year planning horizon with a Five-Year Implementation Strategic Plan. Following and expanding on these requirements, the plan has a twenty-year vision, two five-year implementation plans that correspond to short- and medium-term implementation, with long-term implementation in the final ten years. Implementation primarily focuses on the first five years but may take longer, depending on the strategy, and some actions will be ongoing. State law also requires an implementation report at the end of five years, and updating and re-adoption at the end of 10 years.

A. SUMMARY: GOALS AND POLICIES

| GOALS | POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS |
|---|--|
| 13-1 <i>The comprehensive plan guides Town decision making.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a comprehensive plan implementation committee to assist Town government in implementing the plan. • Review goals and implementation of the plan annually in a public hearing. • As required by state law, submit a five-year implementation report to the State Planning Office and update and readopt the plan at ten years with a public process. • Use a public process every five years to review the vision, goals, policies and implementation progress of the plan. |
| 13-2 <i>The comprehensive plan is incorporated into decision making in multiple ways.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the plan in preparing and approving other planning and implementation actions by other town staff and officials. • Make the capital plan consistent with the comprehensive plan. |
| 13-3 <i>Town government provides effective and meaningful access to information about government activities and performance.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicize actions and activities that implement the comprehensive plan. • Make a wide array of user-friendly information, services, electronic forms, financial and project information easily available to residents, businesses, and others. • Measure government performance. |

B. FINDINGS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Most of the implementation activities related to the 2004 Comprehensive Plan focused on regulatory changes, the creation of the 2011 Vision Plan to create a village center, and there were some early efforts around creating affordable housing. Residential development pressure lessened after the Great Recession and public concerns turned to proposed solar farms and controlled-environment agriculture in large greenhouses.

During the course of the Exeter 2044 planning process, many residents expressed a desire for better town communications. One of the challenges of the implementation process is to help Town government officials, boards, commissions, and staff keep the goals of plan in mind and help them implement the plan. This can include establishing communication vehicles, creating volunteer committees or subcommittees with defined work plans to assist town officials and staff, and creating a schedule to monitor and support actions to implement the plan.

C. NEW INVESTMENTS/INITIATIVES/ACTIVITIES

Achieving the goals of the Exeter 2044 plan will require some new activities and initiatives that will require some investment. These initiatives could be supported by existing Town revenues, new Town revenues, state and federal grants and technical assistance, and grants and assistance from other sources. In some cases, volunteer groups may be best suited to take charge of implementing some goals without direct connection with Town government. Exeter has successful experience with this kind of citizen action—for example, through the fundraising work of the Friends of the Exeter Library and the group that worked to create an outdoor track at the EWG high school.

New activities

- **Annual Town report:** annual Town data and activity reports from boards and commissions.
- **Asset management program** and initial training for more efficient and cost-effective road and facility maintenance.
- **Redesign of Town website** for better communication, functionality, and staff training to keep the website up to date.
- **Economic development coordinator** to inventory and engage with businesses and support an Economic Development Commission.
- **Renewable energy and climate-resilient design** for new town hall, community center, or other facilities.
- **Recruitment of volunteers** to reactivate Conservation Commission, Affordable Housing Advisory Commission, and create Economic Development Commission

New initiatives

- **Municipal Center Area Master Plan** with new Town Hall and new Community Center: add new town hall and community center to Library area
- **Ladd Center Area Joint State-Town Master Plan** with state funding: including access to water system, affordable housing, and public hearings to review State proposals for this state-owned area
- **Route 3 Corridor Area Master Plan:** I-95 access, economic development uses, a mid-corridor mixed-use visitor hub as a gateway to the Arcadia Management Area, and improved road conditions including a road diet, bicycle and pedestrian facilities; potential funding and collaboration from RI Commerce, RI Department of Transportation, RI Department of Environmental Management
- **Route 2 Corridor South Area Master Plan:** to be compatible with existing Village Center conceptual plan

- **Yawgoo Ski and Water Park Area Master Plans:** work with owner-funded plan to keep this important Exeter resource viable in the future

D. REVENUE SOURCES

Traditional revenue sources

- Town budget FY2022-2023: \$17,688,108
- Current revenue: property tax, fees, state transfers (such as library aid), miscellaneous payments
- In FY 2023, the net property tax accounted for 82% of the total budget
- Exeter contribution to the school district budget accounts for 78% of the total town budget and reflects Exeter enrollment in the system.

Newer sources of revenue:

- **Adult Use Cannabis Tax** (Town receives 3% of retail sales)—estimated \$164,000 annually based on first quarter amount
- **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal funding**—approximately \$1,950,000 (must be expended by December 31, 2026)
- **PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) Fund from Controlled Environment Agriculture** (\$10,000 per acre of greenhouses)—estimated \$250,000 annually in PILOT payments. Fund purposes include new town facilities, open space conservation, preservation, improvements to Town-owned historic buildings, matching funds for state open space and recreation grants.
- **New development of warehouse/distribution space** at the proposed Exit 14 site could generate an estimated \$300,000 to \$1.2 million annually, depending on size and based on current tax rates.

E. SELECT POTENTIAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

While there is often competition for external resources, having a proactive plan goes a long way in helping communities secure funding for new activities. Demonstrating the existence of goals, strategies and implementation programs in a comprehensive plan based on a community process and integrated with a broad understanding of community needs and goals is an effective approach to attracting funding for community improvements. Examples of grants and programs that may be useful to Exeter in implementing the comprehensive plan include:

Environmental, open space, and recreation resources

- **State “Green Bonds”** for up to 75% state funding for open space, outdoor recreation, land revitalization, green energy, climate resilience, forest habitat, wildlife conservation, and water quality projects
- **RI Department of Environmental Management grants:** through Green Bonds and federal programs for open space, outdoor recreation, and recreational trails
- **Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Program**
- **State Community Septic System Loan Program**
- **New England Forestry Foundation**

Historical resources

- **RI Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission**
- **Foundation grants** for historic preservation
- State and federal **historic preservation tax credits**
- **RI State Council on the Arts**
- **South County History Center**
- **Potential program receipts** for historic plaques and markers

Economic development

- **RI Commerce: RI Ready Program** (economic development technical and capital assistance)

Agriculture

- **RI Department of Environmental Management:** multiple programs to assist agriculture including Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Small Grant Program, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, Farmland Preservation Program, Farmland Access Program, Farm Energy Program, Rhode Island Organic Certification Program and Organic Certification Cost Share Reimbursement, RI Produce Safety Improvement Grants, State-sponsored Farmland Leasing Opportunities
- **Other resources** include American Farm Trust grants, RI Farm Incubator (140 Exeter Road in N. Kingstown), Northeast Agriculture Exchange—maintained by Farm Fresh RI in partnership with Young Farmer Network, RI DEM, and RI Farm Bureau

Energy, climate change resilience, and hazard mitigation

- **Multiple programs from Rhode Island Energy,** including free audits, technical assistance, loans, and rebates (Rhode Island Efficient Buildings Fund, High Efficiency Heat Pump Program, DRIVE EV rebates for EVs)
- **Energy-efficiency and clean-energy project assistance for farms:** RI Office of Energy Resources; federal Rural Energy for America Program
- **RI Infrastructure Bank—**Municipal Resilience Program planning workshop assistance and grants; MRP Action Grants; Small Business Energy Loan Program
- **RI Emergency Management Agency** funding for updating the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

Planning assistance

- Reach out to **universities** for student workers and projects, and graduate programs in planning and architecture for conceptual planning work at modest costs—for example URI, Roger Williams University, Conway School of Landscape Design (Northampton, MA), UMass Departments of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning and Department of Architecture (Amherst, MA).

F. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Goal 13-1

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GUIDES TOWN DECISION MAKING.

POLICIES

- Create a comprehensive plan implementation committee to assist Town government in implementing the plan.
- Review goals and implementation of the plan annually in a public hearing.
- Use a public process every five years to review the vision, goals, policies, and implementation progress of the plan.
- As required by state law, submit a five-year implementation report to the State Planning Office, and update and readopt the plan at ten years. with a public process.

Goal 13-1 / Strategy A

Appoint a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to support the Planning Board and Town Council in assessing implementation progress.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. Appoint a small citizen committee (5-6 people) to serve as a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC).**
- **Create a simple statement of the purpose and expected activity**
 - **Call for volunteers and invite residents with appropriate skills to be members**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|----------------|------------------------------|--|
| FYIP- #1; 2024 | Planning Board; Town Council | Some CPAC members may be interested. Invite participation widely through mailings that go to all households (e.g., with tax statements) and by asking individuals. |

ACTIONS

- ii. Schedule a minimum of two CPIAC meetings a year.**
- **One meeting to prepare for an annual public hearing review of plan implementation**
 - **One meeting during the annual budget preparation period**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | CPIAC; Town Planner | Volunteer and staff time |

ACTIONS

- iii. Organize a public process every five years to review the vision, goals, and implementation progress with the assistance of the CPIAC.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2028; 2033; 2038 | CPIAC; Town Planner; Planning Board | Volunteer and staff time |

Goal 13-1 / Strategy A (continued)

Appoint a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to support the Planning Board and Town Council in assessing implementation progress.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| iv. Complete and submit the Five-Year Implementation Report to State Planning. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| 2028 | CPIAC; Town Planner; and Planning Board | Volunteer and staff time |

Goal 13-2

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IS INCORPORATED INTO DECISION MAKING IN MULTIPLE WAYS.

POLICIES

- Use the plan in preparing and approving other planning and implementation actions by other town staff and officials.
- Make the capital plan consistent with the comprehensive plan.
- Reactivate commissions or committees to focus on specific issues, such as a Conservation Commission to focus on an overall town open-space plan, maintaining affordable housing percentages, and overseeing economic-development activities.
- As needed, create shorter-term proactive advisory committees or subcommittees to provide input on specific area master plans (such as Municipal Center, Ladd Center, Route 3) and issues such as promotion of the village center concept.

Goal 13-2 / Strategy A

Ensure that Town officials, staff and volunteer boards and commissions are aware of Comprehensive Plan priorities and work to achieve the priorities relevant to their areas of work.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| i. Make the plan priorities easily accessible to officials, staff, and volunteer groups. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post the plan and maps on the Town website. Incorporate Exeter 2044 GIS map projects into the town's interactive mapping system.• Ensure that appropriate topic sections of the plan and implementation matrix are distributed to officials, staff, and volunteer groups. | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Planner; Town Council | Some CPAC members may be interested. Invite participation widely through mailings that go to all households (e.g., with tax statements) and by asking individuals. |

Goal 13-2 / **Strategy A** [continued]

Ensure that Town officials, staff and volunteer boards and commissions are aware of Comprehensive Plan priorities and work to achieve the priorities relevant to their areas of work.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

| ACTIONS | | |
|---|--|---|
| ii. <i>Require a simple annual report from Town departments, boards, and commissions, and appointed advisory groups.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>These reports can be then compiled in a Town Annual Report.</i> | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Department, commission, advisory group members | Staff and group time |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iii. <i>Use the Comprehensive Plan when developing annual work plans and budgets.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>Include reference to plan goals and activities in annual budget requests.</i> | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Department, commission, advisory group members | Staff and group time |
| ACTIONS | | |
| iv. <i>Include reference to achieving plan goals and activities in the annual proposed budget for the town financial meeting.</i> | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council | Town Council, staff. Make widely available to the public through an improved website and a mailing. |
| ACTIONS | | |
| v. <i>Use the plan and refer to achieving plan goals when making regulatory decisions.</i> | | |
| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
| FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board | Staff time |

Goal 13-3

TOWN GOVERNMENT PROVIDES EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES AND PERFORMANCE.

POLICIES

- Publicize actions and activities that implement the comprehensive plan.
- Make a wide array of user-friendly information, services, electronic forms, financial and project information easily available to residents, businesses, and others.
- Measure government performance.

Goal 13-3 / Strategy A

Expand public understanding of the Exeter 2044 Comprehensive Plan and how it is being implemented.

TIMELINE: FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #1 (FYIP #1, 2024-2027); FIVE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN #2 (FYIP #2, 2028-2033); LONG-TERM (2034-2044)

ACTIONS

- i. **Print hard copies of the Exeter 2044 Executive Summary for distribution through the Library, Town Hall, and local businesses.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|--------|--------------|-------------------------|
| 2024 | Town Council | Staff time; Town budget |

ACTIONS

- ii. **Improve design, navigation, and overall usefulness of the Town website.**
- *These reports can be then compiled in a Town Annual Report.*

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|--------|--------------|--|
| 2024 | Town Council | Specialist firm on municipal websites; ARPA funding (See Element 10) |

ACTIONS

- iii. **Post the plan and all maps (see Goal 2.A) on an improved Town website.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|--------|--------------|-------------|
| 2024 | Town Council | Staff time |

ACTIONS

- iv. **Use an Exeter 2044 logo or icon on Town Council, Planning Board, and other agendas for comprehensive plan-related actions on the agenda.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
| FYIP #1-ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board; and so on | Staff time |

ACTIONS

- v. **Create a Town Annual Report to include a brief report from the Planning Board on implementation of Exeter 2044.**

| ► When | ► Who | ► Resources |
|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| FYIP #1-ongoing | Town Planner; Planning Board | Staff time |

G. State Planning Office Five-Year Implementation Reports

Available at <https://planning.ri.gov/planning-areas/local-comprehensive-planning/five-year-implementation-reports>, this template comes from the Division of State Planning but the Town can use its own format. The purpose of the report is to help communities assess and measure progress in implementing their plans. The five-year mark is a good time to hold an abbreviated public process to review the Vision and Goals and to assess whether strategies are working, whether unforeseen barriers or opportunities need to be addressed, and if amendments to the plan are needed.

The simple template asks for a summary of implementation accomplishments and impediments for planning under the comprehensive plan topic areas,

noting that some of these topics may be covered in more than one element of the comprehensive plan:

- Natural Resources
- Open Space and Recreation
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Services and Facilities
- Transportation/Circulation
- Natural Hazards
- Land Use
- Agriculture
- Water Supply
- Energy
- Other and unique needs and character topics

OVERVIEW

Implementing the Exeter 2044 Plan

The implementation matrix on the following pages organizes all goals, strategies, and actions in the Exeter 2044 plan in a single place for quick reference. It gives a timeline for each action, notes who should be responsible for carrying out the action, and identifies potential partners for implementation.

As is the case in Elements 4 through 12, which address specific plan topics, this matrix places every action into one of three stages within the plan's 20-year timeline:

- **FYIP #1:**
Five-Year Implementation Plan One, 2024–2028
- **FYIP #2:**
Five-Year Implementation Plan Two, 2029–2033
- **Long Term:**
Actions that take place in the period 2034–2044

ELEMENT 4 — NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|---|---------------------|--|
| Goal 4-1 Exeter maintains the integrity of its ecological systems, including its surface waters, wetlands, forests, fields and wildlife habitat. | | | |
| A. Reestablish the Conservation Commission with a clear charge and set of tasks in support of the Planning Board and Planning Department. Consider incentives, such as a small stipend. | i. Recruit members and reestablish a Conservation Commission, define the Commission's role, and identify a member of Town Council to lead on natural resources/conservation issues. | FYIP #1 | Town Council |
| | | | |
| B. Use administration capacity and available resources to implement conservation priorities. | i. Identify, map, and prioritize key conservation gaps and associated parcels in areas with high ecological connectivity, such as stream corridors and contiguous forest blocks. | FYIP #1-#2 | Conservation Commission; Rural Land Preservation Trust |
| | ii. Implement the Rural Land Preservation Trust's procedure for parcel review and recommendation. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Conservation Commission |
| | iii. Advise the Planning Board on the effects of proposed development on the quality and natural functions of water bodies and the natural integrity of adjacent land areas. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Conservation Commission; Rural Land Preservation Trust |
| | iv. Seek expertise to ensure that all conservation easements are legally adequate, monitored, and enforced to maintain their resource value. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Conservation Commission; Land Trust; Town Solicitor |
| | v. Identify and pursue funding strategies and political processes to support recommendations from the Land Trust and Conservation Commission. | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Council; Conservation Commission |
| | vi. Adapt conservation goals and priorities to anticipate and respond to climate change impacts. | FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission; Rural Land Preservation Trust |
| c. Leverage partnerships with state, regional, and local actors to support conservation efforts. | i. Coordinate land conservation efforts with state and non-governmental partners, such as The Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island. | FYIP #1 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |
| | ii. Work with local property owners to establish communication channels, informational resources, and a shared understanding of land protection goals and policies. | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Council; Town Planner; Planning Board |
| | iii. Use maps developed for this plan to identify areas suitable for development in coordination with areas targeted for conservation, and make this information available to landowners, developers, and town officials. | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Council; Town Planner; Planning Board |
| | iv. Encourage the use of Exeter's conservation development ordinance and refine the TDR ordinance to make it easier to use. | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE →

ELEMENT 4 — NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|---|--|---------------------|---|
| Goal 4-2 Exeter protects and stewards its surface and groundwater resources and maintains the excellent quality of its water supply. | | | |
| A. Exeter protects and stewards its surface and groundwater resources and maintains the excellent quality of its water supply. | i. Strengthen Exeter's erosion and sedimentation control ordinance by adding performance measures to comply with State best management practices for stormwater and erosion control. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Council; Town Planner; Planning Board |
| | ii. Strengthen Exeter's earth-removal ordinance by adding performance measures. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Council; Town Planner; Planning Board |
| | iii. Require vegetative buffers for all surface water bodies and wetlands to protect water quality and wildlife habitat. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |
| Goal 4-3 Exeter's residents and businesses support and participate in townwide efforts to protect natural resources. | | | |
| A. Build the Town's administrative capacity and funding to develop best management practices. | i. Adopt best practices in landscape management and maintaining environmental resources on both private and public land. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Conservation Commission; DPW |
| B. Leverage partnerships with local organizations, educators, advocates, and the EWG School District. | i. Use resources and partnerships to publicize and share information on best forest management practices with residents, businesses, and institutions. | FYIP #2 | Town Council; Conservation Commission; Public Library |
| | ii. Enhance environmental education and student involvement in the school system with a focus on Exeter's natural resources. | FYIP #2 | EWG school administrators and parent organizations |

ELEMENT 5 — OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|---|----------------------|--|
| Goal 5-1 Town government communicates effectively with residents, businesses, and visitors. | | | |
| A. Coordinate groups with different goals and interest, including conservation groups, historical associations, and recreational groups, to create an open space and recreation plan or policy. | i. Recruit and designate a volunteer group to work with the Conservation Commission, DPW, the Town Planner, and partners to inventory, pursue, and implement a recreation program. | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Council; Town Planner; DPW; Conservation Commission; volunteers |
| | ii. Create an open space and recreation plan or policy that consolidates information, goals, and actions for land conservation and outdoor recreation. | FYIP #1-#2 | Conservation Commission |
| | iii. Continue to implement outreach efforts with local property owners to foster participation in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space (FFOS) program | Ongoing | Conservation Commission; Tax Assessor |
| Goal 5-2 Exeter's facilities and trails for walking, hiking, bicycling, boating, and other recreational activities are connected and distributed throughout town. | | | |
| A. Consolidate and share information to identify assets, needs, and solutions. | i. Consolidate and update maps and databases showing public access to conservation areas, including trails for walking and biking, boating access, hunting and fishing access, parking areas, and related facilities. | FYIP #1 | Conservation Commission and volunteers |
| | ii. Establish a volunteer committee to identify needed connections and improvements to facilities | FYIP #1 | Conservation Commission and volunteers |
| B. Coordinate with State, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources. | i. Coordinate with partners to increase funding and resources for multimodal transportation options throughout Exeter that could include trails, bike facilities, etc. | FYIP #1-#2 | Conservation Commission; Town Planner |
| | ii. Contact owners of conservation lands to discuss opening the lands to the public for recreational purposes. | FYIP #2 | Conservation Commission |
| | iii. Continue to pursue funding for expanding recreational facilities at Chelsea Park. | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Planner; Town Council |
| | iv. Pursue partnerships and funding to expand Exeter's recreational sports leagues and facilities. | FYIP #2 | Town Planner; volunteers |
| | v. Amend local ordinance to permit enclosed off-leash dog parks at strategic locations. | FYIP #2 | Planning Board; Town Council |
| Goal 5-3 Exeter maintains the accessibility, safety, and visibility of its open space and recreation facilities for all residents. | | | |
| A. Consolidate and share information to identify assets, needs, and solutions. | i. Conduct an assessment of existing conservation areas and recreational facilities to evaluate accessibility status and needed maintenance and capital improvements | FYIP #2 | DPW; Conservation Commission; Volunteer advocates |
| B. Coordinate with State, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources. | i. Secure training, partnerships, and funding for accessibility improvements and dedicate match funding for grants.. | FYIP #2 | DPW; Conservation Commission; Volunteer advocates |
| | ii. Establish a volunteer committee to coordinate construction, maintenance and signage for increasing accessibility. | FYIP #2 to long term | DPW; Conservation Commission; Volunteer advocates |

ELEMENT 6 — HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|--|---------------------|---|
| Goal 6-1 Exeter protects and celebrates the historic sites and structures that embody the town's history | | | |
| A. Designate the Exeter Historical Association to lead a historic resources program. | i. Designate and contract with the Exeter Historical Association to create and implement a noon=-regulatory historic resources program. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Exeter Historical Association |
| B. Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources. | i. Secure training, partnerships, and funding to support the Exeter Historical Association's work in documenting historic resources, running programs and events, and providing interpretation through signage and online documentation. | FYIP #2 and ongoing | Town Council; Exeter Historical Association |
| | ii. Reach out to owners of historic properties to build awareness and share strategies to protect historic assets. | FYIP #2 and ongoing | Planning Board; Exeter Historical Association; |
| | iii. Encourage the use of state and federal historic tax credits for adaptive reuse of historic structures by private owners and developers. | FYIP #2 | Planning Board; Exeter Historical Association; Tax Assessor |
| Goal 6-2 Exeter protects and celebrates its heritage landscapes—the network of historic roads, farms, mills, and historic centers that together create its rich rural character and sense of place. | | | |
| A. Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources. | i. Work with farmers and other land owners to identify, protect, and maintain historic walls, trees, views, and other aspects of the historic landscape. | FYIP #2 and ongoing | Exeter Historical Association |
| B. Consolidate and share information to identify assets, needs, and solutions. | i. Share maps and interpretive materials online to disseminate the story of Exeter's heritage landscapes. | FYIP #2 and ongoing | Exeter Historical Association; student interns from RI colleges |
| Goal 6-3 Exeter fosters a shared sense of community by cultivating gathering places. | | | |
| A. Coordinate with state, regional, and local partners to identify opportunities and resources. | i. Continue to seek opportunities to create a dedicated space for Exeter's Old Town Hall and for displaying artifacts and preserving historical documents | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Council; Exeter Historical Association |
| | ii. Continue to invest in the Public Library's programs and assets. | Ongoing | Town Council; public Library |
| | iii. Work with businesses, farms, schools, and community members to identify opportunities to promote and expand community events and activities. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning |

ELEMENT 7—HOUSING

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|--|---------------------|---|
| Goal 7-1 New residential development is managed to promote preservation of environmental connectivity and rural character. | | | |
| A. Review and modify regulations to guide residential development to preserve environmental connectivity. | i. Create a guidance document, using existing resources, for property owners and developers on how to preserved environmental connectivity and resources. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Planner; Conservation Commission; Planning Board |
| | ii. Encourage new subdivisions of 10 or more units (major developments) to use zoning tools that result in preservation of environmental resources and connectivity, such as conservation subdivision, village zoning, or rural compound zoning. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Planner; Conservation Commission; Planning Board |
| Goal 7-2 Exeter has a range of quality housing choices to meet the needs of households at all income levels and stages of the life cycle. | | | |
| A. Activate a housing policy and implementation program within Town government. | i. Reactivate the Affordable Housing Advisory Commission (AHAC) as a proactive entity and review the membership and activities to add new members or subcommittees. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Town Planner; Department of Social Services; volunteers |
| | ii. Explore creating a local public housing authority (PHA). | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Council; Affordable Housing Advisory Commission; Town Planner |
| | iii. Activate the Affordable Housing Trust. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; Affordable Housing Advisory Commission |
| B. Actively pursue strategies to attract affordable housing and elderly housing. | i. Identify potential locations for affordable housing and elderly housing. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | AHAC; Rural Land Preservation Trust |
| | ii. Study and amend zoning, if needed, to promote appropriately-scale multifamily rental housing in the Route 3 and Route 2 corridors. | FYIP #1–#2 | AHAC; Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |
| | III. Enter into discussions with state agencies, nonprofit and for-profit housing developers. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Affordable Housing Advisory Commission subcommittee; Town Planner |
| | iv. Revive efforts to transform mobile-home parks into affordable housing, on site or in other locations. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | AHAC subcommittee |
| | v. Explore enabling a variety of development types for housing choice and affordability levels in Exeter. | FYIP #2 | AHAC subcommittee |
| Goal 7-3 Exeter takes proactive measures to advance efforts to create a mixed-use village or town center. | | | |
| A. Market the Exeter Village Center idea. | i. Create a subcommittee to research and meet with developers from New England and elsewhere to discuss the opportunities and barriers to bringing the village concept to fruition. | FYIP #1–#2 | AHAC subcommittee |
| | ii. Secure an agreement with the State for access to drinking water from the Lad Center public water supply through a joint State-Town master plan and subject to PFAS pollution remediation. | FYIP #2 | Town Council; Planning Board; Town Planner |
| | iii. Create and implement a professional marketing strategy and prospectus. | FYIP #2 | AHAC subcommittee; consultant-marketer or grant writer |
| | iv. Seek funding and prepare a site plan for water and wastewater infrastructure. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Council; AHAC; grant writer |

ELEMENT 8 — ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|---|---|---|
| Goal 8-1 A permanent Economic Development Commission and an economic development coordination role in Town government provide data, information and guidance for strengthening Exeter's economy, including reducing the residential tax burden. | | | |
| A. Establish and clarify the role of a permanent Economic Development Commission and coordinator to strengthen the economic sustainability of the town's nonresidential sector, consistent with preservation of rural character. | i. Establish a permanent Economic Development Commission (EDC) in Town government. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; advice from existing EDTF |
| | ii. Provide an annual budget allocation to pay for an economic development coordinator to assist the EDC in inventorying and engaging with businesses and commercial property owners. | FYIP #1 | Town Council |
| B. Create a regular program of business information and engagement to be implemented by the economic development coordinator. | i. Create and maintain a list of businesses and contact information, recognizing that including a micro-businesses and home-based business may be difficult. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | EDC and coordinator |
| | ii. Create and maintain a commercial real estate inventory | FYIP #1 and ongoing | EDC and coordinator |
| | iii. Develop and implement a program for annual visits and/or telephone contacts to businesses in Exeter. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | EDC and coordinator |
| Goal 8-2 Exeter's economy supports rural character. | | | |
| A. Develop a long-term economic strategy plan focused on rural assets. | i. Explore and identify specific goals and actions and develop an Exeter rural "brand" | FYIP #1-2 | EDC and coordinator with Town boards, community residents, and rural businesses |
| | ii. Develop an outdoor recreation strategy to make Exeter an outdoor destination. | FYIP #2 and long term | EDC and coordinator; strategic partners such as RIDEM, outdoor recreation groups, and businesses |
| | iii. Develop an agriculture strategy | FYIP #1-2. Early actions could include establishing an Agriculture Committee and Town role in upgrading the Grange kitchen. | EDC with coordinator; members of the farm community; Town Council; state and regional partners; URI Extension; volunteers |
| | iv. Develop a strategy to support community-serving small businesses | FYIP#1-#2 and ongoing | EDC and coordinator; possible consultant assistance |

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ELEMENT 8 — ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|---|-----------------------|---|
| Goal 8-3 Exeter takes proactive measures to advance efforts to create a mixed-use village or town center. | | | |
| A. Create a business recruitment package. | i. Communicate with existing businesses to learn about their needs, such as desire to expand operations. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | EDC and coordinator |
| | ii. Research innovative and online business types that might be a good fit for Exeter. | FYIP #2 | EDC and coordinator |
| | iii. Create a business recruitment package including real estate opportunities, market dynamics, and key resources. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | EDC and coordinator |
| | iv. Work with Rhode Island Ready to prepare and market the I-95 site readiness area for development. | FYIP #1 | Town Planner; EDTF/EDC and coordinator |
| B. Develop corridor improvement plans for commercial/industrial areas. | i. Create enhanced development corridor plans for Route 3 and Route 2. | FYIP #2 and long term | EDC and coordinator; Town Council, Planning Board, RIDOT; property owners and businesses; consultant assistance |

ELEMENT 9 — TRANSPORTATION

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|---|---|---------|-------------------|
| Goal 9-1 Exeter has well-maintained and cost-effective road management policies. | | | |
| A. Create systems to track and manage road maintenance and road repair. | i. Create a pavement management system as part of a municipal asset-management system. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; DPW |
| Goal 9-2 Speeding is controlled on major Exeter roads. | | | |
| A. Develop and implement a plan to manage speeding. | i. Identify locations where speeding is a problem. | FYIP #1 | DPW |
| | ii. Place speed limit signs in any identified locations that need them. | FYIP #1 | DPW |
| | iii. Create a pilot program to test the performance of nonphysical traffic-calming elements. | FYIP #1 | DPW |
| | iv. If necessary, develop and implement a plan for physical traffic calming using pop-up pilots to identify the best solutions , and measure results. | FYIP #2 | DPW |

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ELEMENT 9—TRANSPORTATION

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|---|-----------------------|--|
| Goal 9-3 Exeter has multimodal routes for safe walking and biking that connect town destinations. | | | |
| A. Develop and pursue implementation of a plan for safe walking and biking routes that connect town destinations. | i. Seek opportunities to integrate safe walking and biking facilities into road maintenance projects. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW; Conservation Commission |
| | ii. Coordinate with RIDOT on multimodal opportunities in commercial corridors (Routes 2 and 3) and other state maintenance roads. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW; Town Planner |
| | iii. Identify and implement pop-up demonstrations to test possible route options. | FYIP #2 and long term | DPW; Town Planner; volunteers |
| | iv. Evaluate the need for sidewalks and crosswalks at the Route 2, Oak Harbor, and Pine View Apartments locations to provide access to the bus stop and potential village center. | FYIP #1-#2 | DPW; Town Planner |
| Goal 9-4 Exeter protects the character of its scenic roads. | | | |
| A. Inventory the scenic resources of Route 102 and any future designated Scenic Roads and ensure protection of those resources through development standards. | i. Inventory conditions along Route 102. | FYIP #1-2 | Town Planner; volunteers; Town Council |
| | ii. Review and modify development standards for property along Route 102 and any other future designated Scenic Roads. | FYIP #1-#2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |
| | iii. Develop a consistent, simple, and attractive signage system for Exeter assets located on Scenic Roads that can also be used elsewhere in town. | FYIP #2 to long term | Town Planner; Planning Board; possible consultant assistance |
| | iv. Consider nominating Route 165 and New London Turnpike for Scenic Road designation. | FYIP #2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; Historical Association |
| Goal 9-5 The Town conducts a brief survey of seniors and others about public transportation needs every five years. | | | |
| A. Survey the Exeter population every five years to gauge transportation needs. | i. Survey the population every five years about transportation needs, with special attention to seniors. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Planner; Director of Social Services |
| | ii. Work with state transportation officials and with local volunteers and regional nonprofit providers to fill any gaps, especially for seniors and youth. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Planner; Director of Social Services; Town Council |

| ELEMENT 10–PUBLIC FACILITIES, SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE, COMMUNICATIONS | | | |
|--|--|----------------------|---|
| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
| Goal 10-1 Exeter Town government communicates effectively with residents, businesses, and visitors. | | | |
| A. Develop a program to collect and report Town data and Town government activities. | Create a data plan identifying what, how and when data should be collected by Town departments, boards and commissions, and so on. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town staff and officials; possible consultant assistance for initial organization |
| | ii. Make this information easily available online, at the Library, and at Town Hall and publicize the availability of this information. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town project manager with Town staff, IT Director |
| B. Upgrade the Town website to make it useful and attractive to Exeter residents, businesses, and visitors. | i. Consider hiring a specialist consultant in municipal websites to organize and design the Town website. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; IT Director |
| | ii. Identify high-priority information for the website that can be implemented quickly. | FYIP #1–#2 | Planner; Director of Social Services; focus group |
| | iii. Work with town staff and boards/commissions to incorporate data and information system into the continuing work plan. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town project manager; IT Director |
| Goal 10-2 Exeter has a new town hall and a new community center. | | | |
| A. Design and build a new town hall, including community meeting space. | i. Select an architectural firm to develop a plan, design, and cost estimate for a new town hall. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; Town Planner |
| | ii. Build the new town hall or renovate an existing building. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; Town Planner; construction project manager |
| | iii. Invite a committee of residents representing varying demographics and interest for a short-term process to develop priority needs for a community center. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; Town Planner; volunteers |
| | iv. Identify a staff project manager for the community center. | FYIP #2 | Town planner; project manager; committee |
| | v. Develop a concept plan for the community center design, financing, and operational approach. | FYIP #2 | Town Planner; project manager; committee |
| | vi. Hire an architect and build the community center. | FYIP #2 to long term | Town Council, Town Planner; project manager |
| Goal 10-3 Exeter has effective management systems for town assets and infrastructure. | | | |
| A. Establish an asset-management system over time and train town staff to use it. | i. Create an asset-management system and implement it incrementally, including with GIS. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW with training of other staff |
| Goal 10-4 Exeter employs stormwater best practices to protect the Town’s groundwater and surface water quality. | | | |
| A. Promote stormwater best management practices for public and private property owners. | i. Use best management practices in Town construction and drainage projects. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW with training of other staff |
| | ii. Promote stormwater management best practices to private property owners. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | DPW; Town planner |

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ELEMENT 10—PUBLIC FACILITIES, SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE, COMMUNICATIONS

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|--|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Goal 10-5 The Town of Exeter and the Volunteer Fire District/Fire Departments collaborate to ensure continuing public safety over the next 20 years. | | | |
| A. Organize a system of regular meetings between Town government and Fire District/Fire Departments to share information about conditions and future needs. | i. Develop a system of Town/FireDepartment meetings two or three times a years to share information. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Fire Marshal/Chiefs; Town Council |
| | ii. Consider creating a Five-Year Plan for the volunteer fire-rescue program. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Fire Marshal/Chiefs |

ELEMENT 11—SUSTAINABILITY: CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE, ENERGY, AND HAZARD MITIGATION

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|---|---------------------|---|
| Goal 11-1 Exeter is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. | | | |
| A. Reduce emissions through energy efficiency and use of renewable energy. | i. Secure a GHG inventory for municipal and community-wide emissions. | FYIP #1 [2024-2025] | Town Council; Planner; assistance from URI |
| | ii. Request a free energy audit of municipal facilities from Rhode Island Energy. | FYIP #1 [2024-2025] | Town Council; Planner |
| | iii. Develop relationships with the RI Office of Energy Resources for assistance. | FYIP #1 [2024-2025] | Town Council; Planner |
| | iv. Incorporate energy efficiency and renewable energy into design and construction of new Town facilities. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; planner |
| | vi. Update land development and subdivision regulations to require EV chargers in new parking lots and expansion of existing lots by 50% or more. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Planner; Planning Board |
| B. Encourage and promote energy efficiency and use of renewable energy by residents and businesses. | i. Raise public awareness about opportunities and incentives. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Library; Director of Social Services; <i>NK News</i> reporter |
| | ii. Promote energy efficiency and clean energy project assistance for farm operators. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Planner; Economic Development coordinator |
| | iii. Encourage resident and business participation in free energy efficiency audit programs for residents and businesses. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Library; Director of Social Services, <i>NK News</i> reporter |
| | iv. Make available information on EV incentives for individuals, businesses, and nonprofits. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Library; Director of Social Services, <i>NK News</i> reporter |

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| ELEMENT 11–SUSTAINABILITY: CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE, ENERGY, AND HAZARD MITIGATION | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
| Goal 11-2 Exeter has a municipal resilience plan. | | | |
| A. Participate in the state’s Municipal Resilience Program. | i. Apply for and participate in the Municipal Resilience Program. | 2003 application; 2024 or 2025 participation | Emergency Management Director; Library |
| | ii. Implement priority resilience projects. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Emergency Management Director; Planner; DPW |
| Goal 11-3 Exeter considers the community electricity aggregation program as a way to provide lower electricity costs and provide renewable energy sources. | | | |
| A. Investigate and evaluate the existing multi-municipality model for possible benefits for Exeter. | i. Research how community electricity programs are working In Rhode Island. | FYIP #1 | Town Council |
| Goal 11-4 Exeter maintains an updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan and provides public information about risk mitigation. | | | |
| A. Create a joint Local Hazard Mitigation Plan with West Greenwich. | i. Seek funding for a consultant to prepare an updated Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. | FYIP #1 | EMA Director; Town Council |
| | ii. Prepare and adopt the plan. | | EMA Director; consultant; Town of West Greenwich; stakeholders |
| | iii. Use assessment tools, such as the Fire Adapted Communities Self Assessment Tool, to update wildfire risk assessment. | FYIP #1, 2024-2025 and ongoing | EMA Director; residents and stakeholders |
| | iv. Update the plan every 5 years to keep it in force. | FYIP #1-#2 and long term | Town Council; EMA Director |
| | v. Implement the plan as needed. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planner Board; Planner; EMA Director |
| B. Raise awareness and provide public education about natural hazards and risk mitigation. | i. Update the town website information on natural hazards to include more than hurricane planning. | FYIP #1 | EMA Director; Planner; IT Director |

ELEMENT 12—LAND USE

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|--|--|---------------------|--|
| Goal 12-1 Land use regulations are used to protect water quality, prevent flooding, maintain farms/forests, and preserve environmentally sensitive lands in connected networks. | | | |
| A. Use land use regulations to ensure protection of sensitive environmental resources and rural character. | i. Protect groundwater drinking supplies, recharge areas, and surface waters. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board; Administrative Officer; Zoning Inspector; Building Inspector |
| | ii. Protect environmentally sensitive lands and connected corridors by providing guidance in design standards for development. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board; Administrative Officer |
| B. Promote open space protection in major subdivision design. | i. Review and update conservation development and rural compound ordinances and standards as needed. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board; Planner |
| Goal 12-2 Exeter preserves opportunities for the financial sustainability of agricultural and forestry land uses. | | | |
| A. Allow accessory uses for agricultural and forestry enterprises that contribute to those uses' economic sustainability in Exeter. | i. Develop a set of allowed farm and forest accessory uses to help support large land owners. | FYIP #1 | Town Council; Planning Board; farm and residential representatives |
| B. Continue to support land use policies and ordinances that provide space for agricultural and forestry uses. | i. Continue to support the FFOS tax-incentive program. | ongoing | Town Council |
| | ii. Create a means of communicating with property owners in the FFOS program about future potential development. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Planner; Planning Board; Tax Assessor; Tax Collector |
| Goal 12-3 Exeter encourages growth in planned districts that can support more density to provide balanced housing, economic development, and community services. | | | |
| A. Revise and reorganize definitions and categories in the zoning ordinance for better distinguishing zoning tools for planned districts to help create the conditions for high-quality development in special locations. | i. Amend the zoning ordinance to improve planned district issues. | FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board |
| | ii. Pursue PVOD development proactively with innovative developers. | FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; proactive group; possible consultant |
| | iii. Create a master plan for a Municipal Center Special Planned District. | FYIP #1-#2 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council; resident group |
| | iv. Develop a joint State/Town master plan for the Ladd Center as a Special Planned District. | FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |
| | v. Develop a master plan for the southern end of Route 2, including the currently mapped Planned District. | FYIP #2 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council; resident and business group; possible consultant |
| | vi. Create a mapped Planned District for the Yawgoo Valley recreational area based on a future master plan. | FYIP #1-#2 | Planner; Planning Board; owners; neighborhood representatives |
| | vii. Develop specific and objective criteria for the mapped Dorset Mill Planned District. | FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; Dorset Mill owners and tenants |

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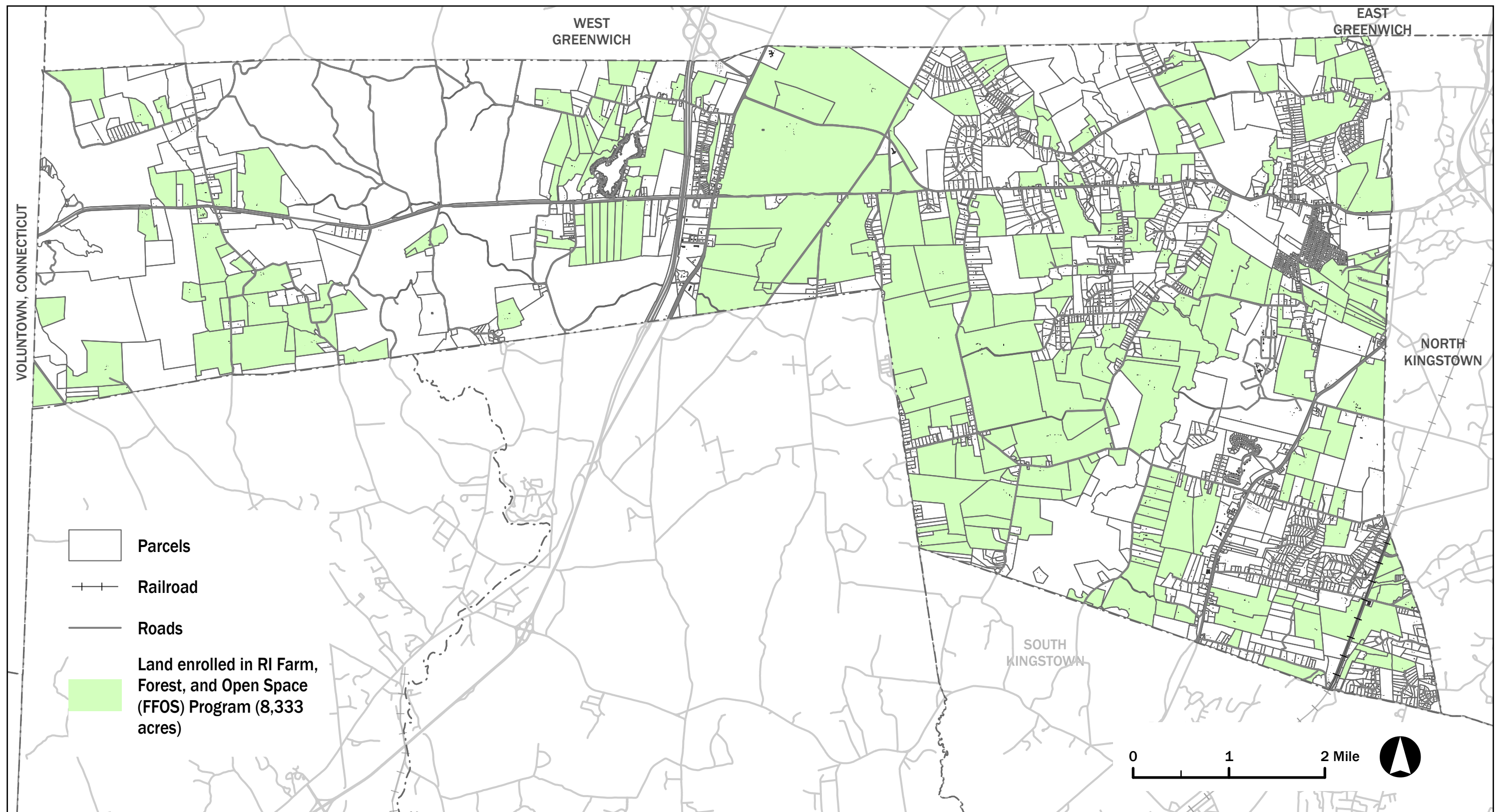
ELEMENT 12—LAND USE

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|---|--|--------------------|---|
| Goal 12-4 The Route 3 corridor is revitalized as an attractive area with a mixture of uses, especially for tax-paying non-residential development in a gateway to I-95 and a visitor gateway to the Arcadia Management Area. | | | |
| A. Work with state agencies to create an integrated plan for the Route 3 corridor. | i. Develop a Route 3 corridor master plan.. | FYIP #1–#2 | Planner; Planning Board RI DOT and RI Commerce; business interests; consultant; owners; housing advocates and nonprofits. |
| | ii. Establish an Interstate Floating Overlay District for areas with access to I-95. | FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |
| | iii. Seek enrollment in the RI Ready program (RI Commerce) for the site at Routes 102/3. | FYIP #1 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council; RI Commerce |
| B. Create a plan for a mixed-use Enhancement Floating Overlay District (Arcadia Main Street) between Austin Farm Road and Ten Rod Road, with transportation improvement and visitor amenities. | i. Develop a master plan for a mixtures of uses. | FYIP #1–#2 | Town Planner; Planning Board; consultant; business and property interests |
| | ii. Advocate for implementation of the RIDOT road diet planning concept for the corridor. | FYIP #1–#2 | Planner; Planning Board; RI DOT |
| Goal 12-5 The Exeter Zoning Ordinance complies with state legislation. | | | |
| A. Review requirements for compatibility with state legislation and amend the Exeter zoning ordinance to comply | i. Amend the zoning ordinance for compliance with 2023 state laws and future relevant legislation. | FYIP#1 and ongoing | Planner; Planning Board; possible consultant; Town Council |
| Goal 12-6 Exeter has a new, modern zoning ordinance. | | | |
| A. Create a modern, functional, and user-friendly zoning ordinance. | i. Rewrite the Zoning Ordinance to reflect contemporary best practices in administrative user-friendliness and to be consistent with the comprehensive plan. | FYIP #2 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council; consultant |

ELEMENT 13—STEWARDSHIP AND IMPLEMENTATION

| STRATEGIES | ACTIONS | WHEN | WHO |
|---|--|---------------------|--|
| Goal 13-1 The comprehensive plan guides Town decision making. | | | |
| A. Appoint a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to support the Planning Board and Town Council in assessing implementation progress. | i. Appoint a small citizen committee (5-6 people) to serve as a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC). | FYIP #1: 2024 | Planning Board; Town Council |
| | ii. Schedule a minimum of two CPIAC meetings a year. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | CPIAC; Planner |
| | iii. Organize a public process every five years to review the vision, goals, and implementation progress with the assistance of the CPIAC. | 2028; 2033; 2038 | CPIAC; Planner; Planning Board |
| | iv. Complete and submit the Five-Year Implementation Report to State Planning. | 2028 | CPIAC; Planner; Planning Board |
| Goal 13-2 The comprehensive plan is incorporated into decision making in multiple ways. | | | |
| A. Ensure that Town officials, staff and volunteer boards and commissions are aware of Comprehensive Plan priorities and work to achieve the priorities relevant to their areas of work. | i. Make the plan priorities easily accessible to officials, staff, and volunteer groups. | FYIP #1; 2024 | Planner; Planning Board; Town Council |
| | ii. Require a simple annual report from Town departments, boards, and commissions, and appointed advisory groups. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Department, commission, advisory group members |
| | iii. Use the comprehensive plan when developing annual work plans and budgets. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Department, commission, advisory group members |
| | iv. Include reference to achieving plan goals and activities in the annual proposed budget for the town financial meeting. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council |
| | v. Use the plan and refer to achieving plan goals when making regulatory decisions. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council; Planning Board |
| Goal 13-3 Town government provides effective and meaningful access to information about government activities and performance. | | | |
| A. Expand public understanding of the Exeter 2044 Comprehensive Plan and how it is being implemented. | i. Print hard copies of the Exeter 2044 Executive Summary for distribution through the Library, Town Hall, and local businesses. | 2024 | Town Council |
| | ii. Improve design, navigation, and overall usefulness of the Town website. | 2024 | Town Council |
| | iii. Post the plan and all maps on an improved Town website. | 2024 | Town Council |
| | iv. Use an Exeter 2044 logo or icon on the Town Council, Planning Board, and other agendas for comprehensive plan-related actions on the agenda. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Town Council, Planning Board, and so on |
| | v. Create a Town Annual Report to include a brief report from the Planning Board on implementation of Exeter 2044. | FYIP #1 and ongoing | Planner; Planning Board; CPIAC |

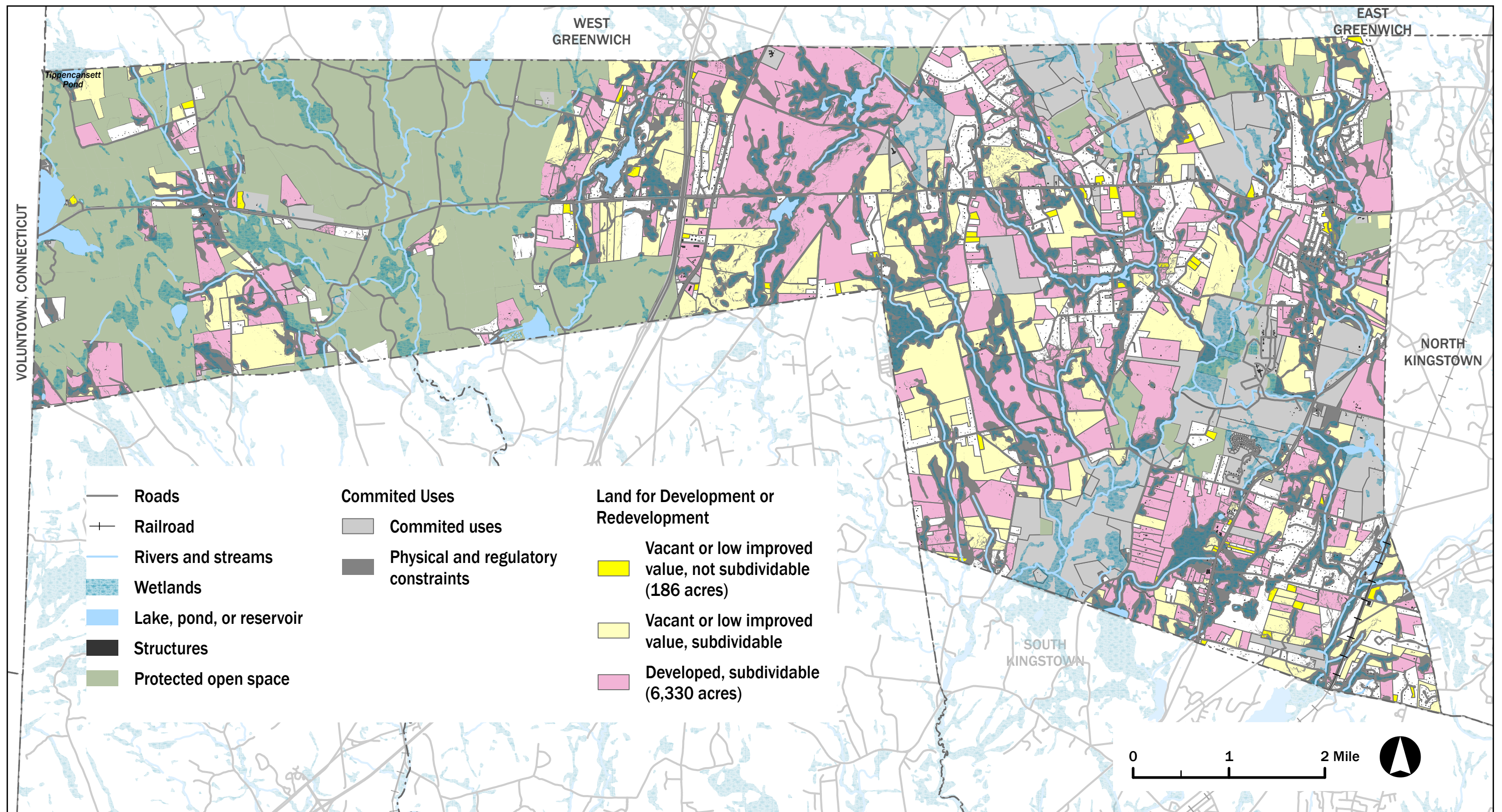
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Land in Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program (FFOS)

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
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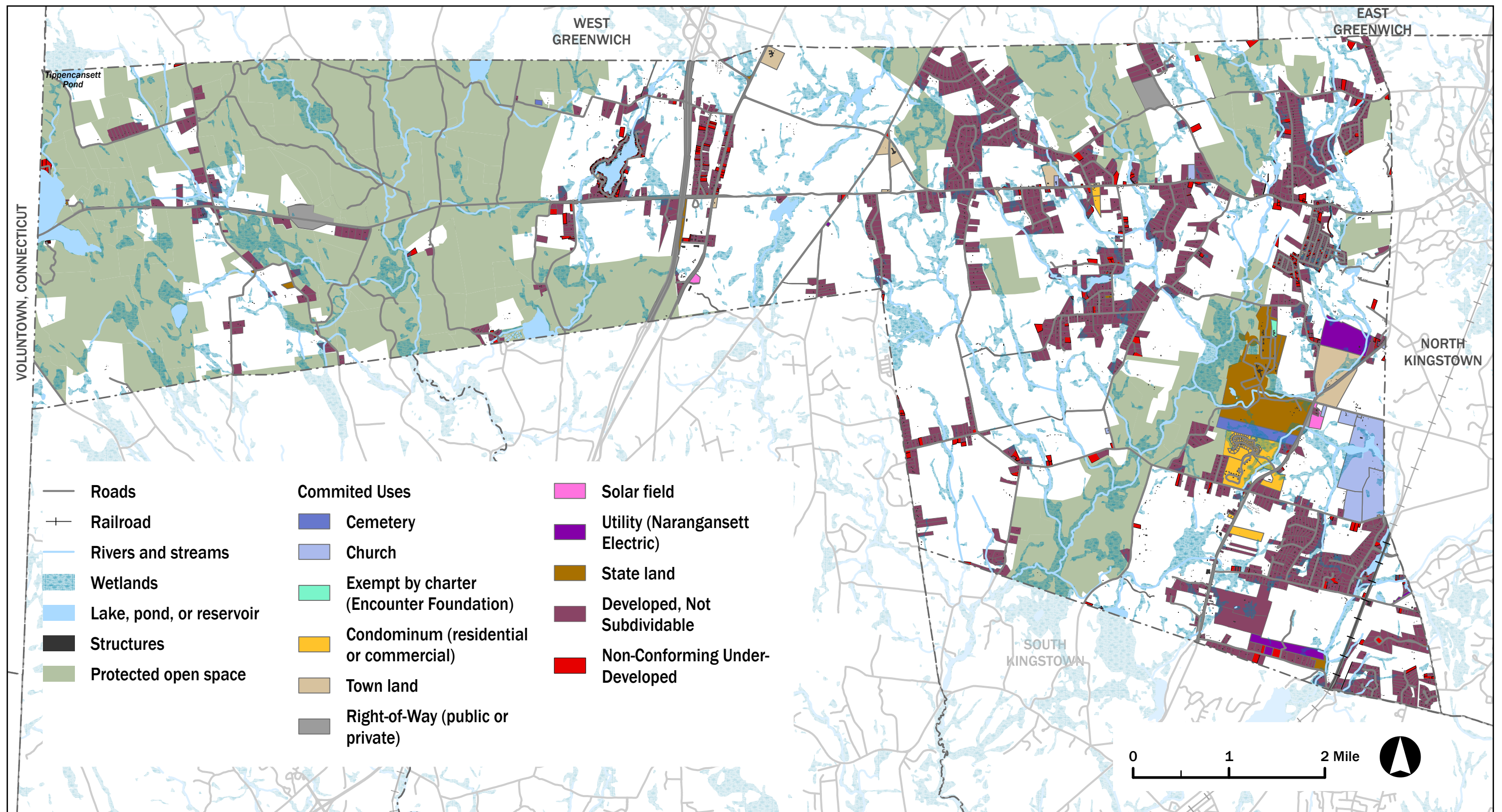
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Buildout

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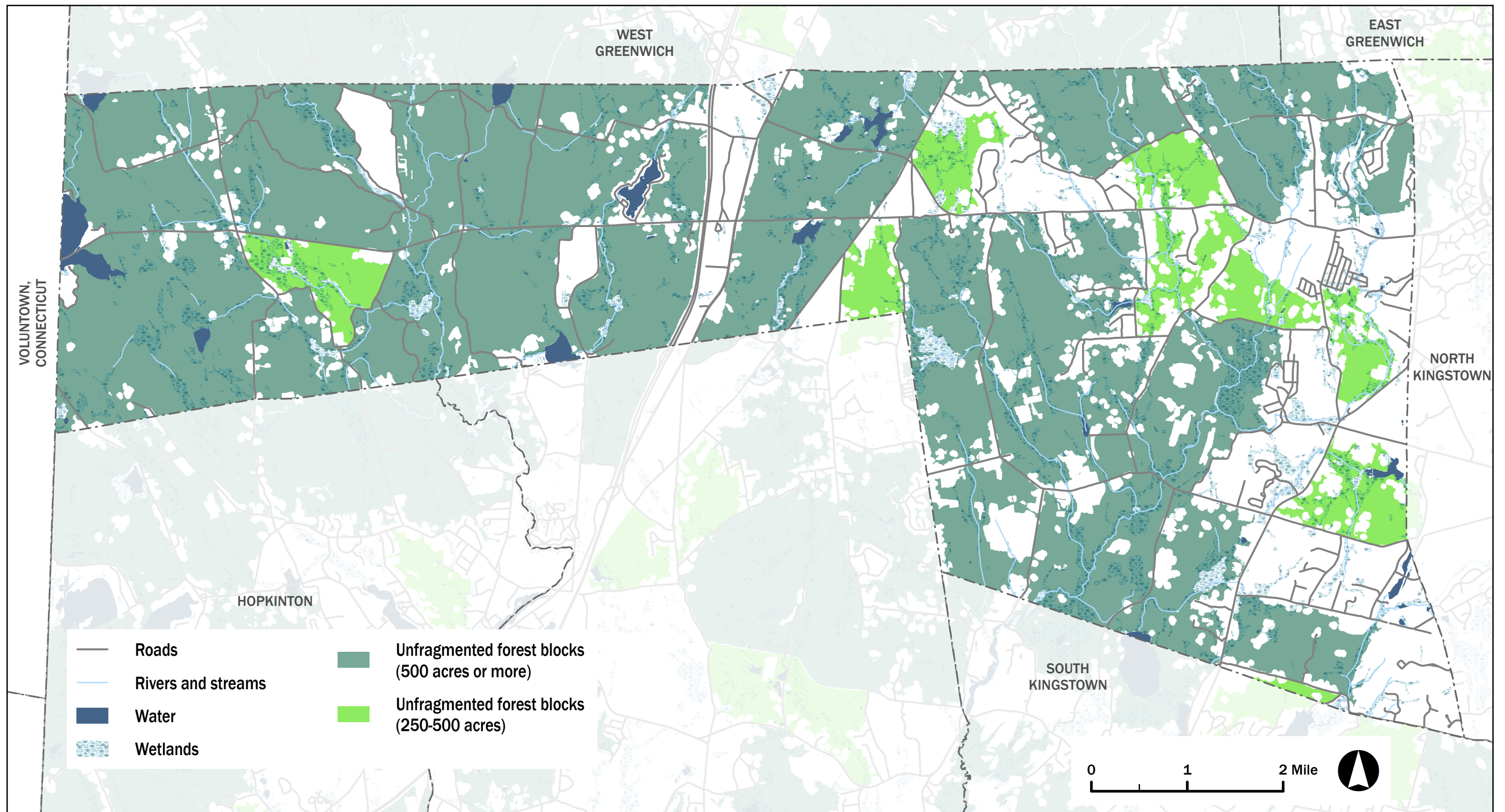
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Committed Uses

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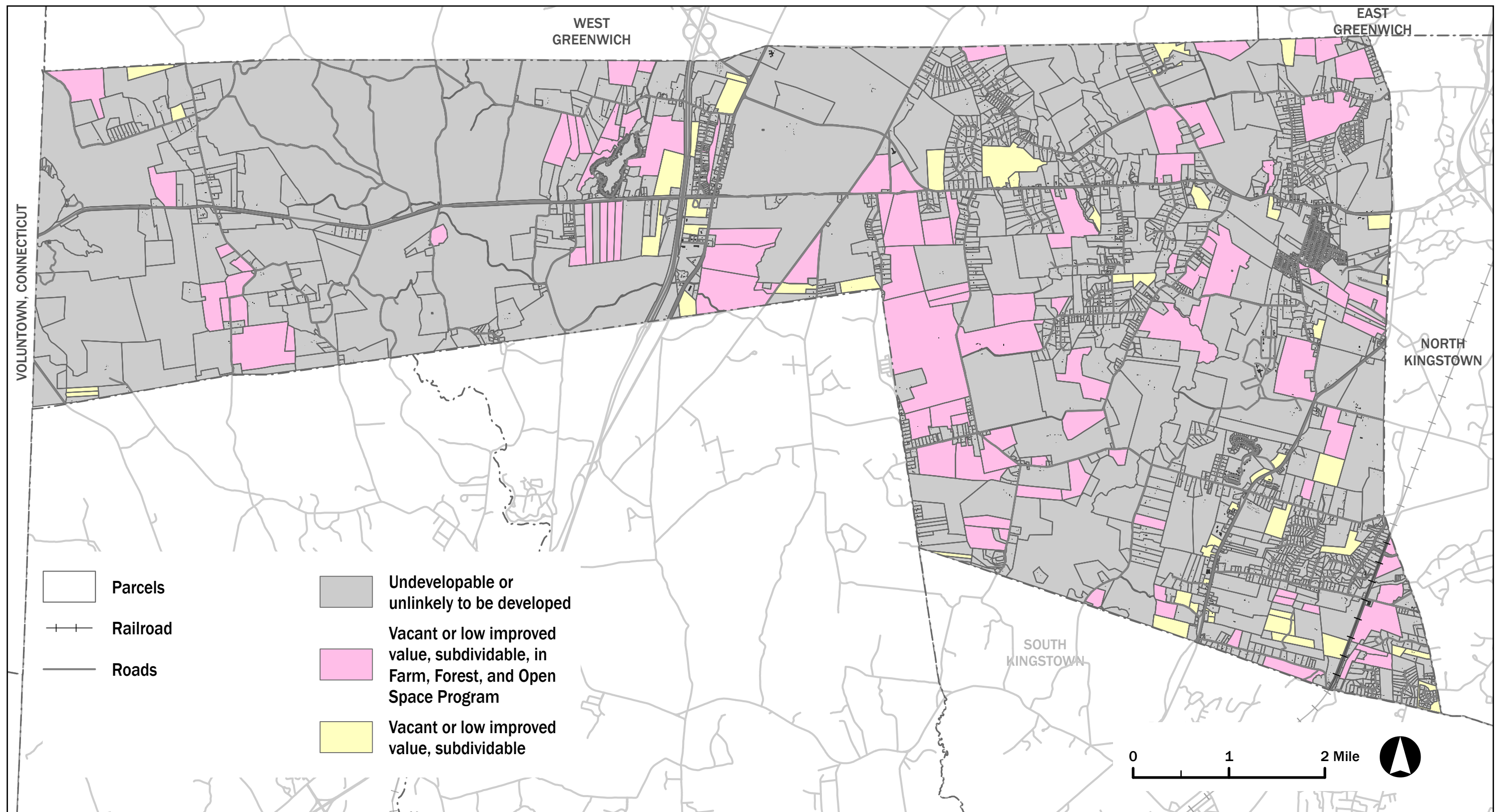
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Core Forest

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI
Environmental Data Center
Map Created: January 4, 2024

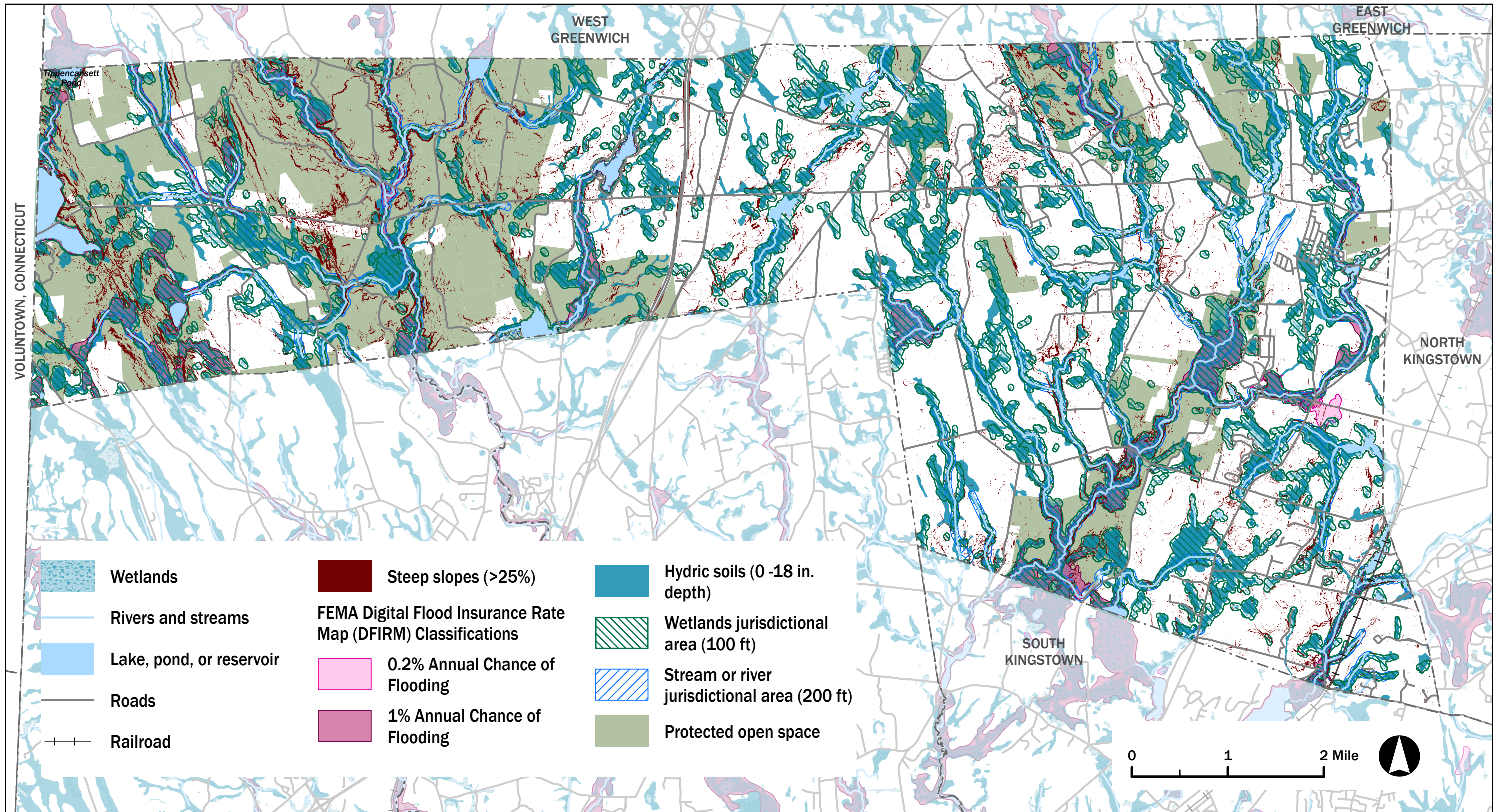
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Developable Land in Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program (FFOS)

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
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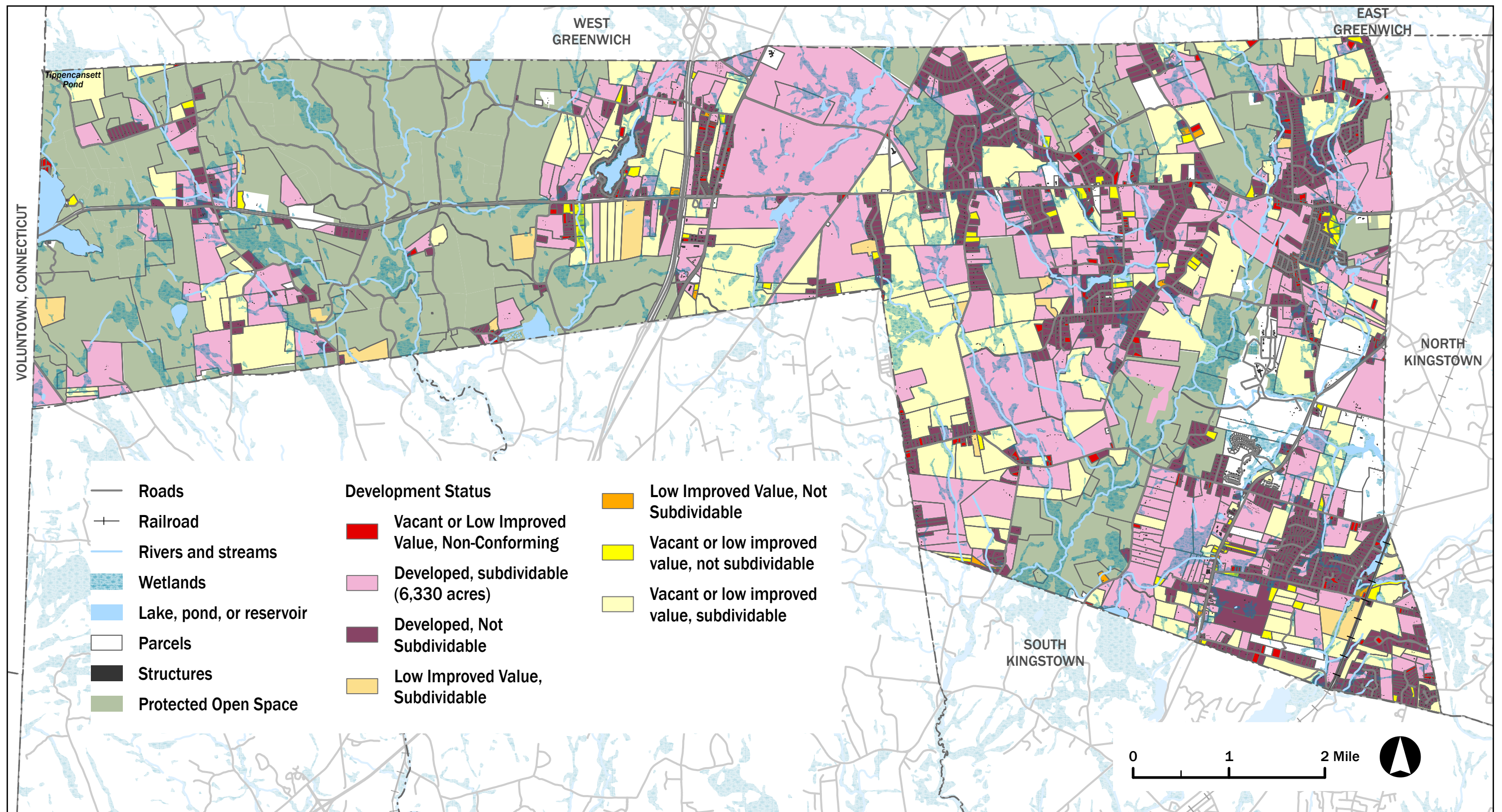
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Development Constraints

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
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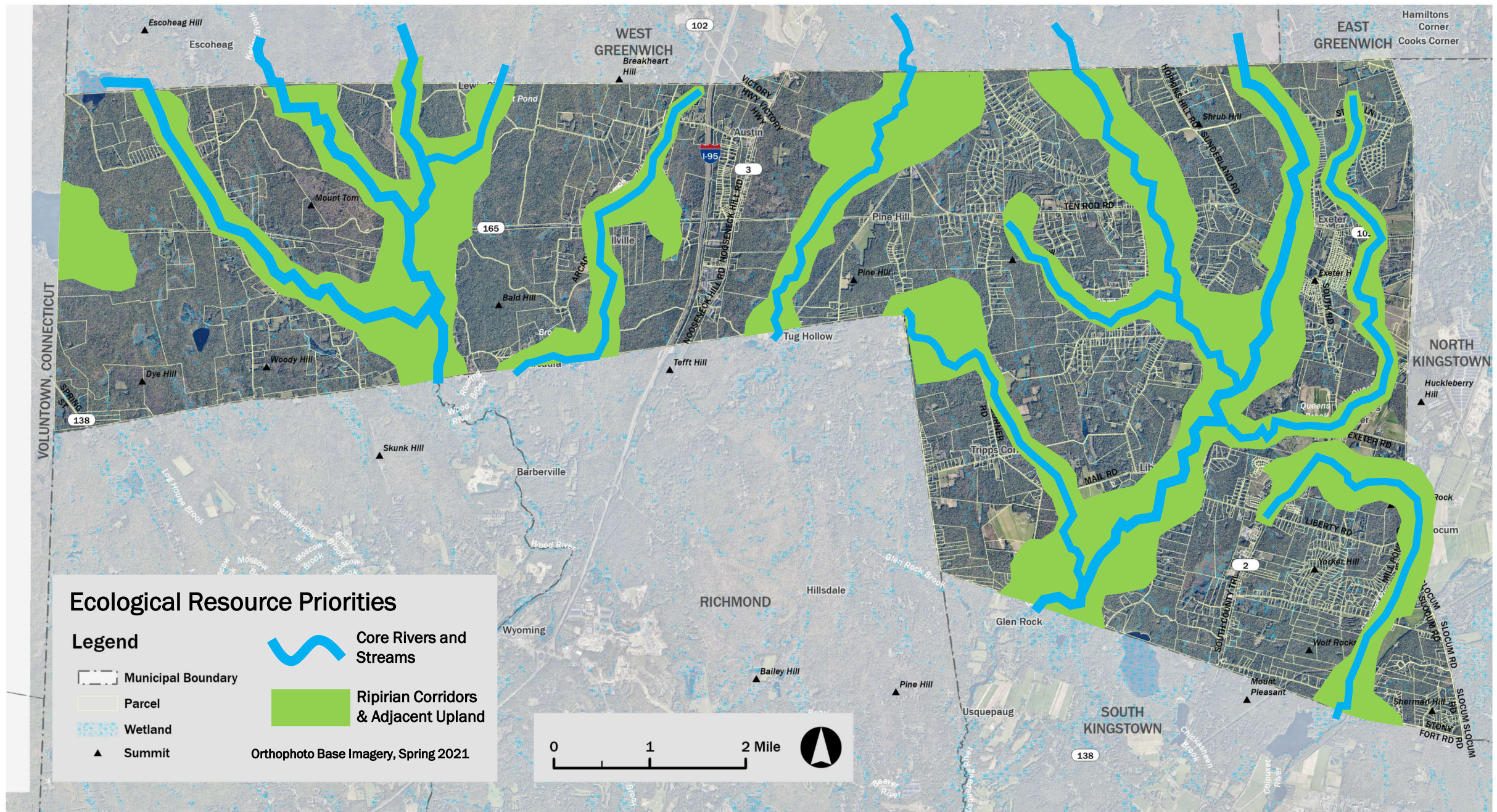
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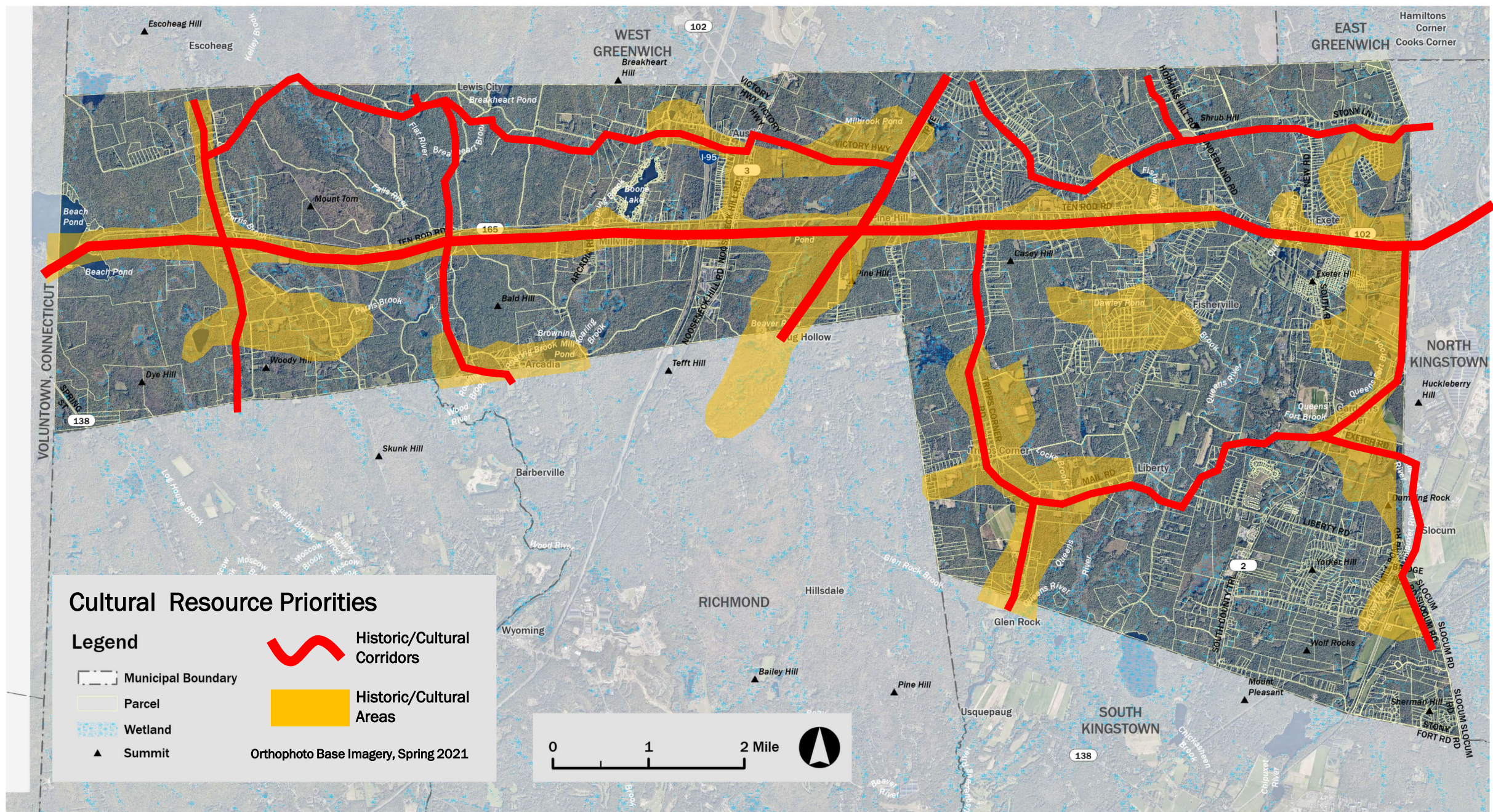


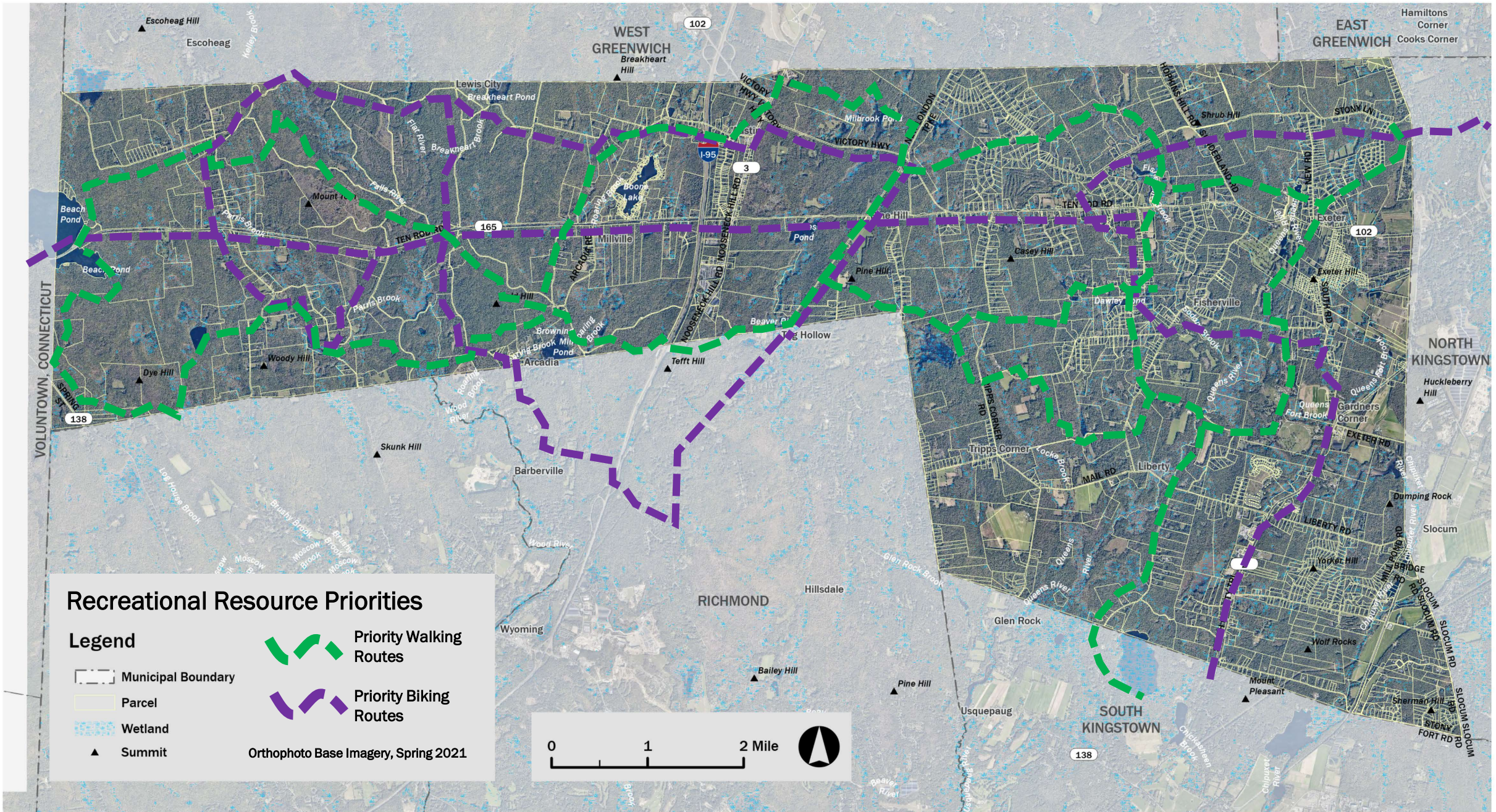
Development Status

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Recreational Resource Priorities

Legend

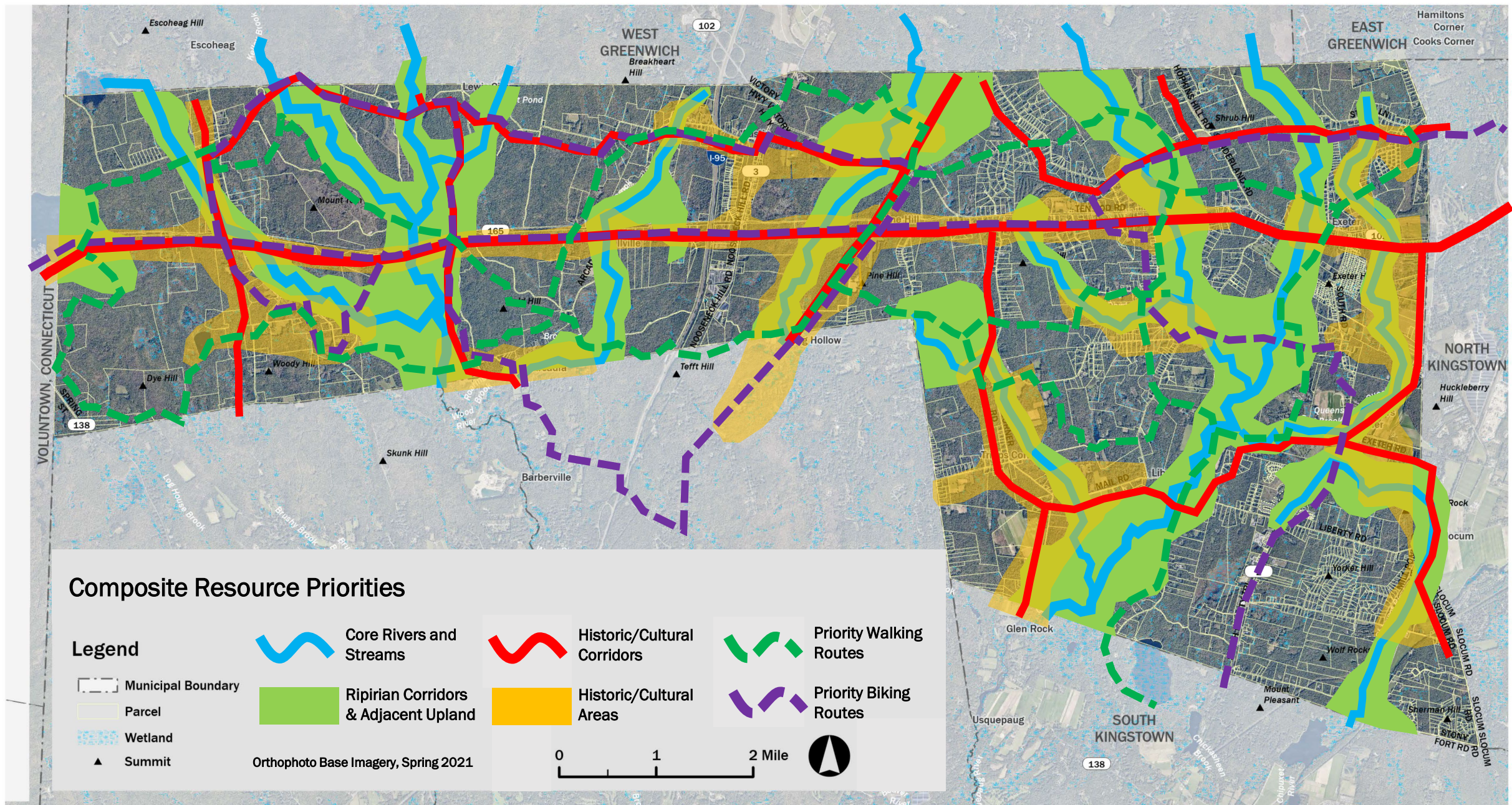
- Municipal Boundary
- Parcel
- Wetland
- Summit

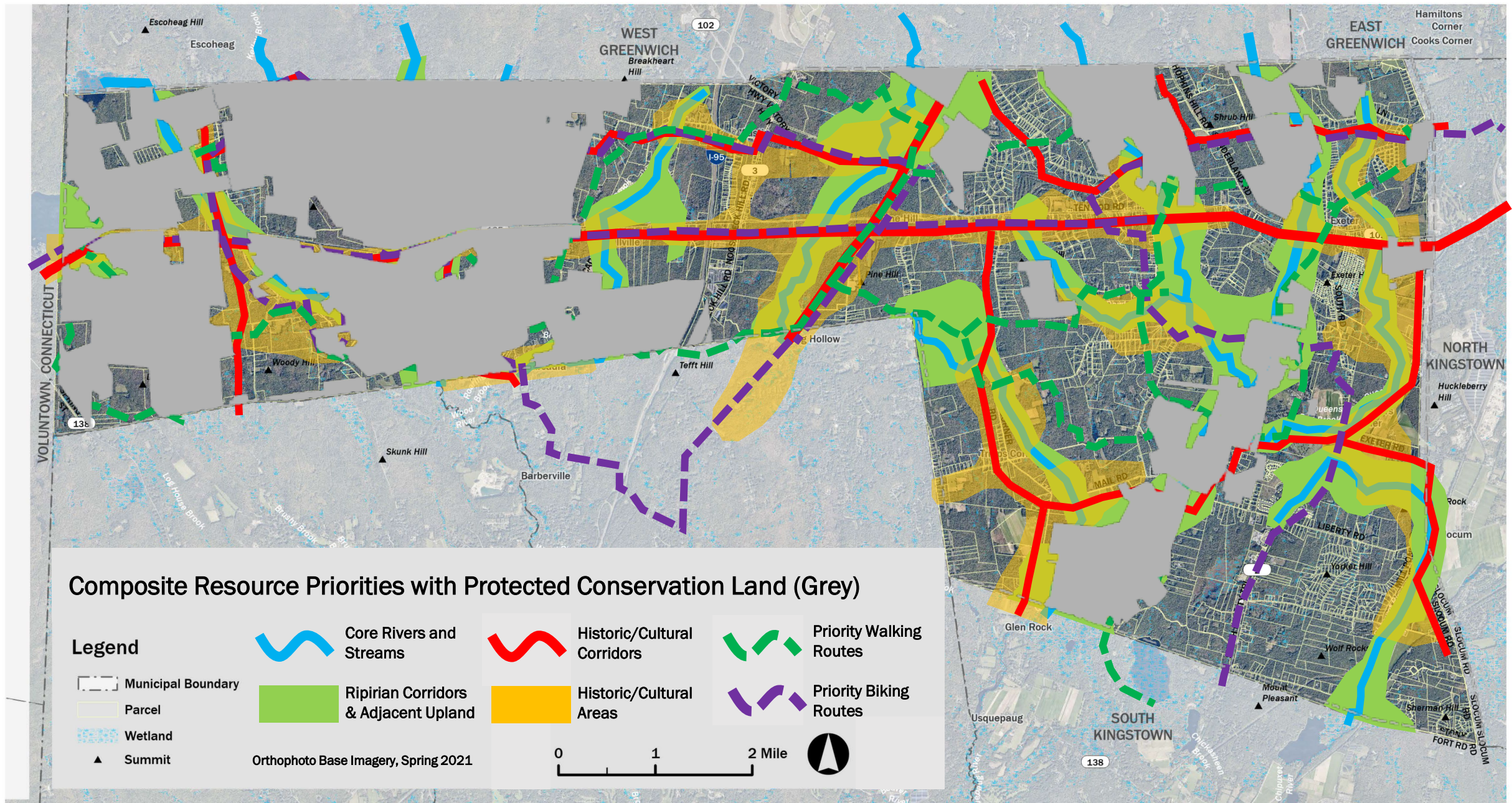
- Priority Walking Routes
- Priority Biking Routes

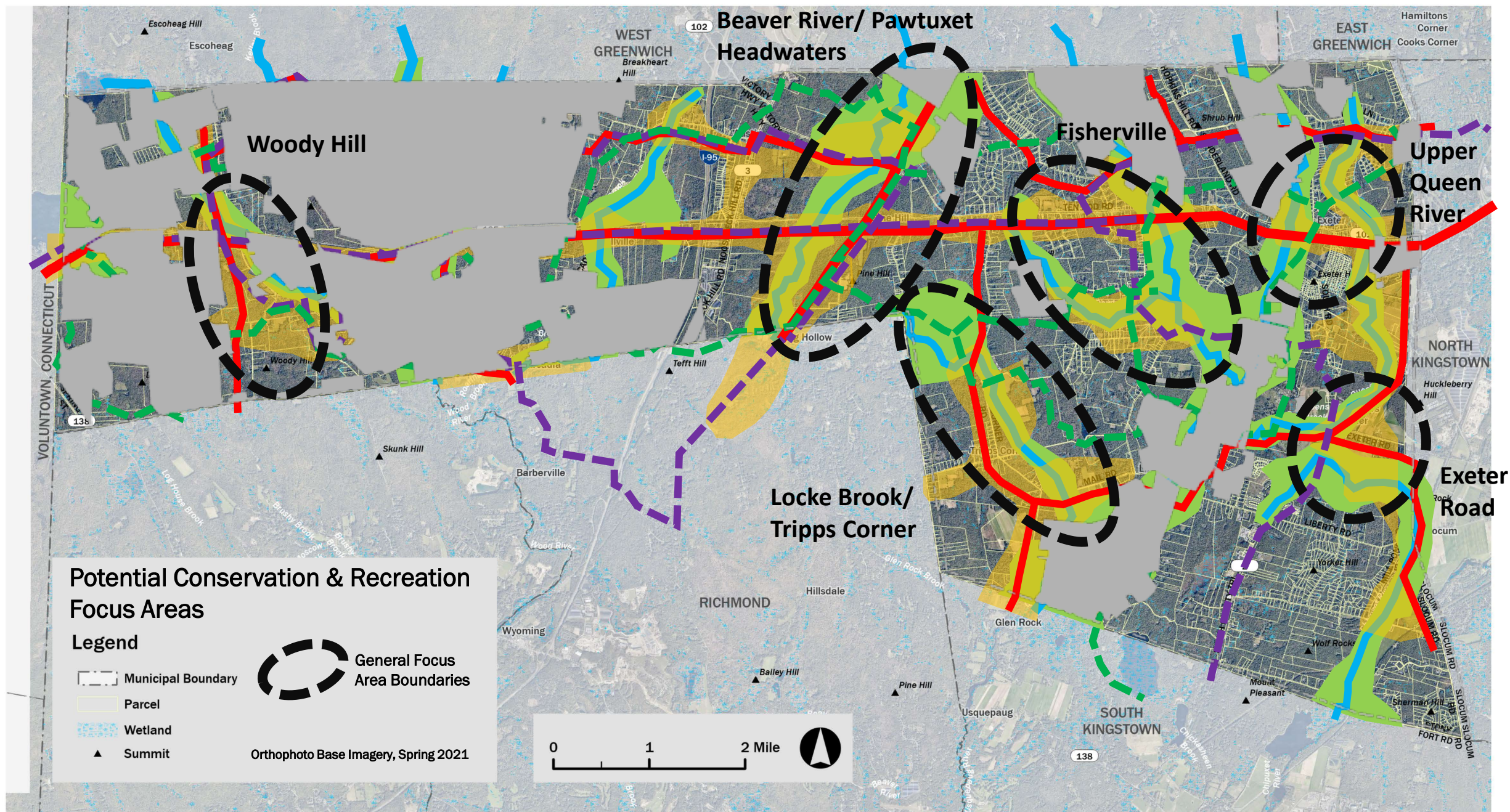
Orthophoto Base Imagery, Spring 2021

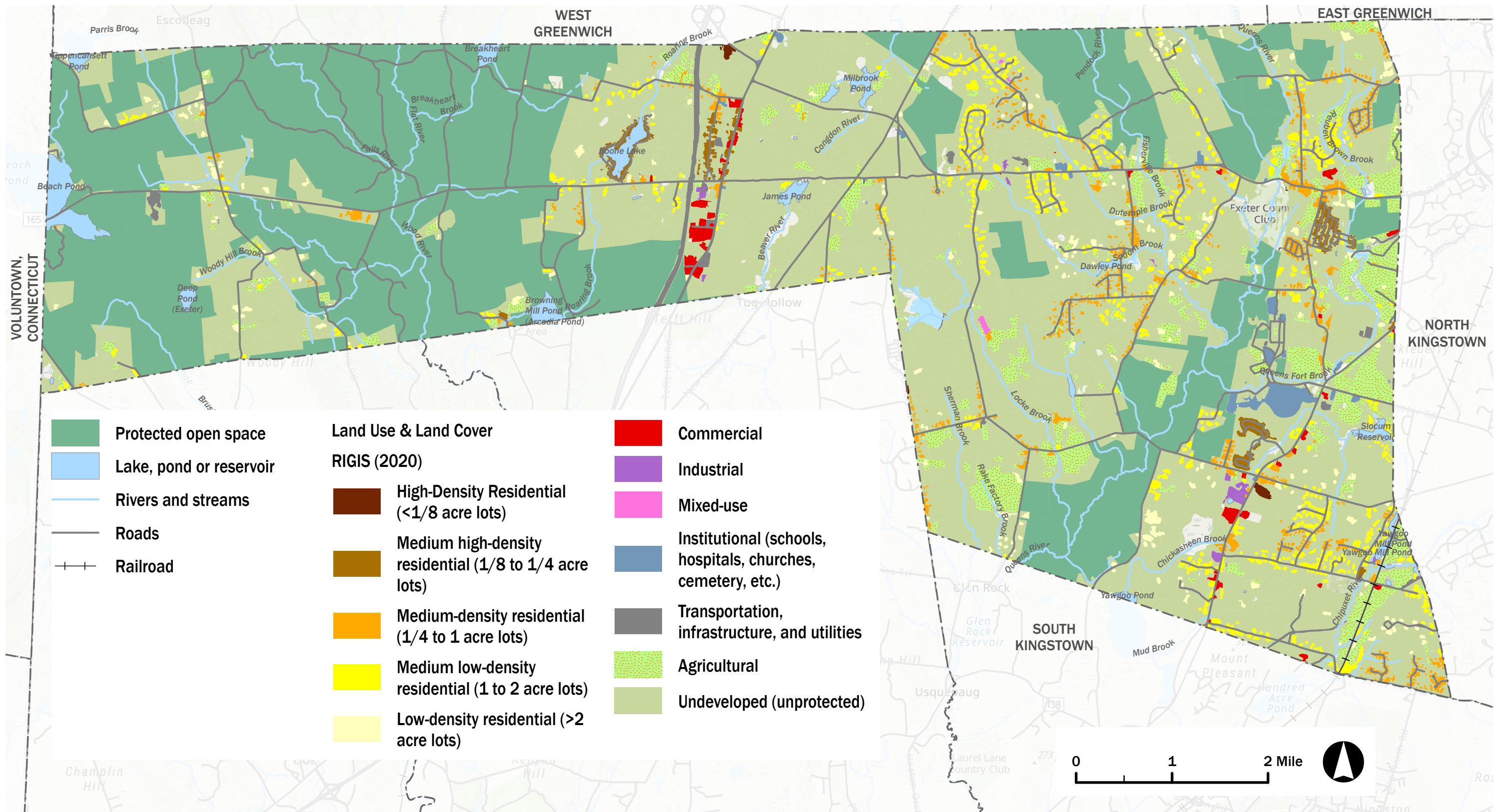
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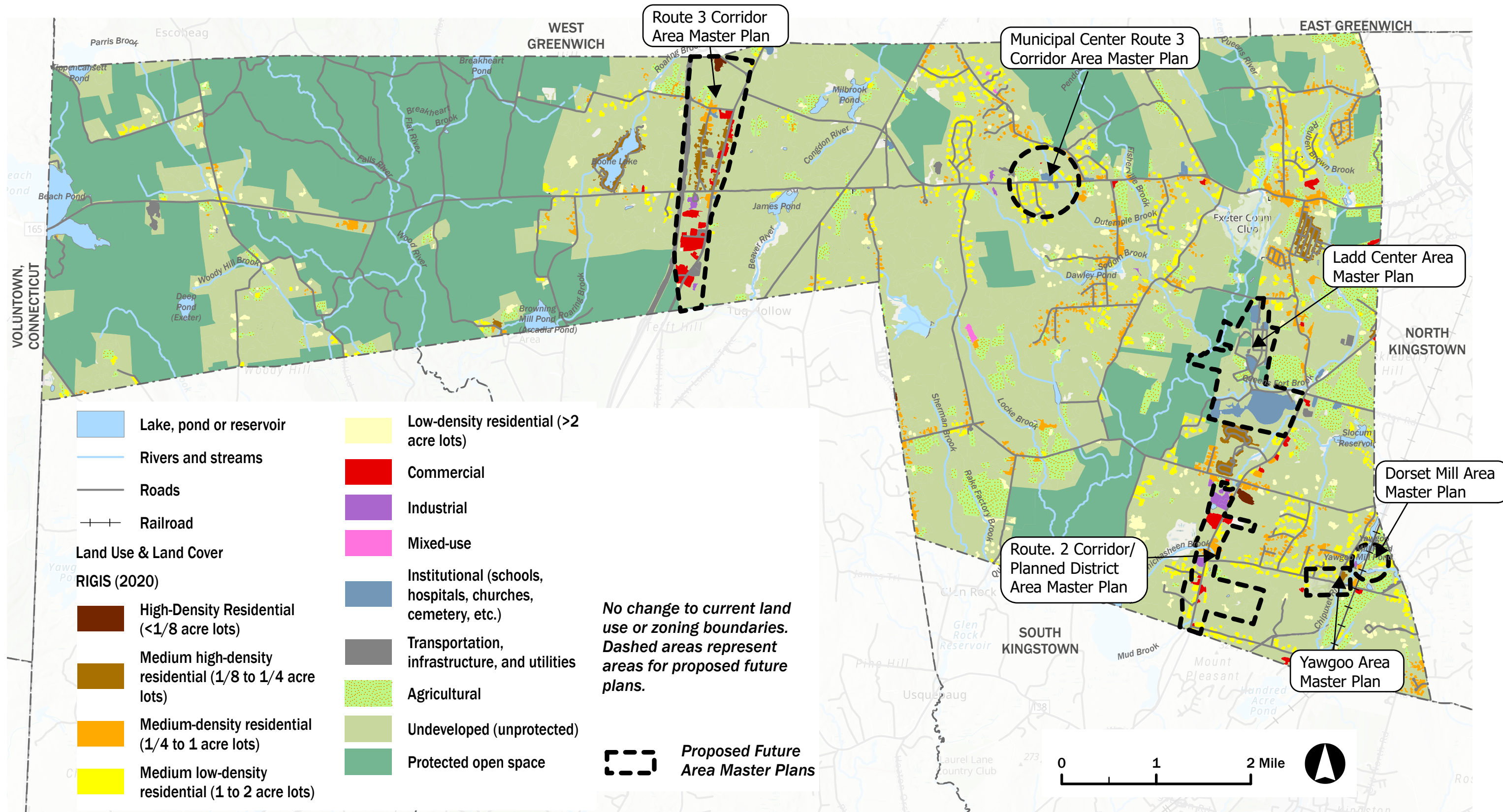




Existing Land Use

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 11, 2024

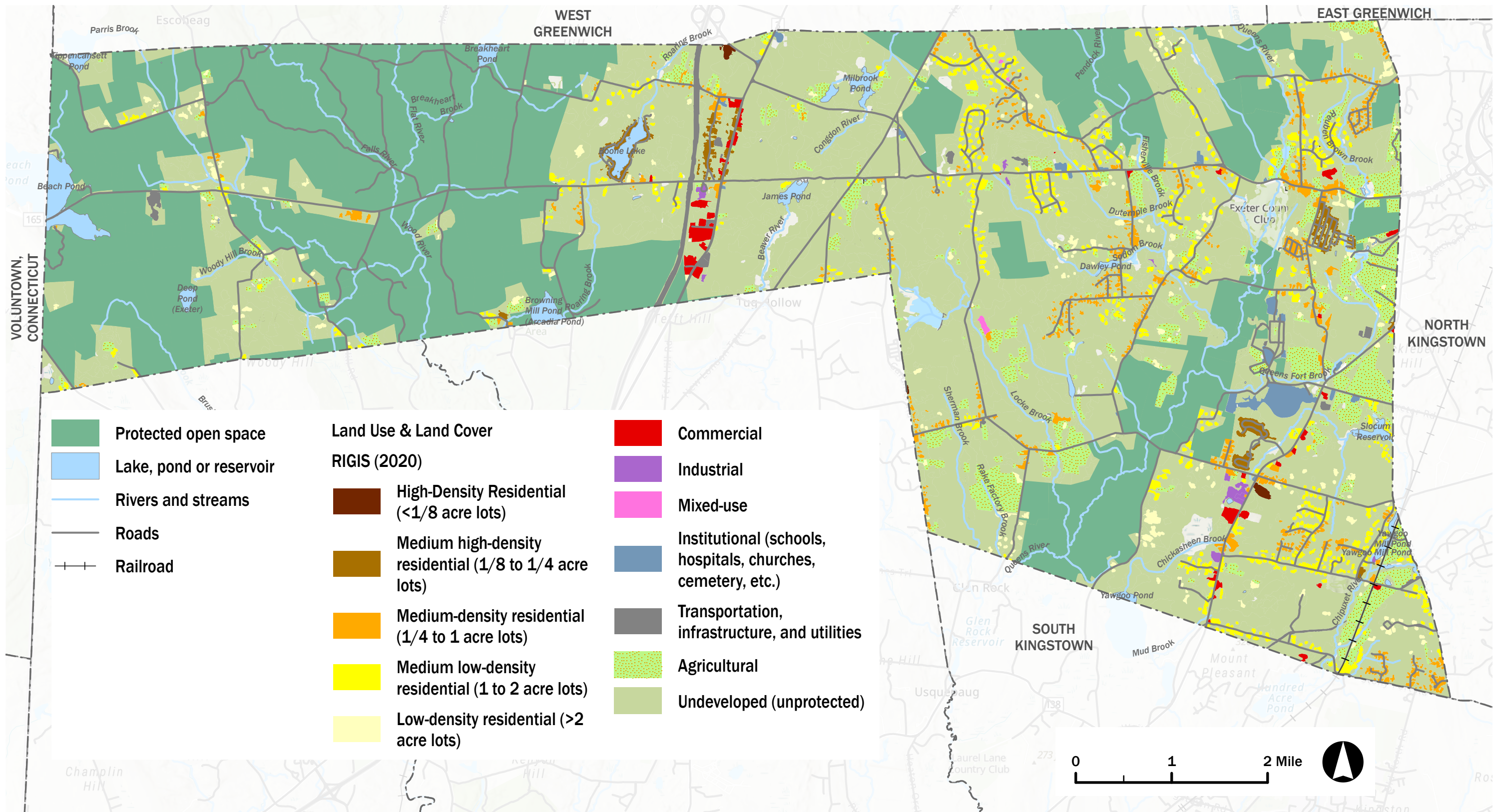
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Future Area Master Plans

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 11, 2024

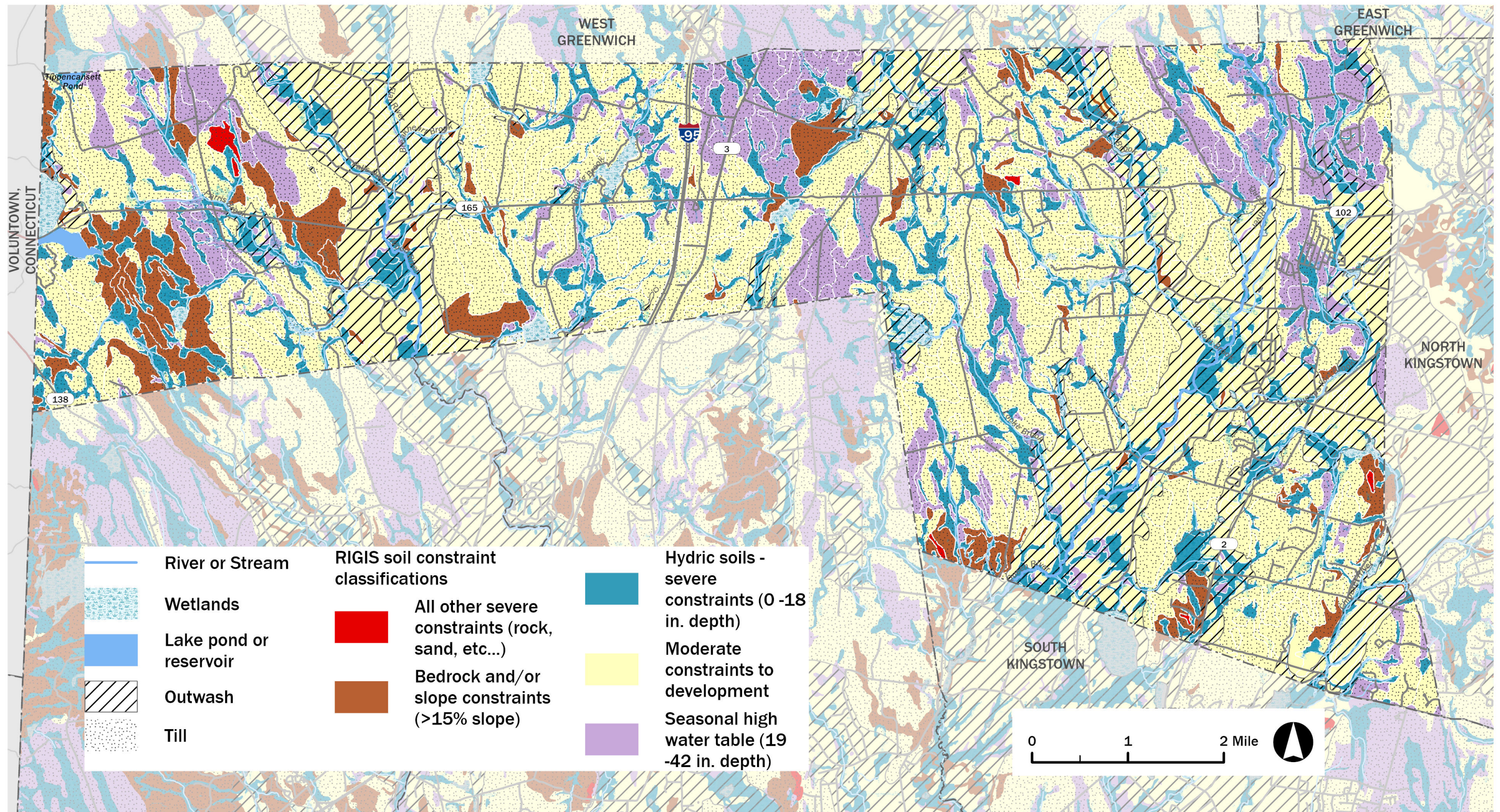
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Future Land Use

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 11, 2024

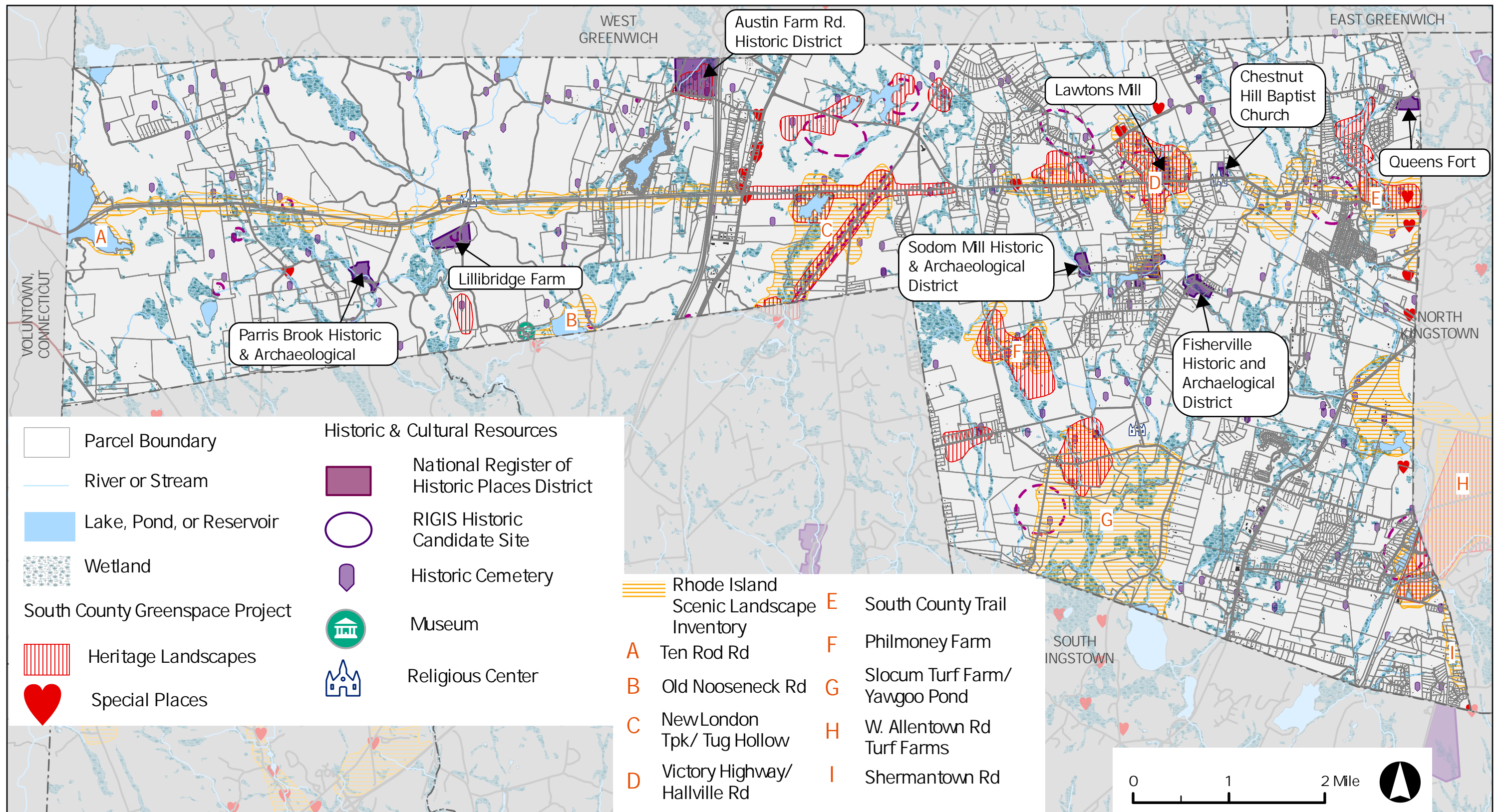
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Geology & Soils

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map Created: January 4, 2024

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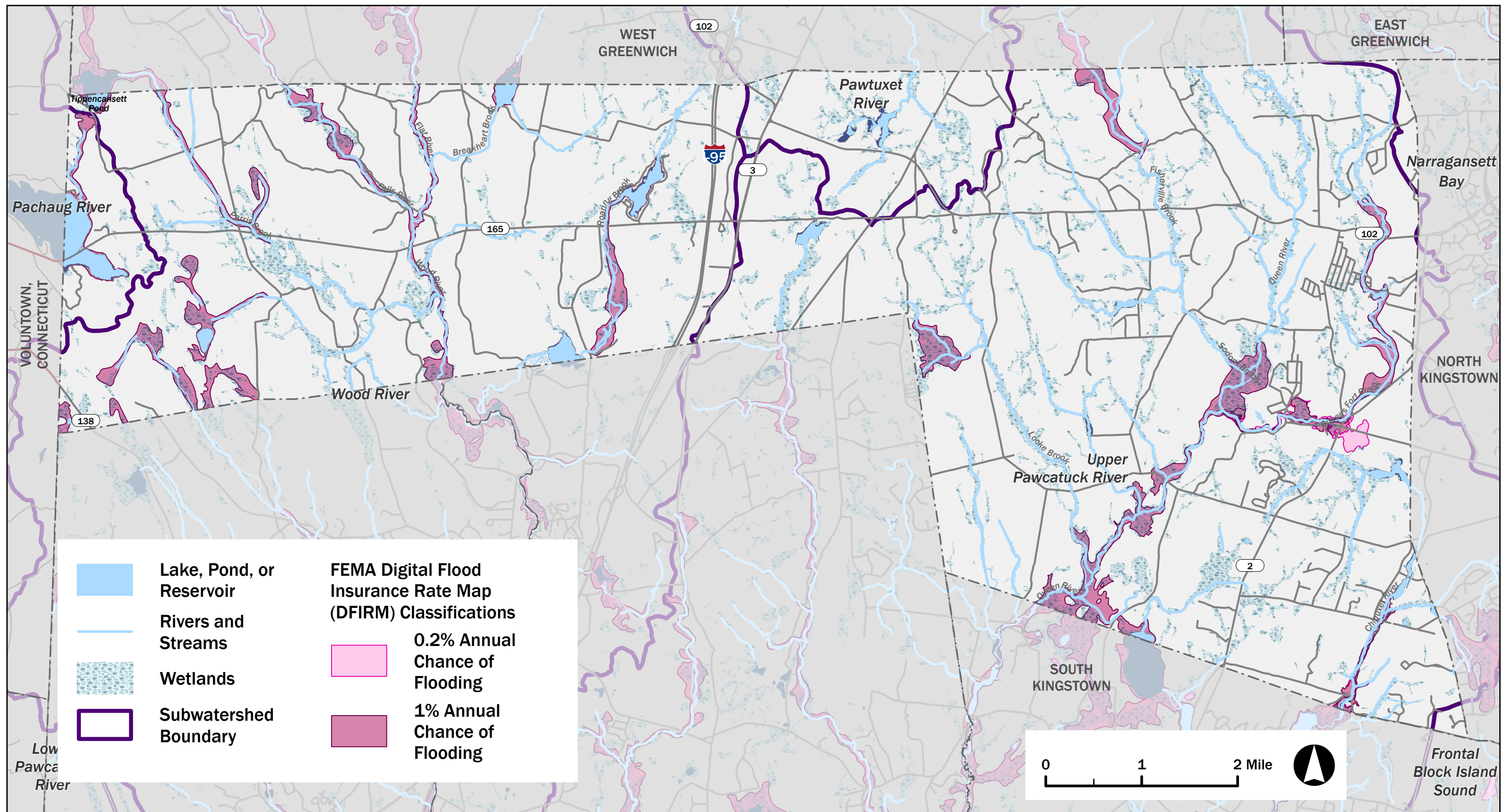


Historic & Cultural Resources

Date: December 19, 2023

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP

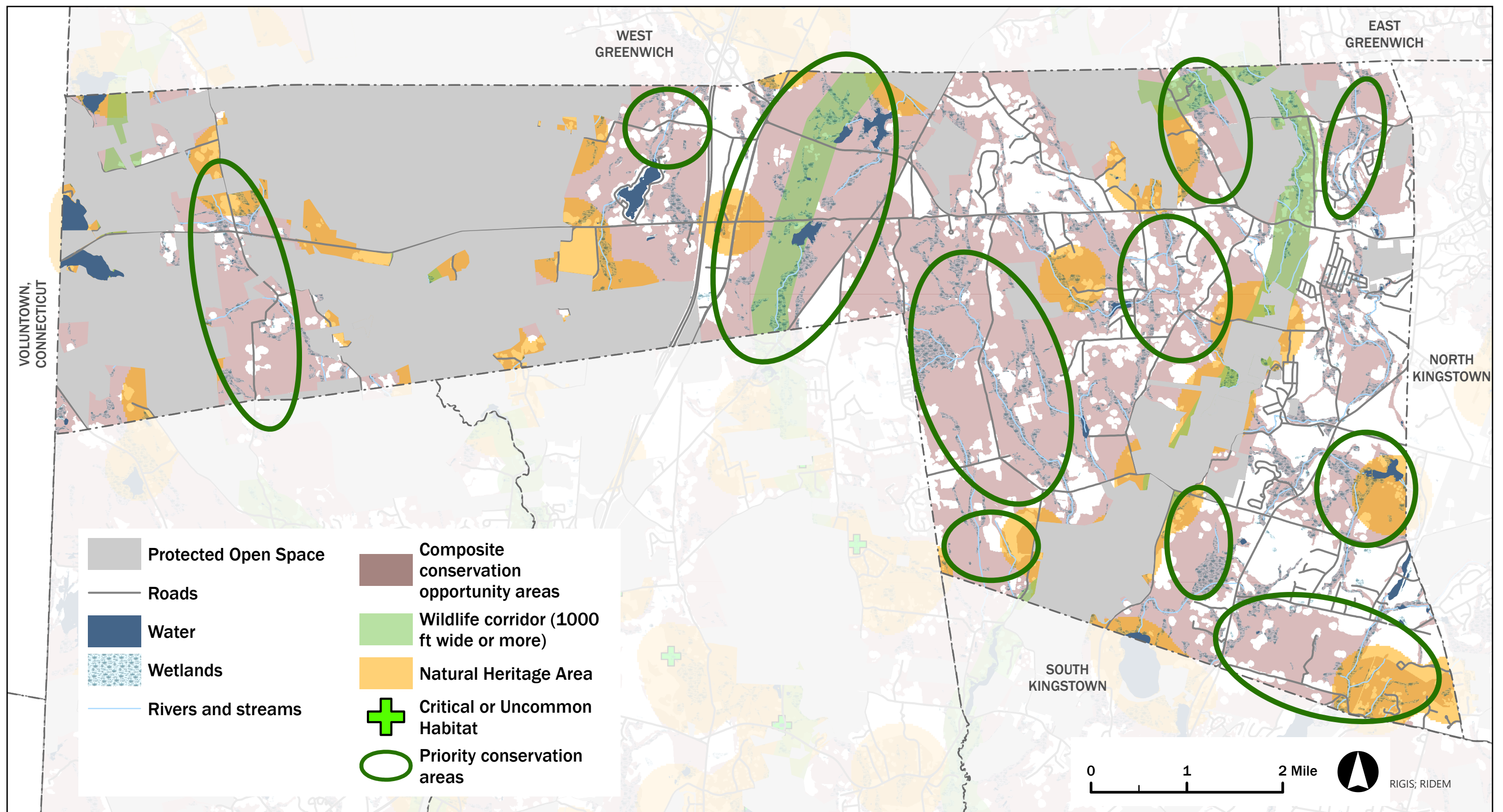
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Hydrology & Floodplains

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map Created: January 4, 2024

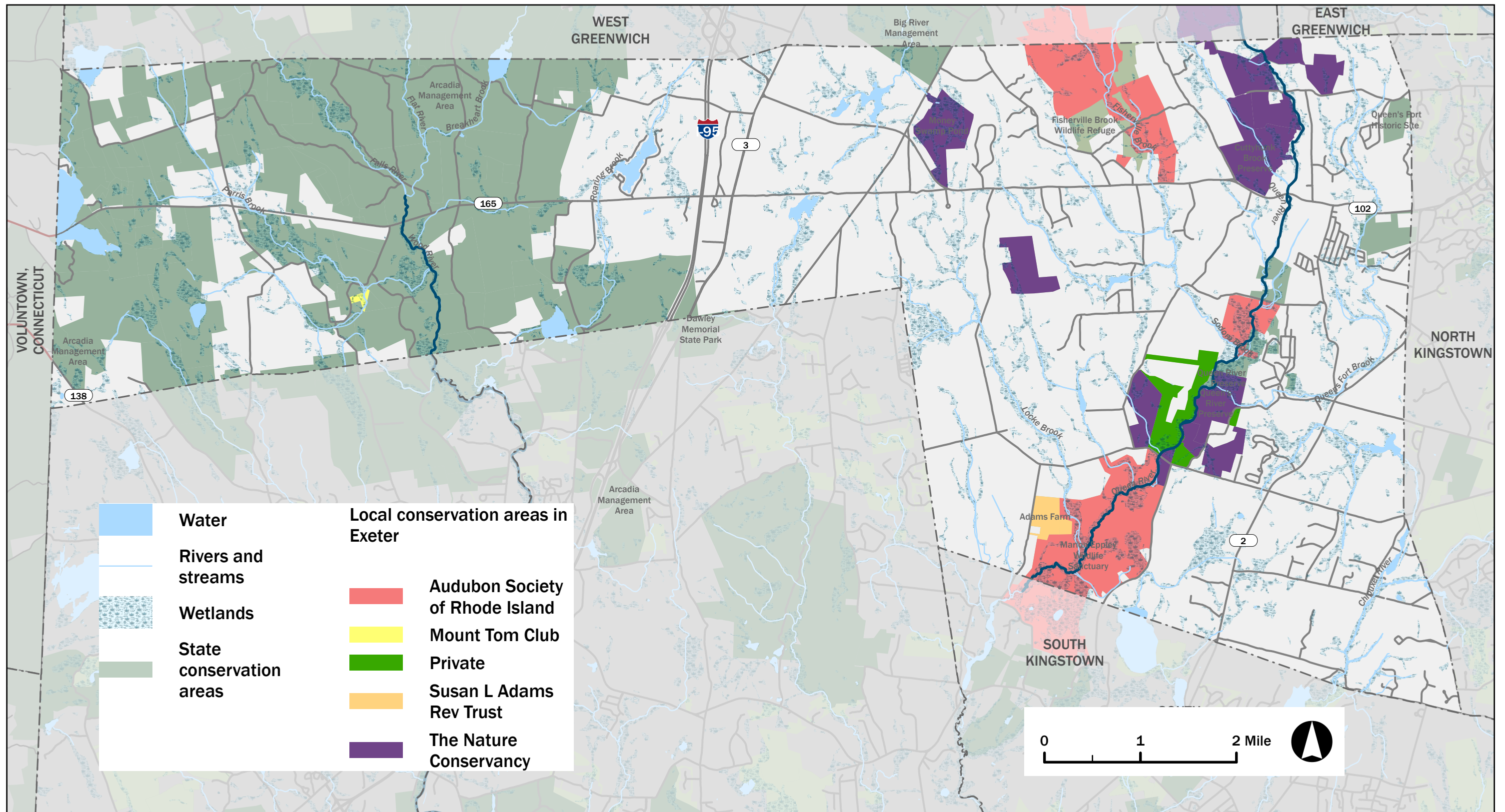
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Priority Conservation Areas

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI
Environmental Data Center
Map Created: January 4, 2024

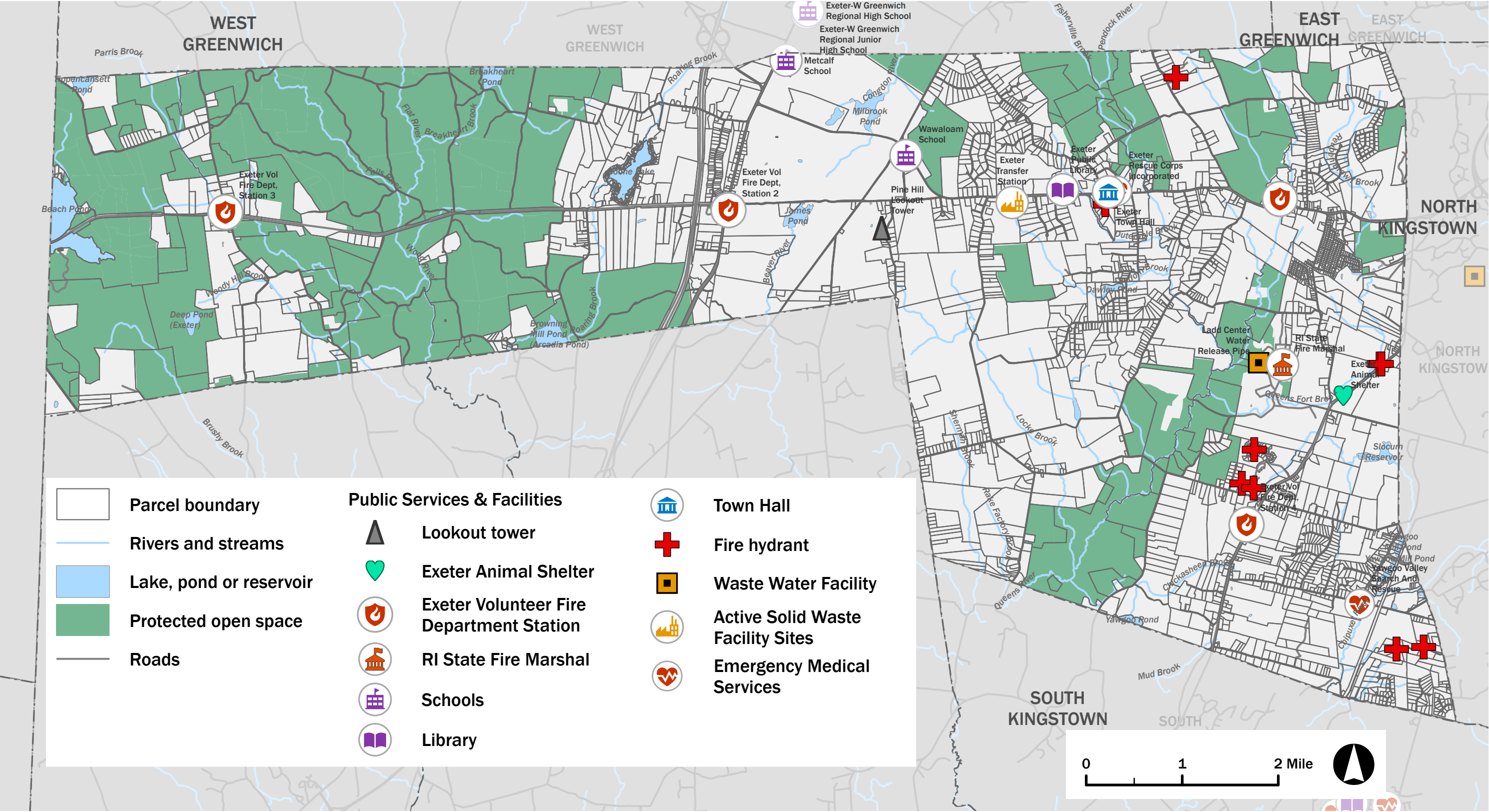
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Protected Open Space

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map Created: January 4, 2023

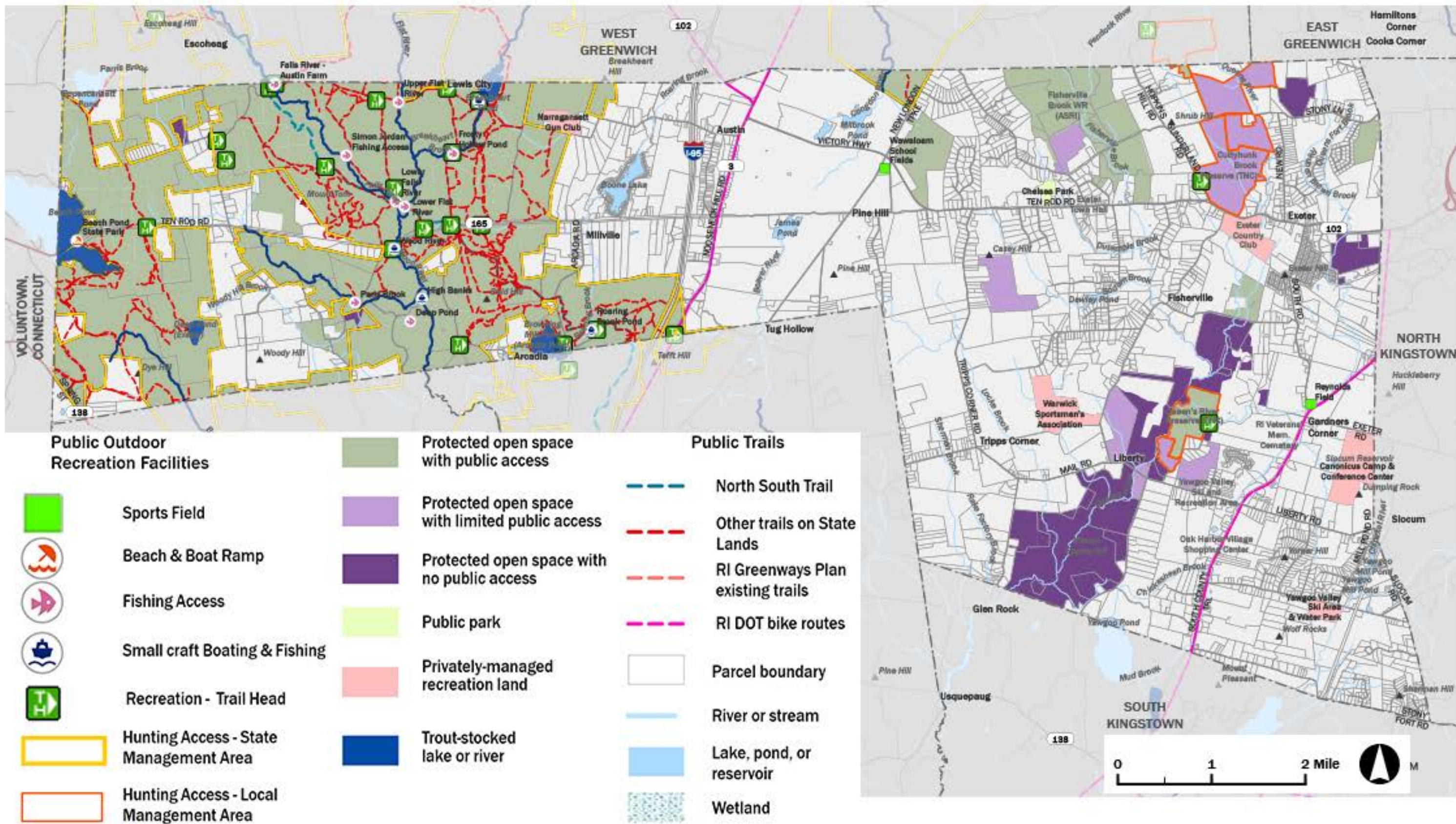
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Public Services & Facilities

Sources: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map Created: January 16, 2024

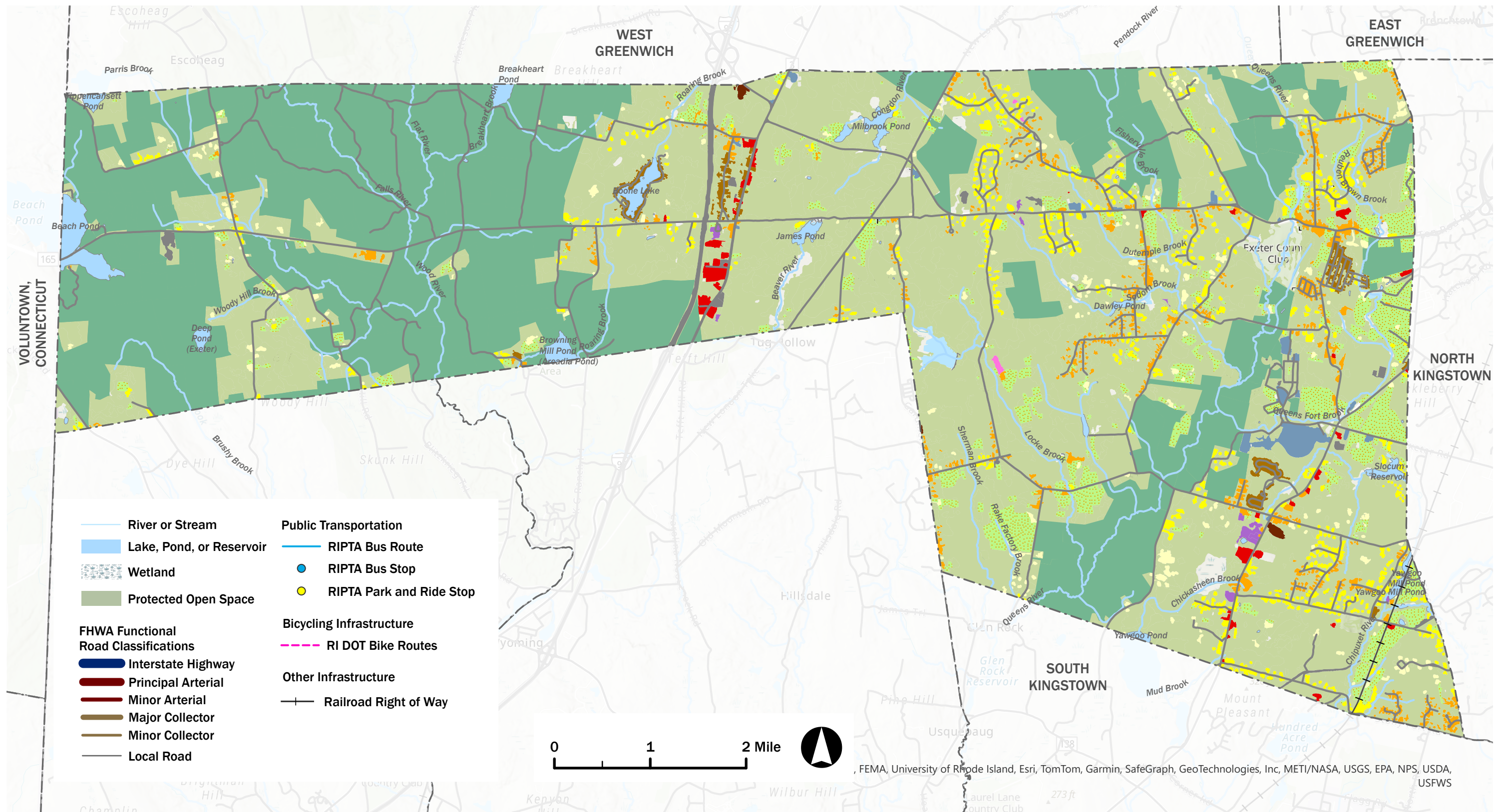
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Recreation & Trails

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 18, 2024

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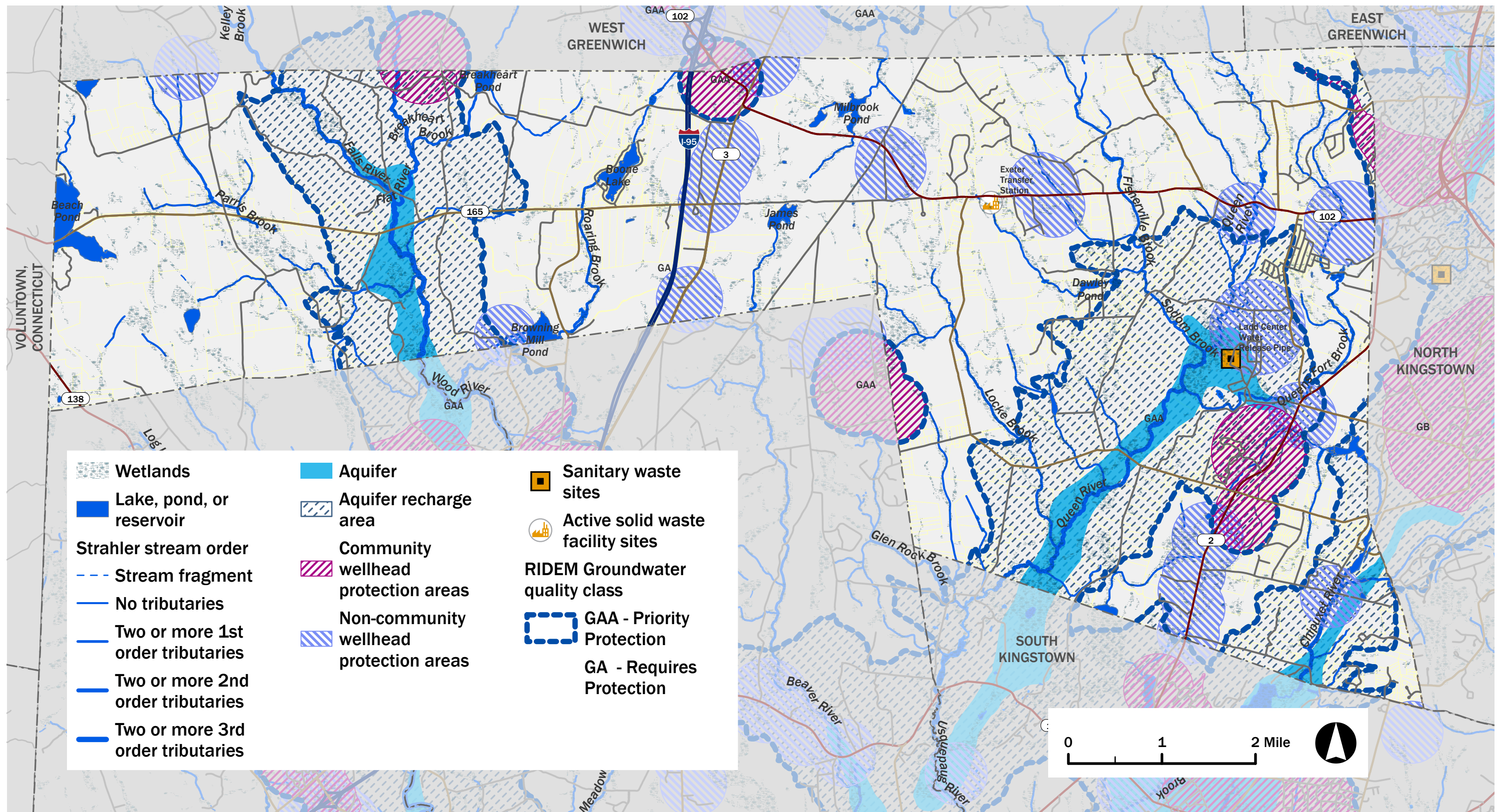


Transportation

Date: June 21, 2022

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP

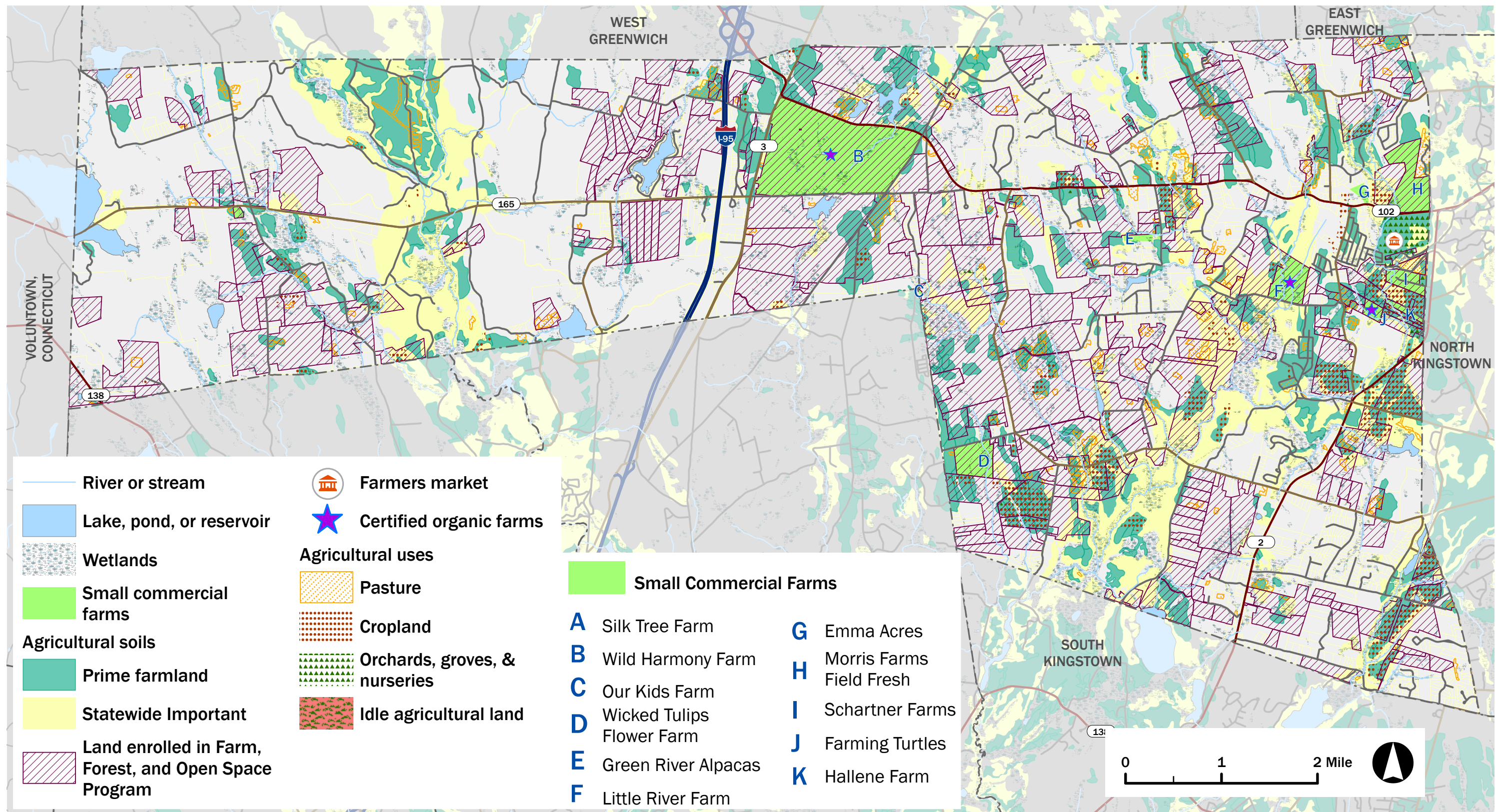
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Water Supply Resources

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 19, 2024

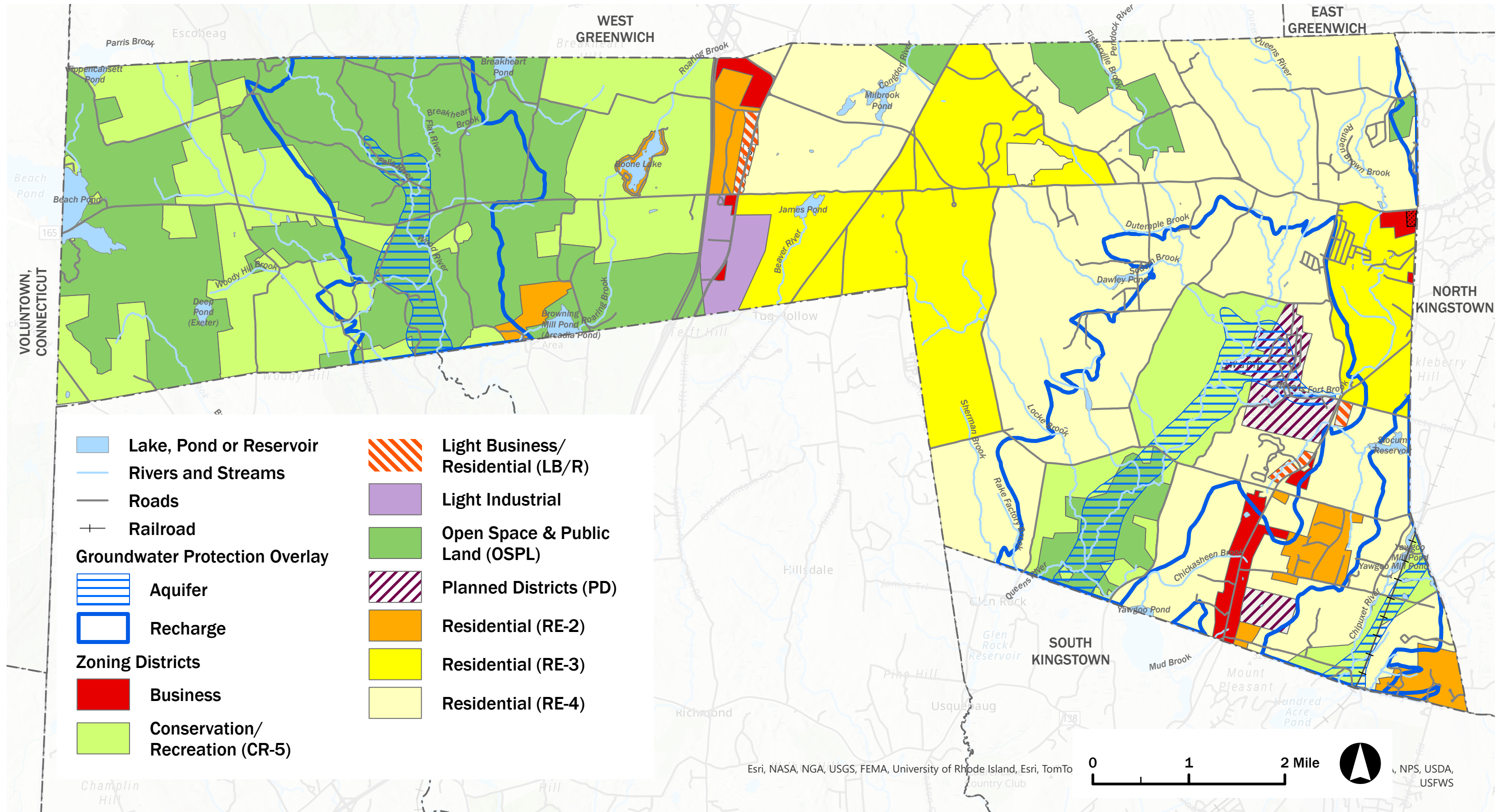
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Working Farm & Forest Lands

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 19, 2024

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Zoning & Overlay Districts

Date: January 4, 2024
Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP

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