

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.

City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island
Comprehensive Plan: 2024-2044
ID#: WON-CP-25

Posted January 28, 2025

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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CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Date Adopted:

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

This Comprehensive Plan is a shared vision for Woonsocket's future and a roadmap that guides how we get there together. It helps us make the things we love about Woonsocket even better and fix the things that need to be fixed. A good Comprehensive Plan is a tool that is used frequently by City leaders, staff, boards, and committees to make decisions about:

- How to promote new development that improves quality of life for everyone.
- How to better support local business development, increase job opportunities, and maintain reasonable tax rates.
- How the City can protect environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites
- How to prioritize future investments in community services and infrastructure

Woonsocket wants to be a city that prepares for the future, spends tax dollars efficiently and effectively, and leaves our community even better and stronger for the next generation. This Comprehensive Plan can help us do that.

Its most important goal is to protect and improve the things in Woonsocket that make it a great place to live, both for today's residents and future generations.

WHAT DOES THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN INCLUDE?

Things that Helped Build the Plan

Existing Plans: We're not starting from scratch! The City has done a lot of planning over the years. This Comprehensive Plan is built on previous Comprehensive Plans (including the most recent from 2012) and other existing work to pull all the best ideas into one place.

Facts & Data: In order to have the most useful plan, we need to understand who lives in Woonsocket, how old we are, where we come from, where we work, and how we get from place to place, in order to make solid decisions for our future.

Needs & Big Ideas: Beyond the numbers, we needed to bring residents together to talk about the City's future and address our needs. From surveys, to public workshops, to information tables at community events, to one-on-one conversations and small group discussions, the City received input from many residents. See Appendix A for a summary of the public engagement conducted over the course of the planning process and what we heard. Each chapter of this plan also includes one or more sections called, "What We Heard." These sections summarize some of the key public feedback on each topic.

Components of the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is made up of three volumes:

Baseline Report: The Baseline Report is a snapshot of existing conditions in Woonsocket. It includes inventories of what exists today as well as projections of future needs and trends. The Baseline Report was prepared at the beginning of the planning process to provide data and facts to help the City make decisions. If you want a “deeper dive” into the data that informed this Plan, please refer to the Baseline Report.

Plan: What you are reading now is the main body of Woonsocket’s Comprehensive Plan. The Plan includes the most important information to make sure everyone in the City is working toward the same goals. The document tells the story of how residents envision the City 20 years from now, discusses the key themes the City needs to address to realize that vision, and then lays out some first steps for achieving that vision.

Implementation Report: The final volume of the Comprehensive Plan provides greater detail on individual implementation actions. Responsible parties, such as City departments or boards and commissions, are identified along with implementation timeframes. Since the Comprehensive Plan is revised every ten years, implementation actions are divided into short term (to be completed in one to two years), medium-term (to be completed in three to five years), and long-term (to be completed in six to ten years) implementation periods.



Public Workshop March 2022 (Horsley Witten)



Public Workshop Feedback (Horsley Witten)

I. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

It is important for Woonsocket to ensure that residents and businesses have access to economic opportunities and that Woonsocket's business climate provides the supports necessary for a thriving and robust economy in the community. Through efforts from the City and its partners like the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative and homegrown developers, renovation is occurring and residential, office, and retail space has been added in Woonsocket over the last several years. In addition to these positive factors, interviews, focus groups, and survey data revealed that there are several areas where Woonsocket can continue to grow and improve its economic development efforts, including improvements in communication with and resources for businesses, developing a robust business climate, adding housing Downtown and other key areas to increase population and spur the demand side of the economy, creating more business-related amenities, and improving marketing and coordination. At the same time, there are factors at play in the broader national economy that impact economic development opportunities in Woonsocket, such as rising interest rates, escalating home prices, a changing retail environment, and the rise of remote work.

Vision for Economic Development

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will invest in its economic development and support businesses to create opportunity, growth, sustainability, and resiliency.

For greater detail on data and statistics related to economic development, see the Economic Development chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.



Downtown Woonsocket businesses during the holidays (Providence Journal)

ADVOCATE FOR AND SUPPORT BUSINESSES & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

One of the biggest themes that emerged from engagement with residents and businesses in Woonsocket was the need to advocate for and support new and existing businesses in the

City. Woonsocket's business community brings employment opportunities, tax revenue, and prosperity to the community, and successful businesses serve as anchors for related growth in Woonsocket's key sectors like health care, entertainment, retail, food production and service, and tourism and accommodations.

WHAT WE HEARD

There is room for improvement when it comes to the City's interactions with businesses

Woonsocket is home to some major employers, including CVS, Honeywell, Summer Infant, Landmark Medical Center, and Woonsocket Health & Rehab. The City itself is also a significant employer. Despite the presence of these large employers, interviews indicated that most of the larger businesses exist in Woonsocket because that is where the business started. If they were starting over, the feedback from engagement efforts is that they would not choose Woonsocket. This presents a risk factor for potential downsizing.

Engagement with community stakeholders and businesses indicated that the business permitting process in Woonsocket is slow and communication is lacking. Interviews and focus groups highlighted that it is difficult to start a business in Woonsocket, and that communicating with the City, receiving information, getting permits, and finding support is a challenge. Business owners discussed how there is no one person a resident can go to at the City if they want to start a business. Stakeholders mentioned that the City should consider hiring an economic development director or assigning a member of the City's staff to be the point person to handle business development needs.

One business owner described the City's process in the following way:

"As a small business owner, I feel there is a disconnect between the departments in this city. It was very difficult to move my location. Some of the departments had never even heard of me and after being a thriving business here for seven years, that is not acceptable. We need to make it easier for businesses to come into or expand in this city. Having someone be the "go between" for the departments would be a godsend. I feel that an Economic Director (or a team of) is the answer to this problem."

Focus group conversations with businesses discussed a desire for façade and small business grants to be more available. There is a need to determine what is working, what is not, and refine programs to be more useful. Some City programs do exist, but they are underutilized.

BUSINESS INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

The City of Woonsocket has a number of programs available to support businesses in the community. These include:

- Downtown Omnibus Tax Stabilization Plan: This program allows businesses who are building, rehabilitating, revitalizing, or restoring properties in the Downtown Overlay District to exempt or stabilize taxes for a period of up to 12 years.
- Tax Increment Financing: TIF is a process by which a municipality allows some or all future property tax revenues from development to support and finance public and private development costs, including those for infrastructure, projects, and programs related to economic development. In Rhode Island, qualified development projects can include infrastructure, new facilities that will increase the number of jobs in the state, or subsidies toward a project that will contribute to a community's economic development.
- Opportunity Zones: Woonsocket has three designated Opportunity Zones in census tracts 179, 180, and 185, which includes portions of Main Street, the south side of the Blackstone River, and a portion of Highland Corporate Park.
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program: Created to help support viable communities through economic opportunity and housing programs, Woonsocket is a designated entitlement community through CDBG. Specific programs available in Woonsocket under the CDBG include:
 - Commercial Façade Restoration Grant Program
 - Small Business Loans
 - Micro-enterprise Grant

Interviews with businesses and community stakeholders suggested there are opportunities for additional assistance. Interest was expressed for the development of City incentives for:

- Business retention and attraction
- Beneficial development and support for at-home businesses ready to make a leap to a retail space

Beyond direct incentive programs, there is an opportunity for the City to become more of an advocate for businesses and property owners wanting to improve blighted areas. A desire exists for the City to do more for small businesses. A community policy survey conducted in summer 2022 as part of the comprehensive planning process found that 93% of respondents say that it is important the City support existing small businesses and 89% say it is important to attract new businesses.

Another challenge described by businesses in Woonsocket is finding appropriate space, especially for smaller businesses. Trends indicate that businesses want to have a storefront but that many do not need a large space. Developing home-grown businesses will be key, and as entrepreneurs move from idea to plan to execution, they will need spaces to grow. There is a struggle to have a rent-ready place for these businesses, and a lack of buildable space for new development. Woonsocket already has resources for food business entrepreneurs, and NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley's Millrace Kitchen provides opportunities for businesses ready to expand in the food sector. For other entrepreneurs, similar support and space to thrive can help Woonsocket develop the next generation of businesses across the community. Continuing to develop and support a thriving entrepreneurial environment creates prosperity and improves the overall standard of living in a community, with entrepreneurs developing new and innovative products and services. Over time, these businesses employ members of the community and become part of the economic system of Woonsocket.

SPOTLIGHT ON: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurs are critical to the functioning of any economy – they see a need where others do not, driving product development and innovations in services and goods. Entrepreneurial impact is accelerated when support and networks are available to help entrepreneurs motivate each other and create exchanges of ideas and partnerships. From the City, it is important for entrepreneurs to feel welcome and valued. One of the clearest ways to send this message is to make the process of opening a small business clear and easy to navigate. Programs and policies the City can support include services and training to enable thoughtful and accurate business planning, marketing, website development, and online presence, as well as ways to improve skill through effective communication, accessing capital, money management, leadership, etc. can further boost their effectiveness. These are things the City can invest in itself or partner and connect with other local providers on.

Woonsocket should be proactive in developing a robust climate for businesses and their employees to thrive in

Interviews revealed concern that over time Woonsocket's population will continue to age and younger residents and workers will not be available to sustain growth. In order to continue to support the City's economy, the City needs to invest in housing and supporting jobs and the local economy. Housing development is economic development. A balance of diverse housing opportunities and adequate supply supports economic development – residents are customers, employees, entrepreneurs, and generate foot traffic in key corridors, which creates consistency in demand for businesses. While housing for households across the income spectrum is needed, the development of market-rate housing in particular will broaden the City's consumer base and attract residents with the spending potential to support local consumer-oriented businesses.

As discussed in greater detail in the Housing Plan Element of this Comprehensive Plan, it will be key for Woonsocket to make housing investments part of economic development plans. Housing demand is generated by population growth and demographic changes (i.e., an aging population or growing families); new employers bringing jobs to the area; and a great quality of life enticing people to move. While there are ongoing residential developments occurring in and around Oak Grove, Sapphire Estates, Simonne Ave, and Liane Drive, adding additional housing could continue to increase the population, attract new retail and services to fill vacant commercial space, and drive overall economic growth.

Two other areas of emphasis stand out – Woonsocket’s uncompetitive tax rates, and challenges related to helping businesses grow and improve their physical footprints. Woonsocket’s commercial taxes are high, and lower than only Central Falls and Providence regionally. Developers and employers in interviews repeatedly mentioned high taxes as an impediment to doing business. Conversations with business owners also indicated that it is difficult to get the right permitting to improve or grow their spaces. Suggested changes include reducing the time and effort required to get reasonable waivers for businesses looking to improve their physical infrastructure as well as reexamining parking minimums needed for new businesses.

Woonsocket can also improve its business climate by supporting its workforce through education and training. Woonsocket can address long-term workforce needs by working with schools to identify where gaps exist and to act as a liaison between local employers, the Woonsocket School District, trade schools, alternative learning institutions, the Woonsocket Education Center, and others to connect employers to workforce and support workforce training.



Woonsocket Education Center (WOC) opened October 2022 (WOC and Providence ABC6)

Improve Woonsocket’s Image & Celebrate Successes

Developing a better external reputation for Woonsocket will require both more effective City support to businesses as well as marketing efforts to showcase those efforts. Marketing the City as a business-friendly community will involve taking steps to create a friendlier business climate – those successes will inform marketing efforts. The City has undertaken beneficial projects that have enhanced neighborhoods and corridors throughout Woonsocket. These need to be highlighted both internally and externally to promote a more positive image

citywide. Some examples include:

- Blackstone Valley Bikeway
- Highland Park
- Walnut Hill
- Redevelopment of 122 North Main (17 residential and 2 commercial spaces with a microbrewery and business center)
- Incubator at Millrace Kitchen

The marketing of the City has improved, but still could be better through enhanced business attraction, retention, and entrepreneurship programs. The creation of a marketing strategy to work on improving the negative perception of the City would also be a positive step toward improving Woonsocket's image. These efforts would require resources and staff time to pursue. Given that, the City should consider the viability of funding a specific economic development division within the Department of Planning and Development to illustrate and produce investment in creating and supporting business.

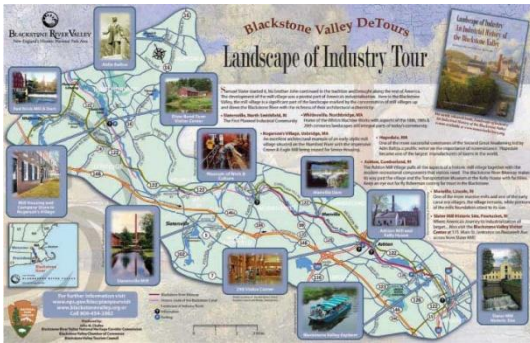
One stakeholder involved in the public engagement process of this work, when asked how Woonsocket could improve its marketing, stated:

"Advertise locally and nationally incentives for medium and large companies to relocate to Woonsocket -have a pamphlet/website dedicated to business development and a clear-cut easy-to-follow process for starting a business in the city."

Woonsocket already has a business webpage and pamphlet resource available for businesses looking to relocate or expand, but would benefit from updated and more targeted materials, development of which could be achieved with additional staff time dedicated to economic development.

According to interviews, the Opportunity Zones in Woonsocket are drawing some interest from prospective investors. Woonsocket's Opportunity Zones cover three census tracts, and provide businesses located within the zones the opportunity to defer or reduce their capital gains taxes and eliminate federal capital gains taxes on future gains if the investment has been held for at least 10 years. A targeted marketing program may be able to draw more investment opportunities.

Interviews and focus groups with local businesses indicated that many business owners feel disconnected from the City and that Woonsocket is not always responsive to their needs and concerns. More connection between the City, developers, and businesses are needed to act in partnership to improve the current conditions of the city. The City should place an emphasis on being collaborative with data and projects to keep local businesses and entrepreneurs invested in the City's economic success and to maintain lines of communication in order to collaborate as needed to improve the economic vitality of Woonsocket.



Tourism Brochure (National Park Service)



Highland Corporate Park (Google Earth)



Millrace Kitchen (Millrace Kitchen)



Walnut Hill Plaza (Valley Breeze)

FOCUS ON SPECIAL PLANNING AREAS & COMMUNITY AMENITIES

These special planning areas offer unique assets and opportunities that can be leveraged to achieve goals around business attraction/retention, creation of community amenities, integrating housing into the community, and other goals. Woonsocket has identified three key areas for economic development planning purposes – Downtown, Highland Corporate Park, and Diamond Hill.

WHAT WE HEARD

Downtown

Downtowns play a vital role in economic development, providing a condensed space where commercial, cultural, and civic activity can coexist, attracting people and businesses together. Downtown Woonsocket's Main Street is on the National Register of Historic Places, containing a series of brick buildings built in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As discussed in the Historic & Cultural Resources Plan Element, the Blackstone River Valley's National Heritage



Downtown Woonsocket
(Valley Breeze)

Corridor and Woonsocket's National Historical Park are key amenities that should be preserved. These historic places can spur visitation, economic activity, and provide the base for opportunities for development and a walkable and thriving community Downtown.

Redevelopment of Downtown is a priority of the City, as a thriving downtown will have positive impacts across the community. Achieving a critical mass of people living and/or working Downtown is a key supporting factor for increased vibrancy. The high commercial tax rate also hinders new development. Residents agree that continuing to focus on economic development Downtown should be a priority, with 72% of community survey respondents saying that it is either important or very important to promote economic development on Main Street. These efforts should build upon the work being done by the Woonsocket Education Center, which is a public-private collaboration that provides credentialing services, as well as skills development courses in technology, management, and the arts. The Woonsocket Education Center also has space available for business needs, including multi-use classrooms.

The City also should continue to partner with the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative (DWC), which brings Downtown businesses together to collaborate on community projects, encourages investment Downtown, and seeks to increase economic growth in the area. Given the City's limited capacity to do this economic development work alone, working in concert with existing organizations such as the DWC provides a greater ability to develop Woonsocket's economy.

Highland Corporate Park

Highland Corporate Park, which houses the largest employers in Woonsocket, is relatively isolated from the rest of the City. Located on the east side of Woonsocket, it is home to some of the City's major employers, including CVS, Hanna Instruments, and Parkinson Technologies. Woonsocket should continue to support these employers and work to develop Highland so that it is both more attractive to employers and workers and to help connect it with the rest of the



CVS Headquarters, Highland Corporate Park (Providence Journal)

City. Woonsocket should consider how it can support repositioning the business park to include more amenities for nearby workers and look into creating smaller spaces, as national trends toward hybrid and remote work continue to reduce demand for large office buildings. Flexibility in zoning will be essential in ensuring that properties within the park can be quickly adapted or redeveloped for in-demand commercial and residential uses that respond to changing market conditions. Adjusting zoning to allow for the development of workforce housing within the park will also assist existing businesses with talent attraction and retention.

Residents are supportive of development, with 67% of survey respondents indicating that it is important to encourage industrial uses and manufacturing-related industries to locate in Woonsocket. These large employers provide opportunities for residents and help create

economic prosperity that supports other industries in the City and region. Woonsocket should collaborate with the Town of Cumberland in supporting efforts of park ownership at strategic repositioning.

Diamond Hill

Located at Woonsocket's north end on the border with Massachusetts, Diamond Hill is home to retail, food, and entertainment businesses. While the current amenities at Diamond Hill provide shopping, dining, and recreational options for residents, the City should spearhead efforts around revitalizing the corridor to fill space vacancies and enhance the quality and variety of retail offerings. With consumer preferences and the retail landscape continuing to



Diamond Hill Road (WJAR)

change nationally, there are opportunities to position Diamond Hill for refreshed retail and services integrated with other uses that attract a broader range of customers. This might involve investing in aesthetic and transportation improvements to the corridor, working with property owners to identify sites that are appropriate for infill or redevelopment, and actively recruiting commercial tenants. Working with a development partner on a signature large-scale project such as a mixed-use development can also help spur additional private investment in the corridor. Flexibility in zoning will be required to allow for a variety of uses that respond to market demand, including both commercial and residential uses.

Facilitate Creation of More Community Amenities

As part of developing Woonsocket's economy, the City should continue to focus on ways to increase quality of life not just through direct support of businesses but also by working to maintain a high quality of life and attractive amenities, including through music and culture. Engagement with community members and stakeholders indicated that the following were limitations in attracting businesses and workers to Woonsocket:

- Nearby communities tend to have better schools which make relocating there (versus Woonsocket) a trend.
- The older housing stock is less appealing to higher income households.
- For lower-waged workers, the affordable housing need is substantial.
- Because there is no direct route to Boston and routes into/out of the City are not easily accessible, we heard from interviewees that Woonsocket is relatively isolated.



Celebrating and building upon Woonsocket's amenities and historic quality will help enhance economic vibrancy and livability. Left: Aerial view of Blackstone River and Downtown Woonsocket (World Atlas). Right: Woonsocket's historic City Hall (Kenneth C. Zirkel, Wikipedia).

Building Redevelopment

The City of Woonsocket is almost entirely built out, with limited space remaining for new greenfield development activity. To ensure that the City can adapt to changing needs in the future, Woonsocket should work to maintain flexibility in its zoning and land use policies and update buildings to meet current needs as appropriate. There are a lot of old mill and other buildings in the City, some of which have redevelopment potential and some that are better to be demolished. The number of buildings presents so much opportunity that prioritization of projects is needed as a first step. The City should work to identify the most prime candidates for development and redevelopment, and support development as appropriate. Woonsocket's older mill and industrial buildings in particular are prime candidates potentially building off the City's active Brownfields Program. The City will need to play an active support role in redevelopment largely due to high construction costs; new development will rarely "pencil out," financially, precluding developers from making a sufficient profit without public support. Focusing efforts on one or two transformational projects could serve as a catalyst to draw additional development.

Attracting Workers

Employers have a hard time selling Woonsocket to potential employees. This will become a bigger issue as the current workforce reaches retirement age. Young people want to be able to pursue other interests and feedback to the community survey included responses saying that Woonsocket does not offer a range of activities for people to participate in. There is a tremendous need for things to do in Woonsocket, to keep employees there after work, at lunch, and to align with residential market trends that demand a suite of amenities and high quality of life. This has led to a situation where higher waged workers tend to not live in Woonsocket. Engagement with stakeholders and businesses offered that this is because of a lack of amenities and better school systems in surrounding areas. They also believed that Woonsocket currently also lacks a "cool" factor, which is difficult to define directly but is

related to the lack of entertainment options in the City for younger workers. A number of respondents to the community survey conducted as part of the comprehensive planning process expressed support for the development of entertainment options in Woonsocket that would appeal to youth. It should be noted, however, that most respondents were older adults making assumptions about what younger people want, as opposed to many young people expressing preferences for themselves. The City should work to understand the kinds of amenities that will bring in the next generation of residents and workers and work to provide the kinds of amenities that will help them work and stay in Woonsocket.

As part of Woonsocket's worker attraction efforts, the City should consider efforts in particular to attract workers from within the greater Boston region who are able to work remotely at least part of the time. Given Woonsocket's relatively lower cost of housing compared to nearby communities and efforts to upgrade its broadband infrastructure, Woonsocket is well positioned to make a pitch to hybrid workers in the region. While commuting to Boston on a regular basis would not be desirable, with the Franklin Commuter Rail line just 20 minutes from the City, a hybrid employee working for a firm based in Boston and living in Woonsocket could commute 1-2 days a week and otherwise work remotely.

Community Assets – Food/Agriculture & Culture/Tourism

Food & Agriculture Economy

Woonsocket's limited grocery options and lack of accessible quality food options, particularly near Downtown and for those without access to cars, poses a challenge to many residents' quality of life and can hinder opportunities for growth and economic development. With the potential of a vertical farming project, a Local Foods Local Places EPA Technical Assistance grant awarded to NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley, and the City examining the feasibility of a Downtown food cooperative, there is much buzz around the potential for developing the economy of food. Supporting the food economy will increase the quality of life (green spaces and community gardens), contribute to community health (better access to healthy food), and add meaningful work within the City. Engagement efforts indicated public support for these efforts, with a number of community survey respondents emphasizing that the City should prioritize adding a grocery store that is centrally located in response to the open-ended economic development question.

While Woonsocket is a largely built out, urban community with little to no land available for traditional commercial agriculture, it does play a role in the state's food economy. For example, the City has zoned for "vertical farming," a component of urban agriculture producing food in vertically stacked layers, vertically inclined surfaces, etc. using controlled environmental agriculture (CEA) technology, where all environmental factors can be controlled; these facilities utilize artificial control of light and environmental control (humidity, temperature, gases) for harvesting, processing on site, packaging, and shipping. Food production and distribution are also allowed uses, and the City is home to 28 food processors and 4 food distributors according to the 2023 Rhode Island Food Policy Council Fact Sheet for Woonsocket. The fact sheet also reports that Woonsocket is officially home to one farm and four commercial fisheries, but the City hopes to increase the number of indoor, vertical farms over time as well as small scale outdoor food cultivation.

Culture & Tourism

The City would like to explore the economic benefits of the National Heritage Corridor. Heritage areas are known for stabilizing property values, offering creatives places to work, and drawing tourism. With the historic Stadium Theatre and musical history, there are ample ways to build off what already exists to develop the tourism industry in Woonsocket. Part of this effort could include an update of the Woonsocket statewide historical preservation report. Though the City should look into redevelopment or new construction as appropriate, where feasible the City can prioritize and seek funding to preserve/mothball at-risk properties, as well as reactivate structures that are vacant, but do not have significant hurdles to reuse.



Museum of Work & Culture (RI Historical Society)



Woonsocket Farmers Market (The Patch)

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

The Economic Development Plan Element is designed to be consistent with RI Rising (State Guide Plan Element 118). Collectively, the goals and policies below ensure: A well-trained workforce; Opportunities for everyone in Woonsocket to find employment to support themselves and their families; Support for industries and investments that build on the City's industrial past while looking to future needs; Great places are made to attract residents and visitors alike, including Downtown/Main Street and components of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor; A more diverse, resilient economy that can weather change, and; Woonsocket is positioned to take advantage of all its assets to build a strong economy.

GOAL ED-1: Stabilize Woonsocket's economic base.

POLICY ED-1.1: Retain and ensure the health of Woonsocket's existing businesses.

ACTION ED-1.1a: Designate a point person for business development in the City.

ACTION ED-1.1b: Hold regular meetings with the City's business community to

understand their needs and concerns.

POLICY ED-1.2: Explore the cost/benefit of lowering the City's tax rate.

ACTION ED-1.2a: Conduct a review of the City's tax rates as compared to similar and surrounding communities, assess economic and community impacts of tax rate changes.

GOAL ED-2: Grow Woonsocket's economy in a balanced and beneficial manner.

POLICY ED-2.1: Retain current businesses and attract new businesses to the City.

ACTION ED-2.1a: Work with the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative, Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce, the RI Commerce Corporation, and other business alliances to explore economic development incentives for retaining existing businesses, advertising available options to the business community, and attracting new businesses.

ACTION ED-2.1b: Create a separate Economic Development webpage or website (distinct from Planning) that is targeted at businesses interested in expanding or locating in Woonsocket.

ACTION ED-2.1c: Develop a business attraction strategy targeted at businesses with space needs that align with the city's inventory of available buildings and sites.

POLICY ED-2.2: Expand existing commercial corridors, where appropriate, in the city.

ACTION ED-2.2a: Identify and prioritize high impact sites (like gateways or in strategic locations) just outside of existing commercial corridors based on access to site infrastructure, and where appropriate, conduct feasibility analysis to determine best use of properties.

ACTION ED-2.2b: As appropriate, market Woonsocket's commercial corridors to businesses appropriate to the area.

POLICY ED-2.3: Examine and make substantial modifications to the regulations within the Zoning Ordinance for the mixed-use, commercial, and industrial zones so as to further encourage economic development.

ACTION ED-2.3a: Create a prioritized inventory of which commercial buildings should be saved, which should be demolished, and what potential preferred uses/reuses might be.

ACTION ED-2.3b: Review the Zoning Ordinance and modify as appropriate, particularly within areas of Park Avenue, Mendon Road, and Cumberland Hill Road to allow for greater opportunities for commercial activity.

GOAL ED-3: Diversify Woonsocket's economy.

POLICY ED-3.1: Transition the City from its former history as a manufacturing center.

ACTION ED-3.1a: Identify uses for former manufacturing sites, including but not limited to:

- Business incubator opportunities
- Shared workspaces
- Retail
- Entertainment
- Recreation
- Indoor agriculture
- Mixed-use development incorporating housing

POLICY ED-3.2: Redevelop the City's mill resources for modern uses.

ACTION ED-3.2a: Inventory mill sites and conduct a space analysis of each property to identify which should be saved, which should be demolished, and what potential preferred uses/reuses might be.

ACTION ED-3.2b: For developable sites, actively market to developers.

POLICY ED-3.3: Promote light industry and small-scale manufacturing in appropriate areas in the city.

ACTION ED-3.3a: As part of site inventory process, identify sites most appropriate for light industry/small-scale manufacturing and market to businesses. Look into opportunities to support small businesses and entrepreneurs who are interested in scaling up operations.

GOAL ED-4: Develop a well-trained workforce.

POLICY ED-4.1: Expand employment opportunities with competitive wages and safe quality working environments.

POLICY ED-4.2: Encourage communication and working relationships between educational institutions and the business community regarding critical skills development and work force readiness.

ACTION ED-4.2a: reach out to educational institutions and business community to understand needs; partner and take action as appropriate.

GOAL ED-5: Identify Woonsocket as a “business-friendly” community.

POLICY ED-5.1: Provide a variety of local economic development programs to support business development.

ACTION ED-5.1a: review existing development programs and identify gaps in uptake and opportunities to support new and existing businesses in Woonsocket.

ACTION ED-5.1b: Work with the business community and other business alliances to conduct an attitude survey of businesses to identify priorities, needs, and concerns of the business community.

POLICY ED-5.2: Work in partnership with the business community on regional and local economic development initiatives.

ACTION ED-5.2a: Host events aimed at engaging different segments of the local business communities, such as entrepreneurs, industry groups, real estate developers and brokers, etc.

POLICY ED-5.3: Build positive relationships between City Hall and the business community.

ACTION ED-5.3a: Hire a dedicated economic development staff person at the City in the Planning and Development Department to interface with businesses, connect with resources, and head business attraction and retention efforts.

ACTION ED-5.3b: Create a volunteer economic development committee composed of business, nonprofit, and tourism leaders, workforce providers, real estate professionals, and other key stakeholders that meets at least monthly to discuss economic issues and advise City staff on economic development approaches in order to enhance Woonsocket’s economic development capacity.

GOAL ED-6: Support Woonsocket’s Main Street as the economic heart of the City.

POLICY ED-6.1: Encourage and try to guide new economic activities to the City’s historic Main Street area.

ACTION ED-6.1a: Assess what is working, what is not, and what works elsewhere to spur residential on main street upper floors and refine policies accordingly.

ACTION ED-6.1b: Support the development of commercial activity for street level buildings on Main Street and support business growth opportunities and attraction efforts to fill space as appropriate.

POLICY ED-6.2: Main Street is a key Special Planning Area, and the City should look into ways to partner further with the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative and others to support development Downtown.

ACTION ED-6.2a: Update and continue to maintain the Main Street Inventory database to assist with spurring economic development along Main Street.

POLICY ED-6.3: Utilize heritage tourism and the arts as economic development tools in the Main Street area.

ACTION ED-6.3a: Convene leaders in the arts and tourism industry to develop a marketing plan for Woonsocket's heritage tourism and arts industries.

POLICY ED-6.4: Support tourism activities in Woonsocket that strengthen Woonsocket's role in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

ACTION ED-6.4a: Work with the State of Rhode Island and other partners to identify sources of grants, funding, and support for the development of businesses and cultural events in the City.

ACTION ED-6.4b: Use Woonsocket's cultural and artistic events and institutions, including Autumnfest, the Museum of Work and Culture, the Stadium Theatre, and the St. Ann Arts and Cultural Center to draw visitors, generate economic activity, and celebrate and sell Woonsocket.

ACTION ED-6.4c: Work with tourism partners to develop a "Visit Woonsocket" website targeted at visitors.

GOAL ED-7: Support appropriate development of Woonsocket's special planning areas.

POLICY ED-7.1: Encourage development in Highland Corporate Park.

ACTION ED-7.1a: Review zoning in and around Highland Corporate Park and update as necessary to maintain flexibility in the park, including the development of workforce housing to attract and retain the workforce.

ACTION ED-7.1b: Pursue aesthetic and needed infrastructure improvements in the corridor to facilitate business attraction.

Action ED-7.1c: Collaborate with the Town of Cumberland to maintain and enhance the quality of Highland Corporate Park.

POLICY ED-7.2: Encourage development and redevelopment in Diamond Hill.

ACTION ED-7.2a: Support attraction efforts to bring new businesses to Diamond Hill.

ACTION ED-7.2b: Pursue aesthetic and needed infrastructure improvements in the corridor to facilitate business attraction.

ACTION ED-7.2c: Rezone to allow for a mix of uses including residential and light industrial.

ACTION ED-7.2d: Work with property owners to pursue strategic redevelopment of underutilized parcels.

GOAL ED-8: The City will integrate the implied and overt value of economic development into all goals and policies within the Comprehensive Plan.

POLICY ED-8.1: Assign the highest priority in the City's municipal capital budgeting and the preparation and submission of grants for state and federal funding for future economic development projects.

ACTION ED-8.1a: Hire a dedicated economic development staff person at the City in the Planning and Development Department to interface with businesses, connect with resources, and head business attraction and retention efforts.

POLICY ED-8.2: Assign top priority and provide existing City staffing required to identify, develop, and pursue all options and opportunities in future economic development.

II. HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

Providing residents with opportunities to live in safe, affordable homes is essential to maintain the economic and social health in any community. A balance of diverse housing opportunities and adequate supply can build the local labor workforce and support the spectrum of housing needs through a lifetime – an apartment after graduation, a family’s first home, or downsizing for empty-nesters or retirees. The type of housing available, its cost, and its condition are important attributes families and individuals evaluate when choosing a place to live.

Much of Woonsocket's early housing stock was developed in response to rapid urbanization and development during the Industrial Revolution. This development was marked by the construction of modest multi-story wood frame tenements, in a high-density configuration, in the Social, Globe, Lower Bernon, Constitution Hill, and Fairmount neighborhoods. Large single-family homes for the affluent business owners were constructed in the City's North End. Many of the City’s neighborhoods, particularly in and around Downtown, maintain these historic development patterns. Since the 1950’s, housing construction in outlying neighborhoods, has provided a broader range of single-family housing options on larger lots for Woonsocket's residents, while decreasing the amount of undeveloped land in the City.

Vision for Housing

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will work to make sure there is an attractive, safe, and affordable range of homes available for every stage of life.

Throughout the Housing Plan Element, the term “LMI Housing” or “Low-Moderate Income Housing” will refer to subsidized housing units that count toward the City’s low- or moderate-income housing goals. The term “affordable housing” will refer to any home that is generally affordable, achievable, and attainable to the occupant, whether market rate, subsidized, owner-occupied, or renter-occupied.

For greater detail on housing data and statistics, see the Housing chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on community surveys and other forms of public engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- Addressing the high cost of housing (rent and ownership) and the need for more housing throughout Woonsocket that is affordable for residents.

- Providing more affordable senior housing and smaller starter homes for younger adults.
- Concern that there could be negative consequences for the community from increasing the amount of LMI housing.
- Reusing old mill buildings and other existing structures for housing.
- Dealing with homes that are in poor condition or poorly maintained, including providing more resources and incentives for repairing houses and apartment buildings and ensuring more consistent code enforcement.
- Providing more resources and services for those who are unhoused or at risk of homelessness.

“I think the city needs to be prepared for the shifting demographics. The 65 to 80 group is exploding and the millennials who are struggling to make ends meet.” – Survey respondent

“Having both affordable and high-end housing is important to make housing available to any and all that want to come to the city.” – Survey respondent

MEETING OUR HOUSING NEEDS

Most homes in Woonsocket are created in the private market, either by developers or by individual homeowners. However, there are many things the City can do to spur housing production and make sure that local housing is meeting the needs and preferences of residents. These needs range from higher-end homes that can help attract and maintain a strong property tax base, to smaller homes and apartments attractive and affordable to young adults and seniors, to housing of all types accessible to low-moderate income residents for whom even Woonsocket’s relatively affordable housing stock is increasingly out of reach.

Housing Costs

While the cost of housing (for sale and for rent) is relatively affordable compared with the region and Rhode Island as a whole, it is still expensive compared to the incomes people make in Woonsocket. As a rule of thumb, most federal agencies (such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Housing & Urban Development) suggest that no more than 30% of a household’s income should be spent on housing. This is a good target, because it means people have income available to address other basic needs like food, health care, and transportation as well as disposable income for fun things like eating out, going to the movies, and shopping. In short, it’s better for each household *and* for the City’s economy overall. However, in Woonsocket today, nearly 40% of households spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing.

That said, it is important to have homes at a wide range of price points to maintain a healthy community and economy. New, higher-end homes and apartments allow people and families to move up without leaving the City and allow higher-income residents to move in, both of which help support the tax base and economic activity within the City’s neighborhoods.

Housing Types

How people live and who they live with is changing, and the type of housing available needs to reflect these changes. Unlike most municipalities in Rhode Island, the average household size in Woonsocket is getting a little larger. At the same time, more people are choosing to live alone or with friends or other roommates as opposed to living with family. Fewer households consist of two adults and their children. Consequently, there is a strong demand not only for single-family homes, but for alternatives. Young adults and seniors alike need smaller homes and apartments, ideally within walking distance of shops and services downtown and in neighborhood centers. New larger-scale apartment buildings and conversion of mill buildings into housing can play a big role in meeting this need, but so can the renovation of smaller scale two- and three-unit homes. There is also a strong need for new construction of smaller single-family homes in residential neighborhoods. Over 3/4 of the homes in Woonsocket today are something *other than* single-family homes, which on the one hand should make it easier for Woonsocket to meet these changing needs. However, finding space to meet the demands for new single-family homes will continue to be a challenge.

Several questions in the public policy survey dealt with the need for alternative housing types. By far, “Encouraging the conversion of former mill buildings to residential use” was the most supported option, with nearly 80% of respondents considering it “Important” or Very Important.” This was followed by “Encouraging the development of smaller market-rate (non-subsidized) homes (e.g. cottages, townhouses, etc.)” at just over 70%, and “Increasing the housing options for seniors” at 55%. “Encouraging the development of higher-end housing” was deemed “Important” or Very Important” by only 43% of respondents.

Zoning for Housing Diversity & Density

One of the greatest tools the City has to allow and encourage a range of housing types is its Zoning Ordinance. Changes in zoning can make it easier for developers or individual homeowners to build the types of housing Woonsocket needs most, from an accessory apartment over someone’s garage, to a small apartment building, to the conversion of a mill building or other commercial or industrial space into housing. Flexible residential zoning allows housing to evolve over time and meet our changing needs. It is important to periodically review existing zoning standards to make sure that the types of housing most needed are allowed where they are desired and do not face unnecessary regulatory hurdles. Overlay zoning districts can also be a good tool for this. For example, the City’s Historic Structures Floating Overlay District allows for the redevelopment of government buildings, such as schools, into residential or other uses. This is a positive tool that could perhaps be expanded to culturally significant non-governmental buildings, such as mills, churches, private schools, and other institutions, that might be adaptively reused for housing.



Housing Diversity in Woonsocket. Upper left: Glenark Landing Apartments, a converted mill building (Trinity Management). Upper right: Typical three-family home – a common housing type in Woonsocket (Realtor.com). Lower left: Suburban style single-family home (Re/Max Properties). Lower right: Historic single-family home (Providence Journal).

Housing Accessibility

Woonsocket has a large and growing part of its population that is elderly or disabled and needs “accessible housing” – which means housing designed to accommodate people in wheelchairs or with other physical disabilities, including wider doors and hallways, accessible appliances and bathrooms, elevators or other lifts in multi-story buildings, etc. Others may have friends or relatives who are elderly or disabled and need first floor spaces that are “visitable” – which means there is at least one wheelchair-accessible entrance and

What is Universal Design?

Universal Design means designing homes to be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability. A home should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it.

What is Visitability?

Visitability means designing homes in such a way that they can be lived in or visited by people who have trouble with steps or who use wheelchairs or walkers.

bathroom in the home, and wheelchair-accessible hallways.

Housing Accessibility is important in all types of housing.

- The Woonsocket Housing Authority manages several homes accessible for seniors and

other people with mobility or sensory issues, including St. Germain assisted living. Facilities like this and other privately operated assisted living facilities ensure that Woonsocket residents can stay in Woonsocket when they can no longer be cared for at home.

- Some private-sector rental apartments and homes include handicap accessible units.
- Many individual homes throughout the City have taken advantage of the Rhode Island Governor's Commission on Disabilities [Livable Home Modification Grant Program](#) which provides 50% of the cost of home modifications for people with disabilities to stay in their homes.

KEEPING UP EXISTING HOMES & NEIGHBORHOODS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Woonsocket's homes are old – nearly half were built before 1940. While this historic housing stock adds to Woonsocket's character and charm, it can also lead to public health issues such as exposure to lead-based paint, asbestos, poor indoor air quality, and general disrepair. Woonsocket is fortunate to already have a diversity of housing types, but these homes must be in good condition and updated to be more energy efficient and meet contemporary needs if they are going to be attractive options for the next generation. Thousands of homes in Woonsocket would benefit from full energy retrofits, including insulating the entire building, sealing off air leaks, and installing more sophisticated HVAC systems – ideally powered by renewable energy sources. The City needs as many tools as possible to help owners reinvest in their properties since these improvements can be very expensive. Of particular concern are older, smaller multi-family buildings. Repairs and upgrades, such as installing sprinkler systems, can be prohibitively expensive and difficult to finance. Without additional financial assistance or incentives, this can lead to continued disinvestment in these buildings.

The City has long-encouraged demolition of disinvested or blighted properties, particularly in more densely developed areas. While efforts should be made to reinvest in homes whenever possible, sometimes demolition is a more viable solution. When this occurs, it is important that lots not remain vacant. Demolition should always be paired with efforts to provide additional space in these older neighborhoods for yards, gardens, and other quality-of-life improvements, thereby making the remaining homes more livable and attractive for the future.

There are many existing programs at the local, state, and federal level to help homeowners maintain and improve their homes, from fuel assistance to energy efficiency upgrades to reduction of lead paint, to name just a few. However, many residents just don't know about these programs or how to combine all the various sources. The City can serve as a compiler of this information and help residents and business owners navigate the details.

Even if all these existing resources are utilized, they are insufficient to meet the extensive financial demands for reinvesting in our aging housing stock. Fortunately, the federal government is seriously exploring options to dedicate funding that would help retrofit

millions of homes across the country. Massachusetts is exploring similar programs, and there is a great need for Rhode Island to do the same. Massachusetts is also investing in design assistance to help property owners understand the most efficient ways to retrofit their buildings, and many of these ideas can be applied in Woonsocket. For example, early in 2021, the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center announced the winners of a competition to design cost-effective, all-electric energy retrofit approaches to existing three-family or “triple-decker” homes, a housing style common in many Woonsocket neighborhoods.

The upkeep of individual houses is important but doesn't happen in a bubble. A good home is still lacking if it is located in a neighborhood where people do not have access to the things they need for a healthy life. A big part of alleviating housing cost burden is investing in healthy neighborhoods and improving economic opportunities for residents (for example, access to better jobs with higher wages). Likewise, continuing to make investments in a thriving economy and mixed-use Downtown is critically intertwined with housing demand. Beyond connections to economic opportunities, good homes need connections to transportation, parks and recreation, and services and facilities.

Residents are strongly in favor of reinvesting in the existing housing stock. In the public policy survey, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents said, “Preserving existing housing stock through revitalization programs” is “Important” or Very Important.”



Keeping up Woonsocket's homes and neighborhoods. Left: Volunteers renovating an existing home (Woonsocket Patch). Right: Investing in Downtown also improves the quality of life for people who live within walking distance (Wikipedia).

LOW & MODERATE INCOME (LMI) HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

LMI housing is an issue on which people disagree in Woonsocket. While many people we heard from see a strong need for more LMI housing as well as housing that is generally more affordable, there is still a significant portion of residents who are concerned that more LMI housing will have negative implications on the local economy and community. In the public

policy survey, over half of respondents said, “Encouraging the development of subsidized affordable homes” is “Important” or Very Important” while over ¼ said it was “Not Important.”

Compliance with the Low to Moderate Income Housing Act (RIGL §45-53)

Woonsocket is one of ten municipalities considered “exempt” due to its percentage of rental housing and current LMI housing inventory. It meets the Low to Moderate Income Housing Act’s mandated LMI threshold by complying with the following:

In the case of an urban city or town which has at least 5,000 occupied year-round rental units and the units, as reported in the latest decennial census of the city or town, comprise twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the year-round housing units, is in excess of fifteen percent (15%) of the total occupied year-round rental units.

Table H-1 below demonstrates that Woonsocket remains in compliance with the Act.

Number of Housing Units (2021)	18,967
Number of Renter-Occupied Rental Housing Units (2021)	10,549 or 55.6% of all housing units
Number of LMI rental housing units (2021)	3,048 or 16.1% of all housing units

Table H-1. Woonsocket LMI Housing Thresholds

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2021 and Rhode Island Housing 2021

LMI Housing Resources

U.S. Department of Housing & Community Development (HUD)

HUD requires communities like the City of Woonsocket to develop a Five-Year Consolidated Plan for the allocation of federal housing and community development funds. Woonsocket’s 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan includes a wealth of data identifying housing and community development needs/priorities and strategies to address them. It is both a five-year plan of action and the City’s application for funds from three formula block grant programs: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG). Together, these make up a large portion of the housing-related funds available to Woonsocket. The Consolidated Plan informs this Comprehensive Plan, not only as it relates to housing, but to economic and community development and social services.

Woonsocket Housing Authority (WHA)

WHA homes are a major asset for the City that should be maintained for future generations. WHA is fully independent from the City of Woonsocket, with all its funding and financing coming from the federal government. WHA manages over 1,200 homes across four senior buildings and two family communities (Morin Heights and Veterans Memorial). Having local control over WHA homes means Woonsocket can more directly meet its housing needs and ensure that people who need it have a solid, stable, affordable place to live. WHA residents

and the City's overall economy all benefit from this. When Housing Authority properties are lost, it can be very expensive to replace them. Further, while Housing Choice Vouchers are a positive tool, they are not as helpful in tight rental housing markets. Access to a voucher doesn't guarantee access to a safe and adequate home. It is in the City's best interest for WHA to maintain all its homes and continue to reinvest in them so that they remain a resource for generations to come.

NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (NWBRV)

NWBRV is a nonprofit [community development corporation](#) that works to enrich neighborhood life and make affordable housing opportunities available throughout Woonsocket and Northern Rhode Island. The organization builds and manages affordable rental homes, maintains a homeownership center that serves as a one-stop shop for education and financial planning for new prospective homeowners, and links their residents and other community members with local and state services and other resources.

LMI Housing & the Economy

Housing affordability is not an isolated issue to solve on its own. It is tied directly to economic development, transportation, and more: the more people's incomes improve, the more they can afford to spend on housing; the more housing is located in walkable neighborhoods near jobs and shopping, the more people can save on transportation; and again, the less people spend on housing the more they can support the local economy with other purchases. In addition, when people are in stable housing, there are often savings in municipal spending on social services. At the same time, the more successful the City is at making Woonsocket an attractive place to live, the more higher-income people may move to the City, which can put more pressure on housing costs to rise, making long-term subsidized affordable homes all the more important.

In short, the whole economy benefits when housing is "affordable" – whether because it's subsidized or just affordable to you based on your income. Maintaining 10% of the City's housing stock for LMI households means that as the market rate prices for housing go up and down, Woonsocket has a core of homes that will stay affordable for the long term. This may help balance out the lower tax revenue from LMI housing, currently capped by the state at an 8% rate.

That said, Woonsocket has for decades been the regional center for LMI housing of all kinds, while most of its neighboring towns continue to fall short. Among the municipalities of Northern Rhode Island, outside Woonsocket, only the Town of Burrillville has met the requirements of the Low to Moderate Income Housing Act. This is, in effect, a free service that Woonsocket provides for the entire region. The City will continue its long-standing efforts to work regionally and statewide to ensure that neighboring towns are doing their fair share to provide affordable and LMI housing.

Homelessness

Shelter is a basic human need. The market alone cannot provide the housing types,

affordability, and supportive services often needed to prevent or remedy homelessness. Homelessness is more pervasive in Woonsocket than in many other communities in Rhode Island, and the City serves as a regional hub of sorts for homeless shelter beds in northern Rhode Island. Based on demographic data, Woonsocket has a significant population that tends to be at risk of homelessness, including those with very low incomes, those paying more than 50% of their incomes on housing, and those with certain disabilities, including mental illness and drug addiction.

Generally speaking, there are two major ways to effectively reduce homelessness in any community: preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place and having exit options for people experiencing homelessness. As eviction moratoriums end and Rhode Island Housing and other state entities roll out rental assistance and other support programs, it will be important for the City to pay close attention to any rise in evictions and the impacts this will have on local emergency services.

It is increasingly difficult for people experiencing homelessness to find permanent housing and the pandemic has only made this worse. According to the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, while the overall number of homeless in Rhode Island has been on a downward trend for many years, those who do fall into homelessness are apt to stay there longer. Resources for permanent housing are very limited. Statistically speaking, almost none of the people in Woonsocket's shelters this year will get access to a permanent housing program or subsidy, so the availability of relatively low cost, low barrier market rate housing is critical.



Heritage Place Apartments, a mixed-income community (NWBRV)

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL H-1: Diversify housing options for present and future City residents.

POLICY H-1.1: Promote construction of market-rate homeownership and rental units in order to achieve both economic diversity and income parity.

POLICY H-1.2: Encourage the construction of “workforce” housing for middle income residents.

ACTION H-1.2a: Explore a new zoning district that allows residential densities somewhere between what is allowed in R-3 and R-4 today (approximately 3-8 unit buildings), and consider placing the zone at the edges of neighborhood centers in order to provide smoother transitions from neighborhood centers to residential areas of predominantly single- and two-family homes while encouraging more housing diversity.

POLICY H-1.3: Expand opportunities for the creation of accessory dwelling units as a means of providing options for extended family members to reside together.

ACTION H-1.3a: Revise the Zoning Ordinance to comply with the latest state legislation regarding accessory dwelling units. Within the context of the law, specifically explore ways to ease the ability to develop accessory dwelling units in single-family residential districts (R1 & R2) in order provide more naturally affordable housing and income for homeowners.

POLICY H-1.4: Support residential conversion, including live/work dwelling units, in select underutilized buildings that are no longer practicable as commercial, institutional, or industrial use.

ACTION H-1.4a: Complete an inventory and assessment of all underutilized former mill buildings/complexes and commercial blocks and determine which would be most appropriate for residential reuse or live/work space. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to permit and regulate this type of use in the areas determined to be appropriate.

ACTION H-1.4b: Explore options for amending the Zoning Ordinance to more easily allow for the conversion and adaptive reuse of existing commercial and institutional buildings for multi-family residential and/or mixed commercial/residential uses, in conjunction with performance standards for minimizing impacts on surrounding properties and maximizing the livability of the site. This could build on the existing policies of the Historic Structures Floating Overlay District. Consider separate standards for the conversion of individual buildings versus the conversion of a larger campus or office park.

GOAL H-2: Preserve the City's existing housing stock in order to protect the health, safety, and financial well-being of City residents and improve the stability and desirability of the City's older neighborhoods.

POLICY H-2.1: Promote small scale development that enhances and supports the existing economic and social fabric of the City's neighborhoods.

POLICY H-2.2: Recognize and preserve housing and neighborhood resources that contribute to the City's viability and heritage.

POLICY H-2.3: Improve existing substandard housing to provide safe, decent, sanitary, affordable units for people at all market levels and enforce minimum housing requirements and building codes.

ACTION: H-2.3a: Continue federal, state, and locally funded rehabilitation programs, and target efforts in the City's older inner-city neighborhoods.

ACTION: H-2.3b: Continue to invest federal, state, and local funds into grants or loans for energy efficiency improvements, and actively market these resources to private property owners.

ACTION H-2.3c: Continue regular housing code enforcement and foreclosed property care, including reduction of exposure to lead hazards.

ACTION H-2.3d: Consolidate and regularly update a list of federal, state, and local services and resources available to help property owners maintain and improve their homes, and actively promote these resources to residents and business owners.

ACTION H-2.3e: Support state and national programs that would provide significantly more financing and design assistance for retrofitting existing homes, and consider actively advocating for future state or federal legislation or programs that would increase such assistance.

POLICY H-2.4: Institute neighborhood level planning, community development, and revitalization programs.

ACTION H-2.4a: Support community-based initiatives that contribute and improve the quality of life in the City's neighborhoods (i.e., crime watches, beautification efforts, etc.).

ACTION H-2.4b: Coordinate local planning efforts in the Fairmount and Constitution Hill neighborhoods with the Sustainable Communities Program's Quality of Life Plan developed by LISC and NWBRV.

POLICY H-2.5: Develop programs with strong citizen participation to ensure they benefit existing residents without displacing them.

POLICY H-2.6: Develop programs to prevent and mitigate the impact of foreclosures and vacant buildings in the community.

ACTION H-2.6a: Continue to track and map vacant properties and

foreclosures on a monthly basis and use this data to develop targeted policies and foreclosure prevention/mitigation programs.

POLICY H-2.7: Work to increase homeownership in the community to bring the renter to homeowner ratio closer to 1:1.

ACTION H-2.7a: Continue to use federal funds to support homeownership subsidies, including first-time homebuyer down-payment assistance and closing cost support.

GOAL H-3: Ensure that existing low-income and special needs residents have safe, decent, and affordable places to live.

POLICY H-3.1: The City will continue to meet the requirements of RIGL §45-53, the Rhode Island Low and Moderate Income Housing Act.

POLICY H-3.2: Maintain a fiscally healthy Woonsocket Housing Authority (WHA) and local control over public housing management, ensuring that all WHA homes are retained and invested in to support future generations of Woonsocket residents.

ACTION: H-3.2a: Encourage and prioritize funding for the renovation of existing WHA homes with universal design and visitability standards, to ensure accessibility for more people in wheelchairs or with other mobility disabilities.

POLICY H-3.3: Maintain and increase support for permanent and supportive housing for homeless individuals and families, and people with special needs.

ACTION H-3.3a: Continue to implement homelessness prevention strategies, including increasing transitional housing capacity, homeless shelter capacity, and resources for homeless prevention.

ACTION H-3.3b: Build relationships between City departments, including the Police, and local homeless service providers. Develop protocol for connecting local homeless with services.

ACTION H-3.3c: Monitor data on individuals and households most at risk of homelessness, including those with very low-incomes, mental illness, and drug addiction. Continue to invest in City services and connect to non-City services to help prevent these populations from slipping into homelessness, particularly rental and mortgage assistance, legal assistance, counseling and advocacy, and anti-eviction programs and policies.

III. CIRCULATION

Introduction

Woonsocket's historic Downtown, with its compact and pedestrian-oriented street network, provides ample opportunities to support the growth of a thriving downtown business district. Through improvements to Downtown streets and public spaces, including enhanced wayfinding to promote a "park and walk" business district, and placemaking to highlight Woonsocket's historic context within the Blackstone River Valley and the City's role in the birth of the American Industrial Revolution, its transportation network is positioned to support economic development. The Blackstone River Bikeway is another important asset, which provides regional bicycle connections and recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors. Additionally, Woonsocket's location between three large regional employment and population centers – Providence, RI and Worcester and Boston, MA – provides opportunities to connect more residents to the regional job market with improved transportation links, especially through the potential return of commuter rail service to downtown Woonsocket. Overall, the City's transportation network of roads, transit infrastructure, sidewalks, and paths, is a strength that can be leveraged to help more people access jobs and opportunities both within and outside of the city, and to promote Woonsocket's businesses, arts, culture, and identity as a historic industrial hub.

Vision for Circulation

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will focus on developing a safe and sustainable multimodal transportation network to provide transportation options for people of all ages and abilities, and to efficiently transport goods and services to support local businesses. Investing in a transportation network focused on sustainable mobility will allow for continued economic growth by attracting business to Woonsocket and connecting residents to regional job centers.

The vision for the future of transportation in Woonsocket supports the State of Rhode Island's vision for a multimodal and sustainable transportation network set forth in Moving Forward RI 2040. By focusing on the movement of people and goods in a variety of ways, including walking, biking, driving, and transit, Woonsocket's people and economy will benefit from increased options and access. The goals laid out in this Circulation Plan Element support the maintenance of transportation infrastructure and efficiency of travel, promote environmental sustainability, particularly through improving walking and biking opportunities, support economic growth, enhance quality of life, and connect people and places, with an emphasis on the revitalization of downtown Woonsocket.

ROADWAY NETWORK

Woonsocket's roadway network provides access to the City's commercial centers for both people and freight, while connecting residents to their everyday needs. The network is

comprised of principal arterials that connect to highways providing regional connections, as well as minor arterial, collector, and local roadways providing access to local destinations. Safety for all roadway users, including drivers, transit riders, pedestrians, and bicyclists, is a critical component of a well-functioning roadway network. Identifying potential projects and policies that prioritize multimodal safety will allow the City to develop a transportation system designed for people of all ages and abilities.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Roadways need repair, with roadway condition being the top need identified in the community survey. Residents are concerned about roadway safety, including implementing measures to reduce speeding.
- Traffic congestion is an issue, especially during evening commute hours to employment centers (e.g., Mendon Road south of its intersection with Cumberland Hill Road, which connect to the Highland Corporate Park and CVS headquarters).
- Some roads within the City are “overbuilt” for existing capacity, meaning that some road space can be allocated to other uses. Examples include Truman Drive, which the City recently converted from a three-lane road to a two-lane road,¹ and Diamond Hill Road.

“The roads really need to be redone as well as lights and sidewalks.” – Survey Respondent

PRIORITIZING SAFETY

Three priority locations for safety improvements in Woonsocket are Diamond Hill Road, Cass Avenue, and downtown (Main Street, Social Street, Clinton Street, Hamlet Avenue, Truman Drive, Park Avenue, Worrall Street, John Cummings Way). Road Safety Audits (RSAs) were completed at these locations between 2018 and 2020 and identified the following challenges and recommendations. Implementing solutions to address these challenges is imperative to reducing crashes and making people feel safe no matter how they choose to travel in Woonsocket.

Challenges

- Lack of bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Inadequate signage
- Poor visibility/sight lines
- Antiquated signal equipment
- High speeds
- Abundant curb cuts

Recommendations

- Rectangular Flashing Beacons (RRFBs), HAWK signals
- Road Diets
- Pedestrian curb extensions/ bump outs and raised crossings
- Corridor wide lighting
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities

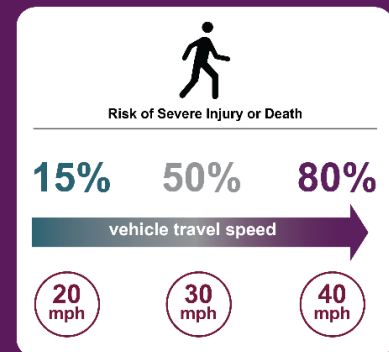
¹ City of Woonsocket, Truman Drive Greenway RFP, 2021, https://www.woonsocketri.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf5231/f/uploads/rfp-truman_drive_greenway.pdf.

VISION ZERO

To raise awareness of safety and promote a culture of reduced vehicular speeds, some communities have developed a “Vision Zero” Plan. “Vision Zero” acknowledges that many factors contribute to safe mobility - including roadway design, speeds, behaviors, technology, and policies - and sets clear goals to achieve the shared goal of zero fatalities and severe injuries.

Safety is directly related to vehicle speed, which impacts crash severity.

<https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/>

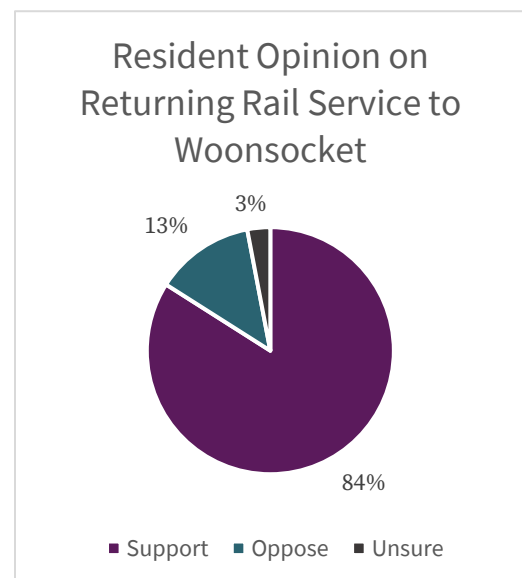


PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Improving and expanding public transportation in Woonsocket will benefit the community by connecting residents to both local and regional job centers and destinations. It is critical to find ways to provide access to as many job opportunities as possible for residents, both within and outside City limits. In addition to bus service provided by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA), Woonsocket has the physical foundation for commuter rail service, with a centrally located train station Downtown with access to a regional rail line, and the community support for expanded service. By working with local and regional stakeholders to advocate for expanded transit service, Woonsocket can promote economic development through increased transit access.

WHAT WE HEARD

- The vast majority (84%) of survey respondents are supportive of restoring commuter rail service to Woonsocket, with only 3% of respondents opposed, and 13% unsure. Providence is the number one preferred commuter rail connection, followed by Green Airport and Worcester, MA.
- 18% of residents live in a household without access to a private vehicle, limiting accessibility and demonstrating need for increased local public transit options.
- Improving RIPTA bus stops with more amenities, especially Downtown, was a common theme from the community survey.
- There is a need for transit connectivity to regional job centers, including Providence and Worcester, Boston, and Norfolk County in Massachusetts. This not only includes

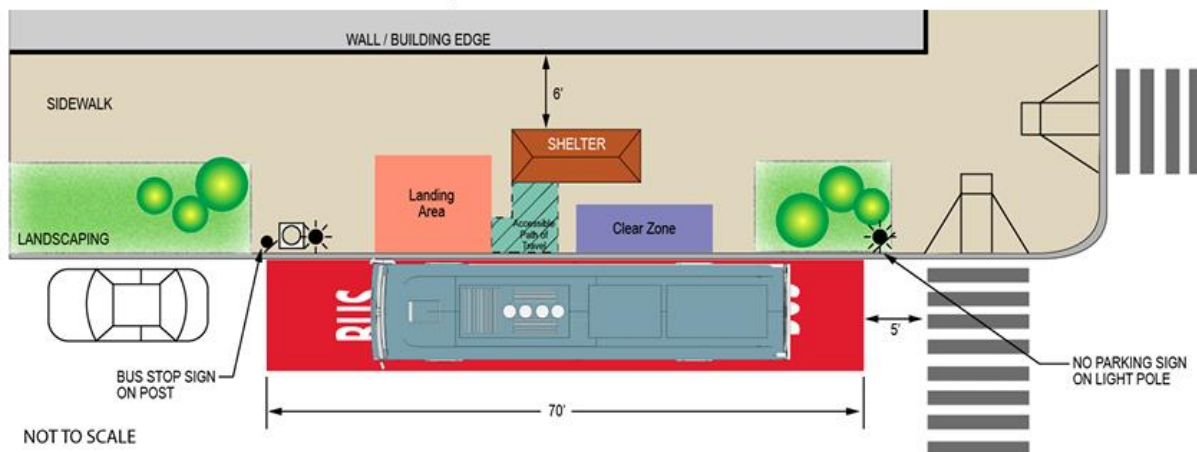


exploring the restoration of commuter rail service, but also working with RIPTA and Massachusetts RTAs to improve regional bus service. As of 2023, the RIPTA 54 bus to Providence is the only regional transit connection².

- There is a need for additional paratransit services for senior citizens and residents with disabilities, according to the Department of Human Services.

MOBILITY HUBS

Mobility hubs are places where people can access services or amenities as they transfer between modes of transportation, such as transit, walking, bicycling, or driving. Mobility hubs are typically located where different bus routes converge, or a connection to another mode, offering a safe, secure waiting area, and serve areas with high average daily riders. The major features of a mobility hub are connectivity, safety and security, multimodal connections, and design and amenities. Likely locations for mobility hubs are downtowns or neighborhood centers, hospitals or medical buildings, shopping centers or malls, college campuses, and large business parks.



Ideal bus stop layout and amenities, from the Rhode Island Bus Stop Design Guide (2017)³

² RIPTA, 54: Lincoln/Woonsocket, 2023, <https://www.ripta.com/routes/54/>

³ RIPTA & RIDOT, Rhode Island Bus Stop Design Guide, 2017, https://www.ripta.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/rigsdg_final_print_version.pdf.

WALKING & BIKING

Woonsocket's existing sidewalk and bicycle networks provide a solid foundation to support additional pedestrian and bicycle activity throughout the City. Providing options for walking and biking will increase accessibility to jobs, schools, shopping, and health care, while encouraging more multimodal activity Downtown. Regionally, connections to the Blackstone River Bikeway (BRB) provide opportunities to bring visitors Downtown and connect residents to local and regional destinations.



Transit Forward RI 2040 is Rhode Island's master plan for transit service over the next twenty years, including recommendations for short-term and long-term improvements.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, especially Downtown, could encourage more activity and people to choose modes of transportation other than driving.



21% of people would make daily trips by **biking** and **33%** would make daily trips by **walking** with improvements to infrastructure

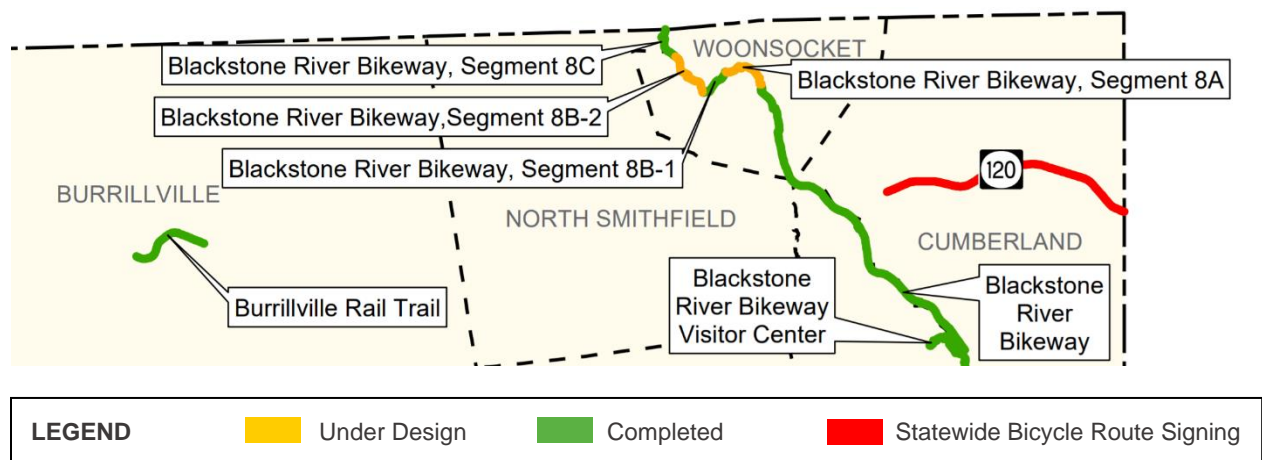
Results of Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan Public Survey, 2022

The community survey revealed if improvements were made to transportation infrastructure, **33%**

of people would prefer to make their daily trips by walking, and 21% would prefer biking – this indicates that a desire for alternative modes, but there are barriers preventing residents from choosing to walk or bike.

The Blackstone River Bikeway is an asset for both residents and visitors. The addition of on-street bicycle infrastructure connecting to the BRB could encourage more local use of the bikeway for commuting and shopping trips with better connections between local neighborhoods and commercial areas.

“Woonsocket is a tight, densely developed community that is entirely car dependent but shouldn't be. Many residents do not own cars and many more would make trips on foot or bike if we could.” – Survey Respondent



When completed, the Blackstone River Bikeway will connect through Woonsocket, Cumberland, Lincoln and Pawtucket.⁴

⁴ State of Rhode Island, Statewide Bicycle System, 2020, http://www.dot.ri.gov/travel/bikeri/docs/RI_Statewide_Bicycle_System.pdf.

Truman Drive Green Infrastructure Parkway

The Truman Drive Green Infrastructure Parkway project converts two of the four existing vehicle lanes to a shared use path and linear park. A portion of this project has been completed with the removal of a vehicle lane and construction of the bikeway along the west side of the roadway.⁵



DOWNTOWN

With walkable streets, historic charm, and direct access to the Blackstone River Bikeway, Downtown Woonsocket has the potential to further establish itself as a “park and walk” business district, attracting residents and visitors to its local businesses to create vibrant and lively streets, and building on its identity as a historic hub of the Industrial Revolution. Making changes to wayfinding and public parking, and upgrading streetscapes and multimodal infrastructure, could help advance the goals of a revitalized Downtown.

“The library is great, however, its location is not convenient. There are few residents that live a walkable distance from it, it is located on a busy, dangerous street, and there isn't any safe bicycle access to it. Redeveloping that part of the city and focusing on interconnected pedestrian and bike networks could draw more city residents to make use of it.” - Community Survey Respondent

⁵ Design and Illustrations prepared by Stephen R. Crasfulli, RLA, for the Woonsocket Planning Board, Design Review Commission and River Overlay District Review Commission in 2019.

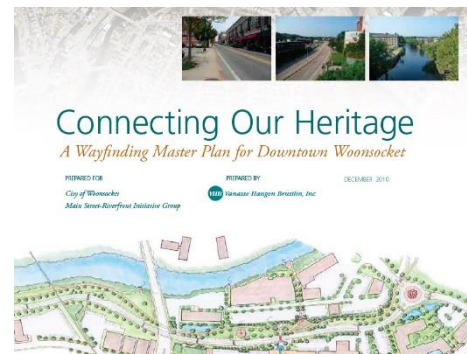
WHAT WE HEARD

- Downtown has ample public parking, which is often underutilized. There is an oversupply of parking and a lack of wayfinding to direct residents and visitors to public parking facilities.

One of Downtown Woonsocket's biggest strengths is its pedestrian-oriented street network. Improvements to both pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure would encourage more people to visit Downtown on bike or foot. Improved wayfinding, placemaking, and public spaces could encourage people to spend more time Downtown after they arrive.

WAYFINDING PROGRAMS

As people engage with a community while walking, wayfinding signage can direct people to destinations of interest, promote existing pedestrian connections, and can add to the feeling of comfort and accessibility of a street. A



FUNDING FOR SIDEWALKS

As a designated entitlement community, the City of Woonsocket is eligible for funding through the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program. The City can use this program to fund identified local public infrastructure needs. Priority is given to those in income eligible neighborhoods.

wayfinding Plan was completed in 2010 but should be updated to meet evolving needs and redevelopment in Downtown⁶.

⁶ City of Woonsocket, *Connecting Our Heritage: A Wayfinding Master Plan for Downtown Woonsocket*, 2010.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL C-1: Ensure Woonsocket has a well-maintained and consistently upgraded roadway network to transport people safely and efficiently to local and regional destinations.

POLICY C-1.1: Repair and maintain existing infrastructure, including roads and bridges.

ACTION C-1.1a: Develop a cyclical Pavement Management Program to collect and retain sidewalk and roadway condition data, and to help identify potential roadway infrastructure needs. This Pavement Management Program should be merged with the Sidewalk Prioritization Program so that improvements are cohesively managed and implemented.

ACTION C-1.1b: Leverage state programs such as the Municipal Road and Bridge Revolving Fund (MRBRF) and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to finance infrastructure projects, including capital improvements to roads, bridges, and sidewalks. Projects must be added to RIDOT's Project Priority List (PPL) to be eligible for funding.

ACTION C-1.1c: Develop a prioritized list of necessary rehabilitation/reconstruction of major arterial and collector roads, including Mendon Road, Diamond Hill Road, Cumberland Hill Road, Manville Road, Main Street, and Truman Drive.

ACTION C-1.1d: Routinely reassess the structural capacity of Woonsocket's bridges to accommodate truck weights.

ACTION C-1.1e: Develop a freight route plan to prioritize roadway and bridge improvements. The State's 2022 Freight Goods and Movement Plan⁷, documents the State's freight network and can be referenced as a starting point.

POLICY C-1.2: Create policies and investment programs for infrastructure to improve roadway safety for all users.

ACTION C-1.2a: Develop a "Vision Zero" Plan to reduce vehicle speeds, improve roadway safety for all users, and achieve the goal of zero fatalities and severe injuries.

ACTION C-1.2b: Implement recommendations from recent Road Safety Audits (RSAs) conducted on Diamond Hill Road, Cass Avenue, and Downtown,

⁷ RIDOT, Freight Forward RI, Freight and Goods Movement Plan Interim Update, 2022.

https://planning.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur826/files/2022-06/2022_RI_Interim_Freight_Plan_Update_6_1_22.pdf

including installing Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacons (RRFBs), curb extensions, raised crosswalks, and a road diet⁸.

ACTION C-1.2c: Create “complete streets” design guidelines for future repaving projects to reduce vehicle speeds and incorporate sustainable transportation options, particularly on roadways providing access to City destinations and in areas with a high number of crashes.

POLICY C-1.3: Optimize the operations of the roadway network.

ACTION C-1.3a: Create a freight access management program to identify optimal freight routes, including installing appropriate signage so trucks avoid low clearance bridges.

ACTION C-1.3b: Evaluate the traffic signal equipment and signal timing Citywide to see if changes could be made to optimize operations and prioritize pedestrian crossing. This may include upgrading traffic signals, installing loop detectors, repairing or installing new pedestrian signals, and making adjustments to signal timing/phasing, especially for areas with the highest number of crashes and highest pedestrian volumes.

POLICY C-1.4: Improve clarity and ease of use of the existing roadway network.

ACTION C-1.4a: Upgrade road signs on a regular basis to ensure easy identification of State Routes and other notable destinations in the City.

ACTION C-1.4b: Work with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission to make updates to historical markers and other signs, helping to advance the goals of placemaking and wayfinding in Woonsocket’s historic districts.

GOAL C-2: Provide high quality public transportation services connecting residents, workers and visitors to the places they live, work, and play.

POLICY C-2.1: Improve local transit connectivity, especially for Woonsocket’s transit-dependent population.

ACTION C-2.1a: Work with RIPTA to examine opportunities for a mobility hub downtown, and to implement the most aggressive plans presented in Transit Forward 2040⁹, including bus access to Highland Corporate Park, higher

⁸ RIDOT, Road Safety Assessment: Cass Avenue, 2018.

RIDOT, Road Safety Assessment: Diamond Hill Road, 2020.

RIDOT, Road Safety Assessment: Downtown Woonsocket, 2019.

⁹ RIPTA, RIDOT, & RI Statewide Planning, Transit Forward RI 2040, 2020, <https://transitforwardri.com/pdf/TFRI%20Recs%20Briefing%20Book-Final%20201230.pdf>

frequency along all bus routes, and on-shoulder bus travel on RI-146A.

ACTION C-2.1b: Work with RIPTA to make changes to routing, scheduling (frequency), and service hours to best meet the needs of residents, especially for vulnerable and transit-dependent populations (e.g., elderly, students, and low-income).

ACTION C-2.1c: Work with RIPTA to study bus on-time performance on routes that serve Woonsocket to prioritize measures that would improve bus reliability and minimize delay.

ACTION C-2.1d: Assess bus stop conditions and identify potential physical improvements, including opportunities to enhance accessibility and passenger amenities (e.g., benches, shelters), especially for high-ridership locations such as the John Cummings Way stop between Clinton Street and Social Street.

ACTION C-2.1e: Work with RIPTA to advocate for additional paratransit services via the RIDE program, as Woonsocket's senior population would benefit from additional door-to-door services for their everyday needs.

POLICY C-2.2: Expand transit connectivity to regional job centers and other destinations.

ACTION C-2.2a: Implement the recommendations from the *Transit Forward RI 2040 Plan*, including a new bus route through the City connecting to Bellingham, MA and a new regional bus route offering better service to Providence.

ACTION C-2.2b: Reestablish commuter rail service in the City, and advocate for a connection between Woonsocket and regional destinations, including Providence, Green Airport, and Worcester. Work with other regional stakeholders to promote commuter rail along the Providence & Worcester Railroad, while opposing any changes to the rail rights-of-way that would jeopardize the possibility of future commuter rail service.

Goal C-3: Develop a safe, comfortable, and accessible network of walking and biking routes throughout the City connecting residents and visitors to Citywide destinations, natural and cultural amenities, and commercial areas.

POLICY C-3.1: Invest in improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities and programs Citywide to encourage people to choose these modes rather than driving for short trips.

ACTION C-3.1a: Create a Citywide Bicycle & Pedestrian Action Plan to evaluate

the overall bicycle and sidewalk networks and develop recommendations for improved safety and connectivity. The Rhode Island Statewide Bicycle Mobility Plan¹⁰ can be used as a starting point for identifying City priorities for a connected bicycle network.

ACTION C-3.1b: Add additional on-street bicycle infrastructure to connect local neighborhoods to the BRB to increase recreational opportunities and potential for everyday use for residents, and to attract tourists Downtown.

ACTION C-3.1c: Identify streets with potential for bicycle and pedestrian improvements due to their proximity to areas with pedestrian-oriented land uses, available right-of-way, or ability to connect to recreational opportunities such as the BRB. For example, Cumberland Street and the northern part of Cumberland Hill Road have the potential to provide improved walking and biking facilities to facilitate connections between the residential neighborhoods to the east and Downtown and the Blackstone River to the west. Other examples include Manville Road, Harris Avenue, River Street, South Main Street, Providence Street, and Park Avenue.

ACTION C-3.1d: Work with City departments such as the Education Department, DPW: Parks and Recreation Division, and Police Department to host public education programs on walking and biking safety and walk or bike to work or school days to encourage these modes of travel.

POLICY C-3.2: Prioritize pedestrian safety and accessibility to encourage more walking trips throughout the City.

ACTION C-3.2a: Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance to identify opportunities to include incentivizes for developers to make accessibility upgrades on sidewalks adjacent to new/redevelopment.

ACTION C-3.2b: Develop a Sidewalk Prioritization Program to develop an inventory of sidewalk conditions to prioritize where to make improvements for pedestrian connectivity and accessibility. Priority factors might include whether a sidewalk provides access to grocery stores, farmers markets, and other similar food providers, as food access has been identified as a priority for the City. This Sidewalk Prioritization Program should be merged with the Pavement Management Program so that improvements are cohesively managed and implemented.

GOAL C-4: Increase access to Downtown Woonsocket's commercial area through enhanced transportation infrastructure.

¹⁰ Rhode Island Moving Forward Statewide Bicycle Plan, 2020. <https://planning.ri.gov/planning-areas/transportation/long-range-transportation-plan/bicycle-mobility-plan-documents>

POLICY C-4.1: Assess current and future parking needs Downtown to identify opportunities to better manage parking demand.

ACTION C-4.1a: Evaluate parking supply near the train station to plan for potential demand of future restored commuter rail service and new infill development.

ACTION C-4.1b: Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance for further opportunities to reduce or remove parking minimums and allow for shared parking, as initiated with the Downtown Overlay District¹¹.

POLICY C-4.2: Improve wayfinding Downtown to help with navigation and placemaking.

ACTION C-4.2a: Develop a wayfinding program to improve access to and within Downtown to take advantage of Woonsocket's walkable streets and to help visitors locate public parking.

ACTION C-4.2b: Use wayfinding signs to establish consistent "branding" for Downtown to help establish its identity as a historic district.

POLICY C-4.3: Invest in multimodal infrastructure to encourage activity and foot traffic Downtown.

ACTION C-4.3a: Implement multimodal improvements to Main Street to help bring more residents and visitors Downtown. Improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure conditions will serve as a placemaking strategy by supporting a people-oriented commercial district.

ACTION C-4.3b: Identify roadways that could support multimodal projects like the Truman Drive Greenway, which will help advance the goal of making Downtown more attractive for pedestrians and bicyclists by providing dedicated facilities and expanding green space.

¹¹ WOONSOCKET, RI., ZONING ORDINANCE, ch. 2 § 1-6, 1994, Amended 2019.

IV. SERVICES & FACILITIES

Introduction

The City of Woonsocket provides a broad range of services to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community. The level at which these services are delivered is influenced by changes in population, development, environmental factors, and economic conditions. Evaluating service capacity in conjunction with anticipated changes in community needs can help the City determine strategic infrastructure and program investments in the near- and long-term.

Vision for Services & Facilities

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will be a financially stable, self-sustaining service provider to its residents, providing a level of service that meets community expectations in a resilient manner and supports a high quality of life.

For greater detail about City services and facilities, see the Services & Facilities chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.

Wastewater Management

Woonsocket's City-owned sewer system and Woonsocket Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) transport and treat wastewater from 95% of Woonsocket, while the remaining 5% is served by private septic systems. The Woonsocket Thermal Conversion Facility, dries and incinerates sludge produced as a byproduct of wastewater treatment and generates revenue for the City by processing sludge from other wastewater treatment plants. Private utility companies operate the sewer system, WWTF, and sludge facility under contract with the City.

The City has ongoing programs to maintain and upgrade its wastewater management system. Through targeted repair and replacement of sewer pipes and manhole covers, the City has reduced seepage of rainwater into sewers, thereby improving sewer capacity and WWTF efficiency. Recent upgrades at the WWTF have reduced phosphorus and nitrogen loading to the Blackstone River, and improvements at the sludge facility have reduced odors.

Despite this progress, the City faces many challenges to maintaining a good level of service and protecting public health and the environment. Continued investments will be needed to address aging infrastructure, WWTF and sludge facility operational issues, Blackstone River water quality, odors, and climate risks.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on the community survey, 53% of respondents expressed that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the City's wastewater management services, while 35% were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. Residents expressed concerns about odors, flood risks, and recent water-quality violations at the WWTF. A few respondents expressed concerns about discharges from the WWTF into the Blackstone River, and 71% of respondents indicated that protecting and improving the water quality of the Blackstone River and its tributaries was "Very Important."

"Wastewater treatment is a critical service, but there are best practices that can be adopted to eliminate all of the negative externalities produced by this facility." – Survey Respondent

UPGRADE AGING SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

Much of the City's sewer system was originally constructed in 1897 out of vitrified clay pipe, within which cracks and leaky joints allow rainwater to seep into the sewer. The City will continue its program to replace, repair, or line aging pipes and replace vented sewer manhole covers. The City will continue to monitor infiltration/inflow (I/I) with camera inspections targeted to problem areas, and will accelerate sewer upgrades in areas most susceptible to I/I and sanitary sewer overflows.

PREPARE WWTF FOR CLIMATE CHANGE & EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Positioned along the Blackstone River, the WWTF is vulnerable to river flooding and will be more at risk in the future as climate change leads to more frequent and severe floods. A study in 2018 found that portions of the WWTF would be inundated during a future 100-year flood event and that operation of the four pump stations would be impacted. The City will further evaluate potential flood risks and will implement recommended flood-mitigation actions such as installing flood barriers and watertight doors, raising walls, installing and/or elevating backup generators and fuel sources, and upgrading pumps.



Woonsocket Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility (Google Earth)

MITIGATE ODORS AT THE WWTF & SLUDGE FACILITY

The WWTF has a long history of odor problems, due in part to its proximity to residential and commercial areas. The City recently implemented odor-control improvements to the WWTF and sludge facility, such as installing and sealing covers, adjusting airflow systems, and upgrading air scrubbers. Odors from trucks transporting dewatered sludge to the sludge facility remain an ongoing issue. The City will assess additional operation and facility

improvements to alleviate odor impacts on the neighborhood.

PROTECT THE BLACKSTONE RIVER FROM WASTEWATER POLLUTANTS

The City is permitted by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) to discharge treated wastewater to the Blackstone River, provided that it meet limits on pollutant concentrations. The WWTF has adequate capacity and treatment processes; however, recent operational failures have caused discharges of untreated or undertreated sewage to the Blackstone River. To prevent future failures, the City will investigate and improve upon operations and maintenance of the WWTF and sludge facility, as well as improving the City's industrial pretreatment and fat-oil-grease programs. The City will also explore operational and equipment upgrades at the sludge facility to reduce phosphorus concentrations in its waste stream.

Water Supply

Woonsocket is fortunate to have ample water supply, modern drinking water treatment and distribution infrastructure, and good water quality at the tap. Woonsocket owns three water supply reservoirs, along with some of the watershed land contributing to those reservoirs. In 2021, the City completed construction of the new Woonsocket Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in the Bernon Heights neighborhood, along with transmission main upgrades and a new raw water pump to convey water from the former Charles Hamman WTP to the new treatment plant. The water supply system has adequate capacity to meet Woonsocket's current water demand (3.97 MGD in 2018) and future projected water demand (4.60 MGD in 2040). The water distribution system has interconnections with water systems in the neighboring towns that have the capability to provide water in emergency situations. The Woonsocket Water Division's (WWD's) ongoing and future projects will protect water supplies, maintain and improve the distribution system, and reduce water demand.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on the community survey, 56% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with Woonsocket's drinking water system, while 33% were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. Residents expressed concerns about water safety, taste, and fluoride.

"I have always thought Woonsocket has the best tap water out of everywhere I've ever been." – Survey Respondent

PROTECT DRINKING WATER SUPPLY RESERVOIRS

The Woonsocket Water Division (WWD) plans to purchase additional watershed land under the Rhode Island Water Resources Board Watershed Protection Bond Program.

MAINTAIN & REHABILITATE THE WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

WWD will continue ongoing infrastructure inspections, maintenance, and rehabilitation, including:

- Flushing of hydrants and tanks,
- Replacement of hydrants and distribution pipes,
- Cleaning and lining of transmission mains, and
- Upgrades to storage tanks and pump stations.



Woonsocket Water Treatment Plant (New England Construction)

WWD will implement several projects to further improve drinking water distribution:

- Comprehensive water meter replacement program. Most existing water meters were installed in 2004 and are nearing the end of their useful life. WWD will replace residential and commercial water meters with new meters with radio encoders and implement a system for remote meter-reading and monthly billing.
- Park Avenue transmission main. A new transmission main, augmenting an existing main on Park Avenue, will boost water pressure in the service area.

MANAGE WATER DEMAND

WWD will continue its ongoing program for detecting and fixing water leaks. It will also implement policies to monitor drought and impose a series of restrictions and actions to control demand as drought conditions warrant.

Stormwater Management

The City owns and maintains stormwater infrastructure that collects runoff from streets and properties and releases it into the Blackstone River and other waterbodies and wetlands. To reduce stormwater pollution, the City inspects and cleans its drainage infrastructure, educates the public about pollution prevention, enforces stormwater management regulations for development projects, sweeps streets and municipal parking lots, and manages road salt applications. The City also partners with environmental organizations to implement low impact development and green stormwater infrastructure practices, which reduce the creation of stormwater runoff and the transport of pollutants to receiving waters. Waterbodies continue to be impacted by stormwater pollution, however. The drainage infrastructure also faces challenges, with many pipe networks lacking adequate capacity to move water quickly during intense storms, leading to



High waters during Hurricane Irene (Flickr)

localized flooding. It is anticipated that flooding and water quality issues will become more challenging due to climate change.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on community surveys and other methods of public engagement, residents expressed concerns about erosion and flooding, localized flooding during storm events due to overwhelmed or unmaintained infrastructure, and the adequacy of funding for the maintenance program. Many residents suggested that the City should prioritize improving the water quality of the Blackstone River, with 71% of respondents indicating that protecting and improving the water quality of the Blackstone River and its tributaries was “very important”. Of survey respondents, 41% indicated that protecting neighborhoods, businesses, and infrastructure from flooding, storms, and other natural hazards was “Very Important.”

“We should look into putting tree pits/street trees wherever possible (including making provisions to maintain them) to reduce stormwater runoff and increase tree canopy cover.” – Survey Respondent

EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ABOUT STORMWATER

Residents and businesses play an important role in preventing stormwater pollution. The City will continue its efforts to educate residents and businesses about pollution prevention, such as picking up dog waste and covering dumpsters. The City will also continue to support environmental stewardship opportunities, such as Earth Day cleanup events.

ENHANCE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT ORDINANCES

The City will continue to enforce its stormwater management ordinances: *Illicit Discharge Detention and Elimination Ordinance* (City Code §16-17), *Erosion & Sediment Control Ordinance* (City Code Chapter 7½), and *Post Construction – Storm Water Control Ordinance* (City Code Chapter 7¾). The City will explore opportunities to improve upon those Ordinances.

REDUCE STORMWATER POLLUTION FROM CITY OPERATIONS

The City will continue its illicit discharge and good housekeeping program to prevent stormwater pollution from City roads, properties, and drainage infrastructure. The programs include drainage system inspections and water quality sampling; street and parking lot sweeping; catch basin cleaning; optimized sand and salt applications; and maintenance of stormwater pollution controls at the Highway Garage.

UPGRADE DRAINAGE INFRASTRUCTURE TO PREVENT FLOODING

As climate change leads to more intense downpours and extreme storms, the City’s drainage infrastructure will struggle to move runoff quickly enough to prevent flooding. Two areas in the City already experience chronic drainage flooding. The City will evaluate drainage infrastructure capacity and backflow preventers and will develop and implement a plan for

infrastructure upgrades to prevent localized flooding.

IMPLEMENT & PROMOTE LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT (LID) & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Many survey respondents expressed that there were not enough natural resources in their neighborhood, with several suggesting that additional plants, flowers, and trees would be welcome additions. Respondents also expressed a desire for better parks. Low impact development (LID) practices and green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) can help reduce stormwater pollution while providing natural habitat, beautification, and public amenities. Likewise, investments in land conservation, ecological restoration, street trees, and revegetation can reduce stormwater runoff and pollutants.

The City will develop and implement procedures for evaluating LID and GSI opportunities on municipal capital projects, including road, streetscape, facility, and park projects. The City will also continue to partner with the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone, and Blackstone River Coalition to advance LID and GSI projects in Woonsocket.

Solid Waste

The City provides curbside trash and recycling pick-up for residents with City-issued bins through a private contractor, as well as curbside yard waste pickup in the spring and fall. The City also manages a Recycling Facility & Drop Off Center where residents can bring recyclable materials. The solid waste contractor collects all waste and recycled materials and transports them to the Rhode Island Resource Recovery facility in Johnston. Woonsocket is required by State law to recycle a minimum of 35% of its solid waste and divert a minimum of 50% of its solid waste. The City has not yet reached those targets.



Recycling Public Notice (Solid Waste Division)

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on the community survey, 75% of respondents reported that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the City's solid waste services, while 15% were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. 46% of respondents indicated that increasing opportunities for residents/businesses to reduce trash going to the landfill (recycling, composting, reusing etc.) was "very important." Residents expressed a desire for more options for recycling, yard waste, and disposal of large items. They also expressed a desire for more frequent collection.

INCREASE SOLID WASTE RECYCLING & DIVERSION

To meet its required recycling and diversion rates, the City will evaluate and implement best practices such as source reduction, reuse and donation opportunities, food waste composting, textile recycling, mattress recycling, summer yard waste pickup, and community education and engagement. The City will periodically review and update its Solid Waste Plan.

EDUCATION IN WOONSOCKET

The Education Department provides public education services to the City's children from pre-K through grade 12. The Department is comprised of seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. The former Woonsocket Middle School at 357 Park Place is still vacant, though the City recently sold it to a private entity with plans to redevelop the imposing, historic structure.

Residents recognize the connection between a high-quality public school system and a community's ability to attract families and businesses. Residents want to improve academic outcomes at Woonsocket's schools, which are performing below statewide averages for metrics measuring basic subject matter proficiency and graduation rates. Improving outcomes in Woonsocket's schools will go beyond having a good curriculum. Students need high-quality learning environments and staff (e.g., instructional, administrative, and other support staff) and access to necessary social services and both in and outside of school environments.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on surveys and other engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- Recognizing the connection between high-quality public schools and the overall social and economic wellbeing of the community, as a robust public school system is imperative to attracting and retaining families and businesses and maintaining student enrollment.
- Improving academic outcomes and graduation rates within the Education Department's school system.
- Offering early education and daycare opportunities for families with young children.
- Improving the physical condition of school facilities and ensuring schools are adequately supplied with classroom supplies and equipment.
- Advancing citywide sustainability and energy goals through energy and efficiency upgrades to school facilities.
- Supporting the library by making it more accessible to residents and improving its physical condition.
- Offering additional library programming for residents of all ages, interests, and needs.

"Our public schools drastically need resources to retain talented teachers and ensure good outcomes for students. Communities with a thriving public school system will draw residents." – Survey respondent

“We need to keep our schools and public facilities in good shape...to encourage our youth to enter.” – Survey respondent

ENSURING COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

While formal definitions may vary, ensuring “college and career readiness” means that all of Woonsocket’s students have the skills to succeed in a post-secondary education (including trade and vocational schools) setting or the workforce. Often, “college and career readiness” is conceived to go beyond just academic or content knowledge, including social and emotional intelligence and other life skills and behaviors.

Laying the groundwork for college and career readiness is a community effort. For example, the City can actively support opportunities that build students’ social and emotional growth by encouraging local businesses to provide co-op programs or supporting community organizations that provide extracurricular programs. Students also need access to necessary social services and educational supports that enable successful learning and growth.

The Education Department has two high schools.

Woonsocket High School offers a typical academic curriculum and also includes several pathways that introduce students for possible careers in relevant fields.

The Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center (WACTC) offers programs that prepare students for the workforce as well as post-secondary educational institutions. Students receive hands-on learning opportunities and work-based experience, and many students graduate with relevant career certifications. WACTC is open to all Rhode Island resident students entering or in high school. Transportation is provided for students living in Woonsocket, Cumberland, Burrillville, and North Smithfield for free.

IMPROVING THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF SCHOOL FACILITIES

Every child in Woonsocket deserves to be in a high-quality learning environment. In 2017, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE)’s School Building Authority (SBA) engaged Jacobs and Cooperative Strategies (Jacobs) to conduct a statewide facility condition assessment and master plan, which included preparing condition assessments for each local school



Woonsocket High School Students (Woonsocket High School)

district.¹² A site's deficiencies are listed by building system (roofing, structural, exterior, etc.) and priority to address. Cost estimates are included and projected over the course of five years. Local departments can use this information to plan for capital improvements and other needs at their schools. Overall, the condition assessment for the Education Department found that the interior (e.g., flooring, ceilings, hardware) and mechanical (e.g., heating) building systems had the highest deficiency costs. Most deficiencies are those characterized as "necessary improvements required to maximize facility efficiency and usefulness" (e.g., plumbing improvements) and "items or systems that may be considered improvements... may be aesthetic or provide greater functionality" (e.g., repaving, educational accommodations for special programs).¹³ The City, which does not have bonding capacity, has struggled to meet these facility needs. According to the 2017 assessment, the schools with the greatest five-year need were Woonsocket High School, Globe Park School, and Bernon Heights School.

The data collected during the assessment also informs the statewide Recommended Action Plan. Relevant to Woonsocket, the statewide Recommended Action Plan recommends that RIDE focus on supporting local school districts by applying the planning concept of "newer and fewer" to districts with multiple exceptionally small schools that have significant condition needs. Rather than continuing investment in such facilities, which is often not in the district's long-term interest, a "newer and fewer" approach calls for investment in building a limited number of new schools capable of providing modern learning environments for as many students as possible. This strategy highlighted Woonsocket, specifically Kevin K. Coleman and Leo A Savoie Elementary Schools. The Education Department also supports this approach.

In May 2023, the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approved \$100.2 million in facility construction and renovations for the Education Department.¹⁴ The state share will total approximately \$86.5 million. The project will construct a new elementary school at Barry Field, consolidating operations at the Kevin K. Coleman, Globe Park, and Bernon Heights Elementary Schools. Additionally, the project will also address district-wide security needs and result in renovations and repairs at existing elementary and middle schools.¹⁵

¹² <https://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolBuildingAuthority/FacilityDataInformation.aspx#37541409-master-plan>

¹³ <https://ride.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur806/files/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/SchoolBuildingAuthority/State-of-Rhode-Island-Schoolhouses.pdf> (pg. 20)

¹⁴ https://media.ride.ri.gov/BOE/CESE/05232023Meeting/Encl5g_SchoolBuildingApprovals.pdf

¹⁵ <https://governor.ri.gov/press-releases/rhode-island-council-elementary-and-secondary-education-approves-255-million-school>



Coleman Elementary (Rhode Island Current)



Middle School Students (Woonsocket Middle School)

INVESTING IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

Life-long learning opportunities are key for supporting economic and workforce development. Whether you are honing the skills you already possess or pursuing new interests, all residents should have access to education and training resources regardless of age and background. Ultimately, empowering residents through continuing education opportunities can increase their economic mobility and quality of life while also creating local economic and job opportunities within the community.

The Woonsocket Education Center (WOC) is managed by the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner. Opened in 2022, WOC offers a space for public-private collaboration on continuing education and workforce training. WOC partners include the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, and many businesses, industry associations, and job placement organizations.

There are several places and organizations for residents to pursue continuing education, including the Woonsocket Education Center, Rhode Island Regional Adult Learning, Harbour Youth Center, and Project LEARN. These programs and organizations provide a variety of resources and classes for continuing adult education, including adult basic education courses, test preparation, English as a Second Language courses, and more.

HARRIS PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Harris Public Library has been serving the City since 1868 and has the distinction of being the first public library in the State. Originally situated on Main Street in City Hall, the Library moved to its current location in 1974. The City finished a major expansion and renovation project of the Library in 2001. The Library previously had two branches, the Social Branch (1927-1974) and Fairmount Branch (1998-2007).

Like many other libraries, the Harris Public Library is more than just a space to borrow

reading materials or study quietly; instead, libraries are centers for lifelong learning and act as important community spaces; the Harris Public Library has the dual core objectives of increasing literary empowerment and building community connections. Library staff are trained to connect people with the things they need and to serve as a hub of local and regional information, both in person and online.



Children's Resources (Harris Public Library)

The Library offers a wide variety of educational programs and services for children, adults, and families. Children and teenagers can take advantage of cooking and acting classes, informational lectures, summer reading programs, and more. Adults also have access to book clubs, fitness classes, language learning, test preparation, and more. The Library provides access to computers, printers, Wi-Fi, and other equipment and resources that may not be available at home, as well as books, music, and DVDs.

Public Safety

The City's Police, Fire, and Emergency Response services are critical for keeping people safe day-to-day and during emergency situations. A public safety complex would be an efficient way to meet the demands and needs of both the police and fire departments, potentially providing an integrated space for training, health, and wellness of officers and firefighters.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on the community survey and other engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- Crime prevention and response.
- More police and EMS/fire coverage and staff.
- More traffic enforcement/traffic cameras.

About $\frac{2}{3}$ of public survey respondents said they are 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with Police Department response times. About 58% said they are 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with traffic law enforcement (though less than 14% are 'Very Satisfied'). Concern about crime remains high for many residents. Only just over 40% said they are 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with crime prevention programs (and less than 10% are 'Very Satisfied'). About $\frac{3}{4}$ of survey respondents said they are 'Satisfied' or 'Very Satisfied' with Fire Department response time and with ambulance/emergency medical services.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Police Department is part of the local community. It is committed to community policing, which promotes community, government, and law enforcement partnerships, proactive problem solving, and community engagement to address the causes of crime, the fear of crime, and other community issues. The Department has built partnerships with

several organizations within and outside the City to meet the goal of community policing and improve the quality of life for City residents.

The Police Department is headquartered on Clinton Street, where it also operates the joint dispatch for the Police and Fire Departments. It also has a substation on Hamlet Avenue. The Department has reached capacity at its headquarters facility with limited space to expand personnel offices, training rooms, and locker rooms. The building, built in 1975, is in need of significant renovations to the roof, windows, holding areas and cells, and HVAC system, among other issues. The site also lacks enough space for vehicle storage, including the Department's day-to-day vehicles plus employees' vehicles. The Hamlet Avenue substation provides space for officers, but the building itself is not open to the public because it is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Emergency Management Agency is within the Fire Department. Its primary role is to coordinate with other City departments and regional and state agencies in the event of a natural disaster or crisis situation. The Fire Department is also home to the regional team that responds to natural disasters and other incidences and becomes the command center during events. Equipment is stored at the Department's headquarters facility.



Woonsocket Fire Department (City of Woonsocket)

The Fire Department operates out of five stations. Many of these facilities are at capacity and do not have space for growth. Layout and space cannot accommodate more modern delivery of services, including space for personnel offices, mandatory training needs, and vehicle and equipment storage. All buildings are in need of repairs and/or renovations.

Governance

In many ways, the issue of governing well is at the core of the Comprehensive Plan. Without a well-run government, it is difficult to imagine implementing a lot of the actions in the Plan. Governance touches every Element in the Plan because projects need to be assigned, managed, funded, and evaluated. Residents and business owners will need to continue to be engaged for many programs to succeed, and many departments will need to increase capacity and efficiency and improve customer service.

BEST PRACTICES IN REGULATION & MAINTENANCE

So much of what makes a city function smoothly and serve its residents well are the “nuts and bolts” of regularly maintaining existing ordinances, regulations, policies, and procedures as well as regularly maintaining and investing in physical facilities. While sound policy and procedures can be difficult and time consuming to update, the benefits are long lasting. It is

also worth noting that even the best policies and ordinances will fail to succeed if they are not actively implemented and enforced by the appropriate City staff or department. It is important that all these things are embedded as systems.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION & COORDINATION

In a community as diverse as Woonsocket, communication and engagement are critical to the successful operation of government. If residents are unaware of important decisions being made by the City, the inevitable result will be distrust in government; similarly, if residents do not engage with leadership about important issues, officials and staff cannot be expected to make decisions that represent their citizens' interests.

INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY & DATA

Investing in modern technology can be a bumpy transition, but once these improvements are in place, they can give a significant boost to economic activity and customer service. Whether a new business is trying to navigate the development process or a local organization is seeking a permit to close a street for a block party, there should be a one-stop-shop online to submit information and track the review process. Better access to (non-personal) public data creates enormous opportunities for government to positively impact the lives of residents. It also empowers City departments to track their own success against stated goals and identify areas for improvement. Investments in data access, management, and analysis can improve government efficiency by streamlining processes, promoting innovation, and encouraging greater interagency cooperation.



City Hall (City of Woonsocket)

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL SF-1: Provide City residents with an efficient delivery of services and adequate community facilities.

POLICY SF-1.1: Establish a set of priorities to guide actions.

ACTION SF-1.1a: Conduct periodic public surveys of appropriate segments of the population to gauge service satisfaction and assess the needs of those surveyed.

ACTION SF-1.1b: Per State law, the Comprehensive Plan must be revised no less than every ten years. At year eight, the Planning Board should initiate all processes for review and public participation that are necessary for the Plan's revision. There may be instances when an update is warranted sooner than mandated by the State law.

ACTION SF-1.1c: The Planning Board shall develop a strategic implementation plan for the Comprehensive Plan to be reviewed annually per state law.

POLICY SF-1.2: Resolve to make changes in municipal functions under the direction of an orderly plan.

POLICY SF-1.3: Pursue new avenues of resource generation for the support of needed programs.

POLICY SF-1.4: Commit to on-going maintenance programs for all City facilities.

POLICY SF-1.5: Provide creative options for private sector investment in the City.

POLICY SF-1.6: Adopt an annual or periodic maintenance program to ensure greater life expectancy for all existing facilities.

POLICY SF-1.7: Complete detailed physical evaluations of facilities, recognizing replacement or renovation actions required.

POLICY SF-1.8: Plan and evaluate capital improvement needs, including the identification of preferred options for the most cost-effective expenditure of public funds.

ACTION SF-1.8a: Annually prepare, adopt, and implement a comprehensive 5-year Capital Improvement Program for the City, and link to an annual Capital Budget so that actions are funded intentionally and systematically.

GOAL SF-2: Provide a safe, accessible, and efficient public infrastructure and public works

system.

POLICY SF-2.1: Provide a high level of maintenance and operation for all City infrastructure through a comprehensive maintenance program.

ACTION SF-2.1a: Continue the City's industrial wastewater pretreatment and fat-oil-grease programs.

ACTION SF-2.1b: Continue illicit discharge detection and elimination program to prevent and remove non-stormwater discharges to the City's stormwater infrastructure.

ACTION SF-2.1c: Continue and improve upon DPW's stormwater good housekeeping program to reduce stormwater pollution from municipal roads, properties, and operations.

ACTION SF-1.1d: Evaluate and implement best practices for solid waste reduction, recycling, and diversion.

ACTION SF-2.1e: Periodically review and update the City's Solid Waste Plan.

POLICY SF-2.2: Replace obsolete or worn-out system components with state-of-the-art equipment and materials.

ACTION SF-2.2a: Pursue state and federal grants for infrastructure improvements and pollution prevention initiatives.

ACTION SF-2.2b: Replace or repair aging sewer pipes and vented sewer manhole covers, targeting inspections and upgrades to areas most susceptible to infiltration/inflow and sanitary sewer overflows.

ACTION SF-2.2c: Evaluate flood risks for the sewer system, wastewater treatment facility, and sludge facility; implement recommended flood-mitigation actions.

ACTION SF-2.2d: Evaluate and implement operational and facility improvements at the wastewater treatment and sludge facilities to alleviate odor impacts on the neighborhood.

ACTION SF-2.2e: Improve operations of the wastewater treatment and sludge facilities to prevent operational failures and permit violations.

ACTION SF-2.2f: Study and implement operational and equipment upgrades at the sludge facility to reduce phosphorus concentrations in its waste stream.

ACTION SF-2.2g: Pursue acquisition and protection of watershed land around water supply reservoirs.

ACTION SF-2.2h: Continue water distribution system inspections, maintenance, and rehabilitation.

ACTION SF-2.2i: Implement a comprehensive water meter replacement program.

ACTION SF-2.2j: Construct a new drinking water transmission main on Park Avenue to boost water pressure in the service area.

ACTION SF-2.2k: Continue the City's ongoing program for detecting and fixing water leaks.

ACTION SF-2.2l: Develop and implement a plan for stormwater infrastructure upgrades to prevent localized flooding.

ACTION SF-2.2m: Develop and implement procedures for evaluating LID and green infrastructure opportunities on municipal capital projects, including road, streetscape, facility, and park projects.

POLICY SF-2.3: Educate and engage with residents, businesses, and organizations to promote pollution prevention and environmental stewardship.

ACTION SF-2.3a: Educate residents and businesses about stormwater pollution prevention, such as picking up dog waste and covering dumpsters.

ACTION SF-2.3b: Support environmental stewardship opportunities for residents and businesses, such as Earth Day cleanup events.

ACTION SF-2.3c: Partner with environmental organizations to promote and implement low impact development and green infrastructure.

POLICY SF-2.4: Enforce ordinances to protect City infrastructure and maintain the City's compliance with environmental permits.

ACTION SF-2.4a: Implement policies to monitor drought and impose a series of restrictions and actions to control water demand as drought conditions warrant.

ACTION SF-2.4b: Enforce the City's stormwater management ordinances: *Illicit Discharge Detention & Elimination Ordinance* (City Code §16-17), *Erosion & Sediment Control Ordinance* (City Code Chapter 7½), and *Post Construction*

– *Storm Water Control Ordinance* (City Code Chapter 7¾).

ACTION SF-2.4c: Amend stormwater management ordinances to incorporate best practices.

GOAL SF-3: Produce a school system recognized for its excellence that prepares students for college and career readiness.

POLICY SF-3.1: Institute programs and policies aimed at decreasing the drop-out rate and making universal completion of high school a highest priority.

ACTION SF-3.1a: Support and implement early intervention services and programs.

POLICY SF-3.2: Develop and implement programs aimed at improving the skills of graduating students.

ACTION SF-3.2a: Continue to increase partnerships between local employers and the Education Department's career and technical education programs to connect students to a diversity of experimental learning opportunities.

POLICY SF-3.3: Ensure that the education system prepares the City's youth to become well-rounded, well-adjusted, productive members of society.

ACTION SF-3.3a: Facilitate connections between the Education Department and community-based organizations to expand instructional and extracurricular opportunities for students.

POLICY SF-3.4: Develop a progressive educational system to enhance the quality of life for the whole community.

ACTION SF-3.4a: Attract higher educational institutions and programs to Woonsocket (e.g., Community College of Rhode Island, New England Institute of Technology).

ACTION SF-3.4b: Support and expand early education opportunities for residents, including evaluating options for an early childhood center.

POLICY SF-3.5: Develop a school housing program to implement the neighborhood school concept.

POLICY SF-3.6: Provide adequate facilities to address increasing school enrollment.

ACTION SF-3.6a: Using the statewide Recommended Action Plan and Education Department condition assessments, annually prioritize the school

facilities most in need of investment.

POLICY SF-3.7: Expand opportunities for residents to pursue post-graduate training and further intellectual development.

GOAL SF-4: Provide a high-quality public library system for the benefit of all community members.

POLICY SF-4.1: Effectively disseminate all types of information in order to meet basic human needs.

ACTION SF-4.1a: Develop outreach programs aimed at those sectors of the community not currently utilizing the Library.

POLICY SF-4.2: Expand days and hours of operation and library programs in order to better serve all segments of the population with a special emphasis placed on the minority and adult population sectors.

POLICY SF-4.3: Provide increased levels of service to the community by providing special programs and assistance in locating available information.

GOAL SF-5: Provide basic public safety services that efficiently maintain or improve existing quality in order to meet community needs.

POLICY SF-5.1: Continue to explore suitable funding, location, and design of a new public safety complex.

POLICY SF-5.2: Continue to provide basic police services for the enforcement of laws and ordinances; the preservation of peace and public order; the protection of life, liberty, and property; the prevention and repression of crime; the detection of violations of the law; the apprehension of violators; and the prosecution of those apprehended.

POLICY SF-5.3: Continue provision of basic firefighting services, including the obtainment of the quickest possible response time in responding to fires so as to result in a well-protected community and the education of the public on fire prevention measures and emergency medical techniques.

ACTION SF-5.3a: Complete ongoing reviews of the fire stations, to determine where there are needs for upgrades, closures, consolidations, etc.

POLICY SF-5.4: Implement policies that will increase the efficiency of service provision, including the adoption of a detailed maintenance and replacement program for police and fire fighting vehicles and other apparatus; the implementation of widespread and more efficient fire warning systems; and the restructuring of

personnel so as to obtain greater levels of efficiency.

ACTION SF-5.4a: Continue to carefully plan and schedule the refurbishment and replacement of all police and fire apparatus, (alarm console, trucks, aerial ladder, pumper, rescue vehicles, and protective clothing), as part of the City's 5-year Capital Improvement Program.

POLICY SF-5.5: Institute community outreach programs in an effort to educate the community and to gain their help and cooperation in fighting crime.

GOAL SF-6: Provide efficient professional management of City finances with an integrated network of data and information systems.

POLICY Sf-6.1: Engage in sound financial planning and budgeting.

POLICY SF-6.2: Complete fair and equitable tax assessments.

POLICY SF-6.3: Achieve efficient collection and reporting of revenue.

POLICY SF-6.4: Make wise and prudent investment of City funds.

POLICY Sf-6.5: Monitor the enforcement of prescribed procedures for the obtainment of the best product at the lowest cost to the taxpayer.

POLICY SF-6.6: Utilize fair and equitable procedures for employment of the most capable and well-trained personnel.

ACTION SF-6.6a: Continue to implement the City's Affirmative Action Program in City hiring practices.

POLICY SF-6.7: Increase the technology and data sharing capabilities across City departments.

ACTION SF-6.7a: Invest in technology upgrades as warranted in City government.

ACTION SF-6.7b: Move towards a universal data system for all City departments.

ACTION SF-6.7c: Work towards further integration of the City's computer system to allow for the efficient transfer of accurate, current data and information between departments.

POLICY SF-6.8: Upgrade and improve the City's website to make it user-friendly and informative for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

GOAL SF-7: Provide efficient administration and coordination of all City departments, agencies, and boards and their delivery of services.

POLICY SF-7.1: The Mayor's Office is responsible for establishing and implementing overall City policies and priorities for the various service providers.

POLICY SF-7.2: The Mayor serves as the City's advocate and receives designated funding from State and federal governmental agencies.

POLICY SF-7.3: The Mayor provides overall public leadership.

POLICY SF-7.4: The Mayor works with other chief elected officials from neighboring communities on regional initiatives.

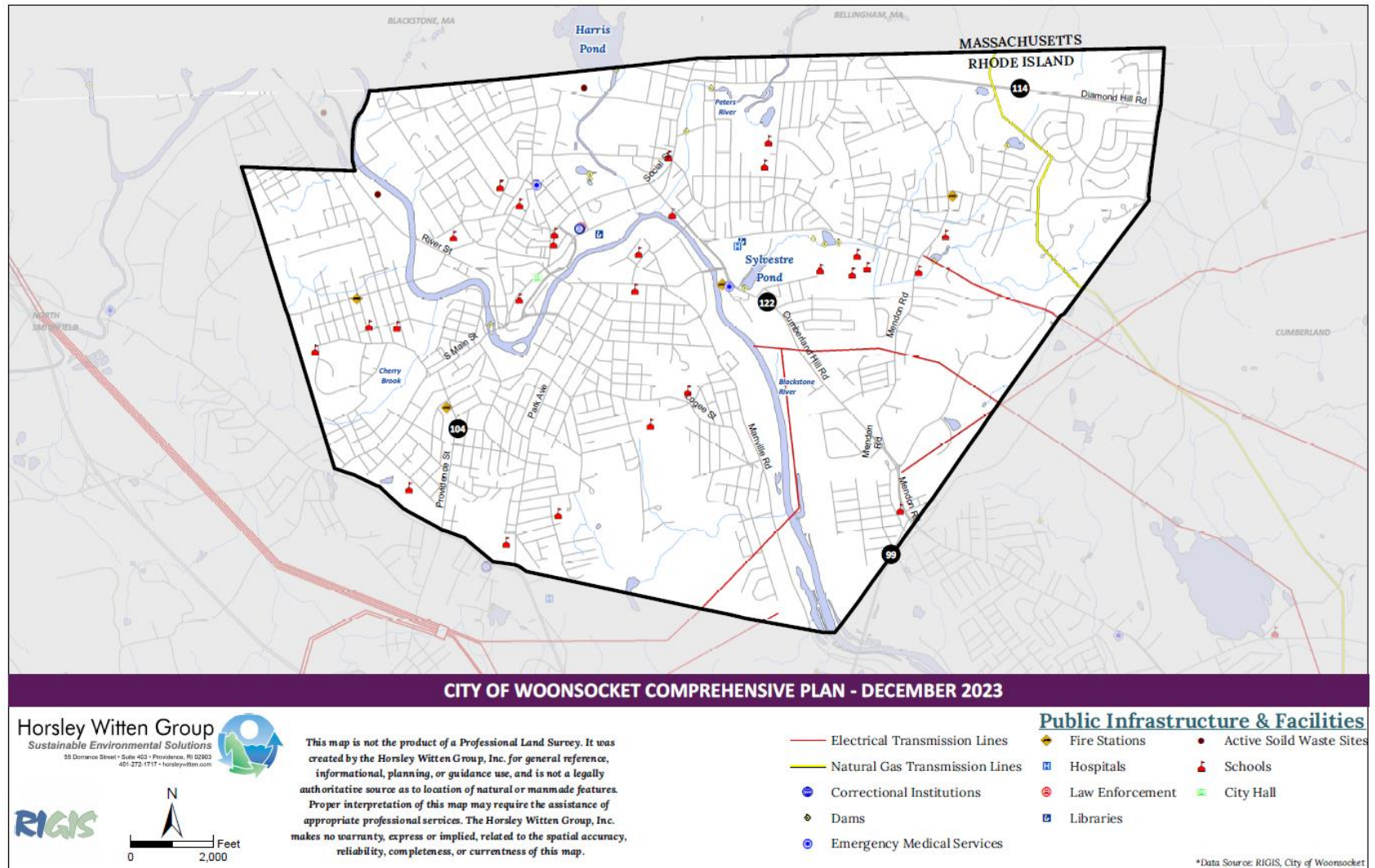
ACTION SF-7.4a: Investigate the expansion of the Municipal Court to include other Northern Rhode Island communities on a regionalized basis.

POLICY SF-7.5: The Law Department provides effective and efficient legal representation to all departments, boards, and agencies of the City of Woonsocket.

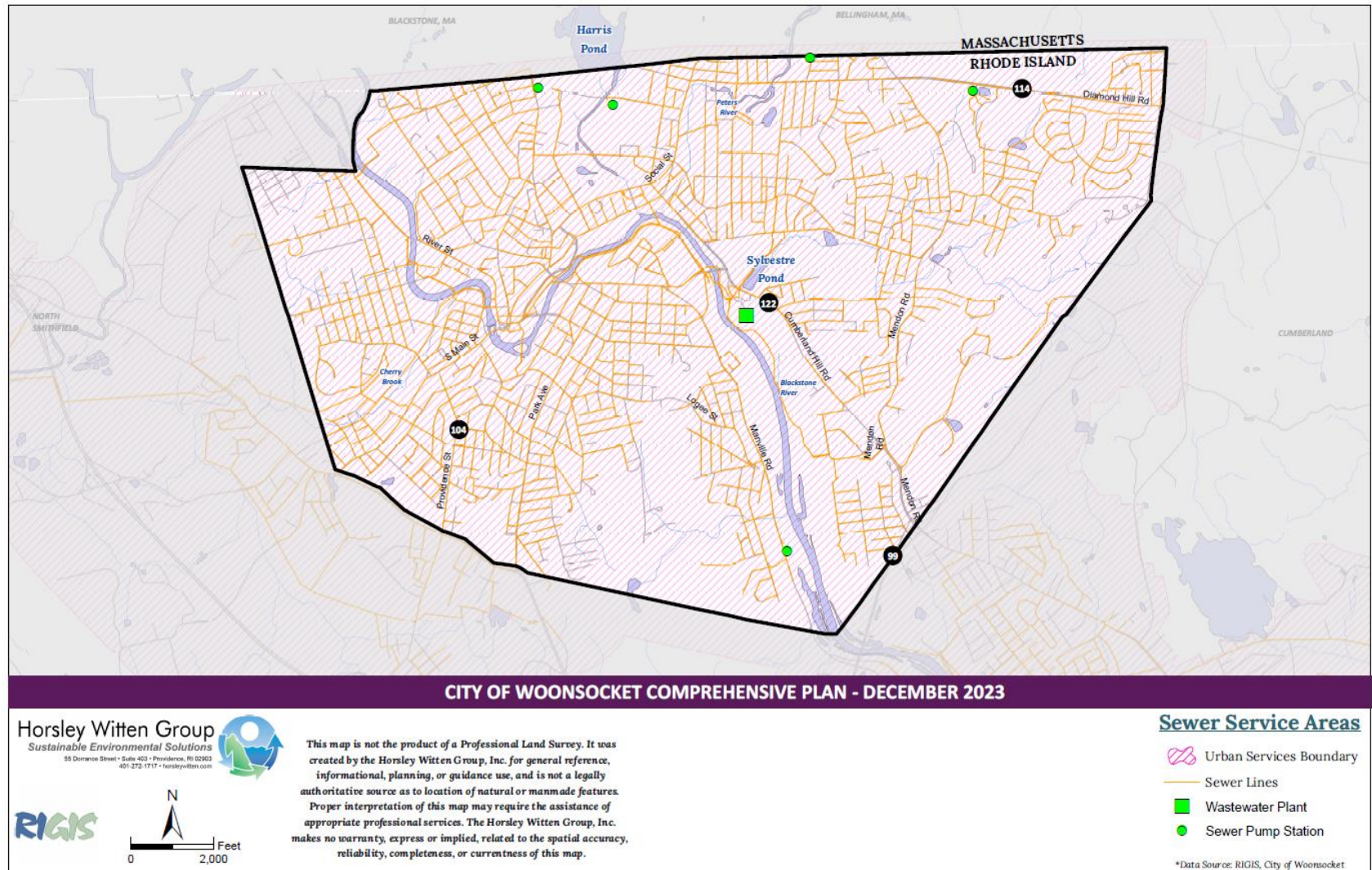
POLICY SF-7.6: The Law Department effectively prosecutes all charged individuals in the various State and local municipal courts.

POLICY SF-7.7: The City Clerk's Office provides efficient storage and cataloging of all important City records and legal documents.

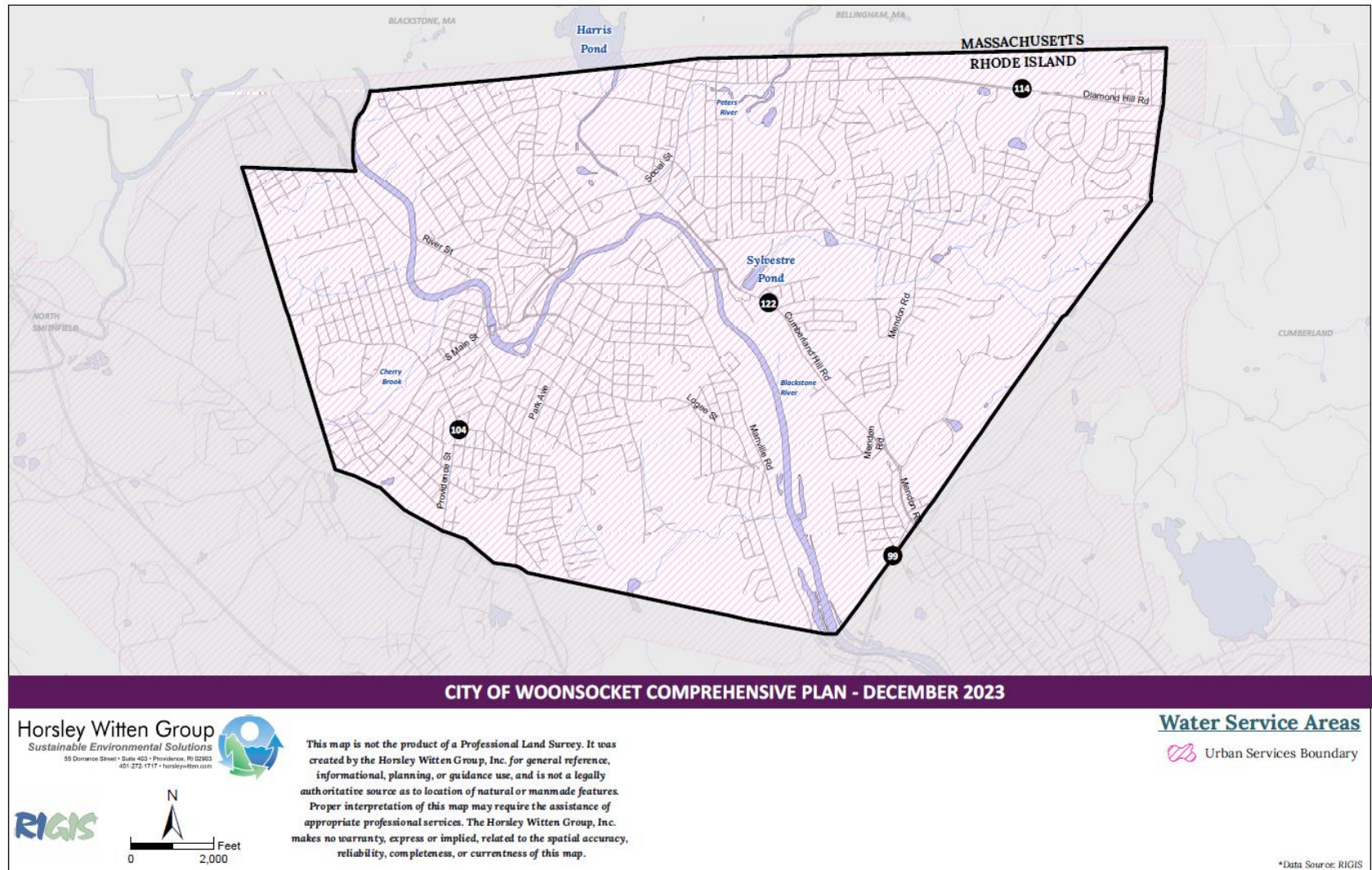
POLICY SF-7.8: The Board of Canvassers provides efficient service to voters and candidates in the administration and implementation of the election process.



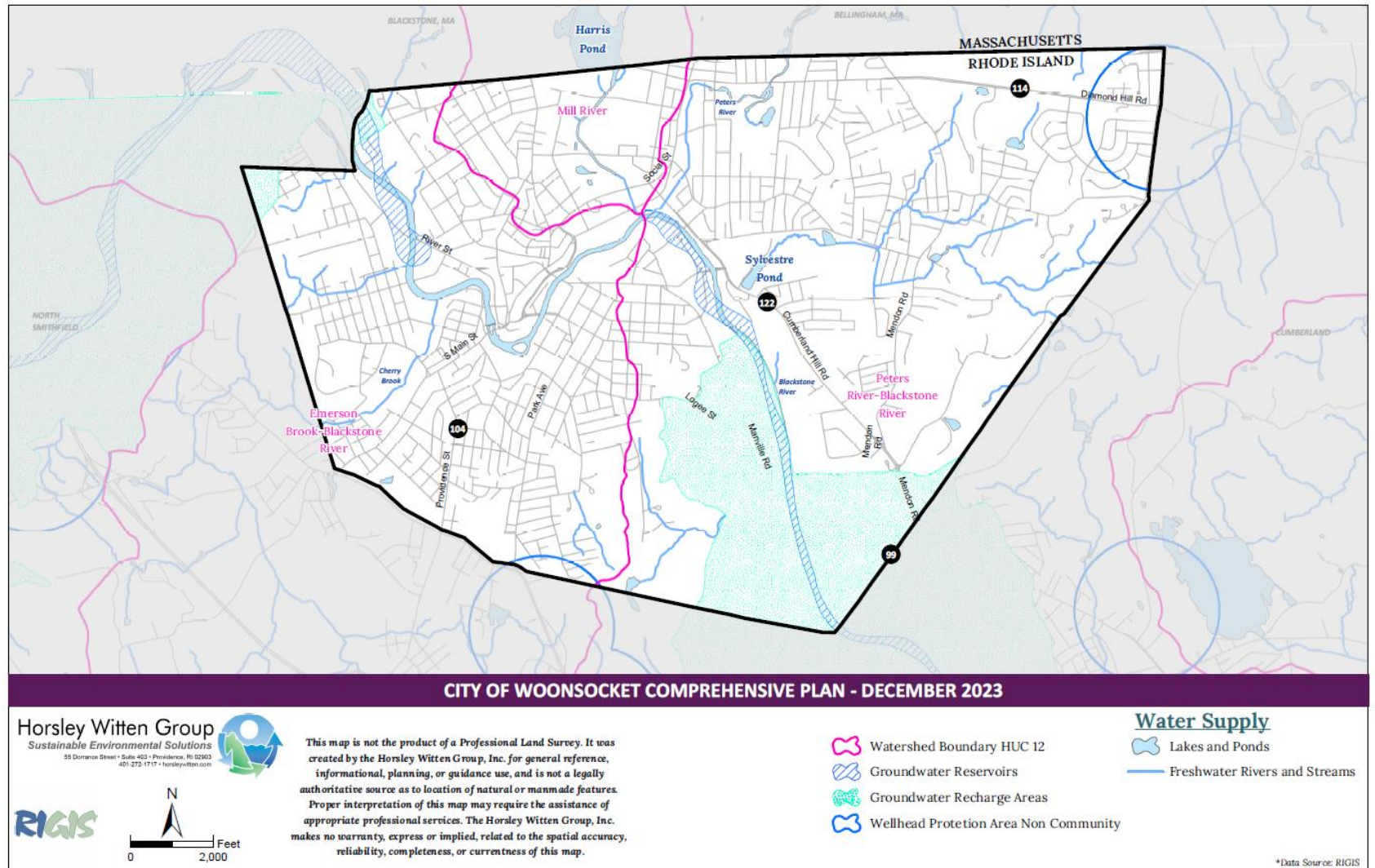
Map SF-1. Public Infrastructure & Facilities



Map SF-2. Sewer Service Areas



Map SF-3. Water Service Areas



Map SF-4. Water Supply

V. SOCIAL SERVICES & PUBLIC HEALTH

INTRODUCTION

Social services and public health go hand in hand. Today, more than ever, there is an increased emphasis on public health to improve our personal and community health and the overall quality of life. Health can mean many things to different people. It is the social, economic, behavior, and physical factors that determine one's overall health, and each is strongly influenced by the quality of one's community and its services. To improve the social and physical well-being of Woonsocket residents, the City must provide or connect people to comprehensive public health resources and wraparound social services that reach and support all residents, including its most vulnerable. Working closely with state and community partners, including the Woonsocket Health Equity Zone (HEZ) will be imperative to achieving positive public health outcomes.

Roads & Sidewalks	CIRCULATION
Recreation	PARKS & RECREATION
Stormwater Management	SERVICES & FACILITIES
Climate Resilience	NATURAL RESOURCES
Energy	ENERGY
Water & Wastewater Infrastructure	SERVICES & FACILITIES

This Plan Element discusses the City's overall capacity to provide high quality social services and improve public health; discussion of other municipal services is found in other Elements of the Comprehensive Plan (see inset).

Vision for Social Services & Public Health

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will work to make sure everyone has the solid foundation of health and social services they need to live healthy, fulfilled lives and reach their individual potential.

For greater detail on data and statistics related to social services and public health, see the Social Services & Public Health chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.

SOCIAL SERVICES & PUBLIC HEALTH

Woonsocket knows that healthy communities lead to healthy people, improving our physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. To create a healthy community in Woonsocket, it is important for the City to tackle social services public health issues head-on and make sure those most at-risk are getting the services and care they need. It is also important to address public health as a whole, looking into how our incomes, education, community connections, social relationships, and the places we live impact our overall

health.

The City cannot do this alone. While part of this work will come from City Departments and programs, the rest will involve partnering with other service providers and resources and connecting them with residents in need.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on community surveys and other forms of public engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- A centralized place to go to learn about all the various services available to them, whether related to health, housing, job training, etc.
- Addressing immediate needs related to food, shelter, and medical care.
- Addressing longer-term needs related to building the skills to find a better paying job to support yourself and/or your family.
- Addressing drug addiction and reducing drug overdoses.
- Reducing illegal drug sales.
- Providing harm reduction and other related treatment services to individuals with drug addictions.
- Addressing housing insecurity for people struggling to find homes and pay rent.
- The long-term implications of the COVID 19 pandemic.

“...I want to see a HARM REDUCTION CENTER FOR DRUG USERS so we can reduce overdoses, violence from people getting high and fighting in the streets, and dying from fentanyl.” – Survey respondent

“We see more tents popping up in the wooded areas around the train tracks (which are also abandoned) and in corners of larger parking lots at night. The homeless need a place to go that is safe and clean. They need food pantries on the sidewalks like in Providence. They need drug treatment facilities (like those NYC safe heroin shoot up sites where medics help them use clean needles and stuff).” – Survey respondent

Residents also raised concerns about services for individuals who are homeless during the public engagement process. For more information and actions related to homelessness, please see the Housing Plan Element.

CITY DEPARTMENTS & PROGRAMS

The City government manages social services through two departments: The Department of Human Services and the Housing & Community Development Division within the Department of Planning & Development.

Human Services & the Senior Center (Aging Well, Inc.)

The system of human service provision is tremendously complex. This array of programs and agencies, designed to meet the needs of today's family, is composed of Federal, State, and local governmental, private and religious service providers, with differing, and sometimes overlapping, locational jurisdictions and programs. It is difficult for a municipality, concerned about the adequacy of service provision for its residents, to understand which agency provides what type of services and for which groups. It is all the more difficult for a client in need to know where to go for assistance.

The Department of Human Services maintains an "open door" policy for all residents seeking assistance. Staff are trained to assist residents in both emergency and non-emergency situations, connecting them with resources from local agencies that provide relevant services. The Department also assists residents with a Displaced Resident Program for emergency, fire, and non-fire related displacements working in collaboration with the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA).



Keep it Moving Class (Aging Well, Inc.)

Woonsocket has a significant elderly and disabled population, partly driven by the concentration of Woonsocket Housing Authority elderly housing units. Future projections suggest that the elderly population will continue to increase. Senior citizens and the disabled thus make up a very significant service group, and plans must be made to enlarge current programs to meet their growing need. Aging Well, Inc., the Woonsocket Senior Center on Social Street, serves as a centralized site for the provision of services and programs. Specific programs include Adult Day Care, the Congregate Meal Program, Senior Wellness Programs and Activities, and Social Activities. As a facility, the building is heavily used and capital repairs and improvements need to be made on a yearly basis.

Housing & Community Development

The Division of Housing & Community Development Division is in charge of managing several federal funding sources that help the City achieve its social services goals: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, HOME Investments Partnership Program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG). Together, these make up a large portion of the social service-related funds available to Woonsocket. The City identifies the following needs for public services to address with these funds:

- Substance abuse prevention
- Domestic violence prevention
- Community policing
- Code enforcement

- Children’s mental and trauma health services
- Health and social services to seniors
- Health services to people with substance abuse issues and the disabled
- Literacy training
- Supportive services for special needs and homeless populations

WOONSOCKET HEALTH EQUITY ZONE

Health Equity Zones (HEZ) are designed to achieve “health equity” – which means that everyone has a fair opportunity to be as healthy as they can be. Many people have different health outcomes based on where they live or the color of their skin. The mission of Woonsocket HEZ, which kicked off in 2015, is to work directly in neighborhoods with poorer health outcomes to eliminate preventable disparities in health.



Working with local residents and stakeholders, Woonsocket HEZ identified four (4) focus areas to address, summarized below.

Addiction Treatment & Prevention

An increasingly pressing and difficult issue that Woonsocket and many of its surrounding communities have had to reckon with over the past decade is high rates of substance abuse and opioid use/disorders. Tackling addiction cannot be done by one group in Woonsocket. With meaningful collaboration from City departments, local nonprofits and organizations, neighboring cities and towns, and regional groups, there is hope for creating a better future for the Woonsocket community that is struggling with or directly affected by addiction. This is a long-term problem, often tied to mental health issues, that can have reverberating impacts on addicts and their families, especially children.

The Woonsocket HEZ’s Overdose Prevention and Recovery workgroup has focused on training people to administer naloxone (a drug that reverses opiate overdoses) and advocated for a community-space with peer recovery services (where people who have dealt with addiction themselves can help others struggling with addiction). Community feedback has offered differing views on the role of public safety officers as they interact with individuals struggling with addiction or engaged in illegal drug sales, and opinions remain divided about how best to handle this.

Improving Teenage Health

Woonsocket has a significantly higher rate of repeat pregnancies for those under 19 compared with the State. To address this and related teen health concerns, Woonsocket HEZ has created a Teen Health workgroup with a family planning educator, various organizations, and teens. Education efforts appear to be successful, with Woonsocket HEZ reporting an over 30% decline in teen births from 2015 to 2019.

Reducing Child Maltreatment

The Woonsocket HEZ's Child Maltreatment workgroup and the City are taking strides to address child well-being to ensure all children are safe from harm and live with families and in neighborhoods that help them thrive. This work is aligned with the Rhode Island Children Cabinet, a state government initiative designed to make sure that children, from pre-natal to pre-Kindergarten, and their parents, have access to quality health care and education.



Reducing Child Maltreatment (RI Department of Health)

Access to Healthy Food

To address food access concerns, Woonsocket HEZ has created a Food Access workgroup that consists of a resident advisor and local organizations. The workgroup has been advocating for new grocery stores to come into the City, helping maintain current farmers markets, hosting roundtables, and supporting local food businesses. For more on this topic, see the Access to Healthy Food section of this Plan Element below.



Fresh food in Woonsocket (JG Woonsocket Meat Market)

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

To have a healthy and thriving community, everyone in Woonsocket needs to have access to fresh, nutritious food. Appropriate access to healthy food can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some types of cancer. Barriers to food access are largely focused on availability, transportation options, price, income, and having the time, knowledge, and tools to prepare fresh and nutritious meals. Residents have commented on the lack of access to grocery stores within the local community and the abundance of fast food and other unhealthy options (a situation known as a “food swamp”). Residents noted that access to a car is necessary to get to a grocery store and that there are

few walkable grocery options within City neighborhoods; this is especially problematic for lower-income and elderly residents who find it a challenge to easily access groceries.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on community surveys and other forms of public engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- Increasing access to affordable, healthy, and fresh food options in Woonsocket.
- Attracting full-service grocery stores to Woonsocket, ideally at least one that is centrally located.
- Supporting existing farmers markets and pursuing opportunities to add vendors, dates, and locations.
- Establishing a network of community gardens to strengthen neighborhood food systems.
- Adding healthy food options at local schools.
- Expanding food access programs for vulnerable Woonsocket residents.

“...We are a FOOD DESERT and people need access to healthy food. We deserve farmers markets and grocery stores.” – Survey respondent

“A cooperative or small grocery store in the center of the city that can be reached without the need for an automobile.” – Survey respondent

FOOD INSECURITY & ACCESSIBILITY

Food insecurity and accessibility is a challenge in Woonsocket. There are several current projects and programs working to alleviate hunger and increase access to healthy food in the City, including food distribution sites managed by several local organizations and churches, including the Community Care Alliance Food Pantry, St. James Episcopal Church, the Connecting for Children and Families Pantry, and Holy Trinity Church, to name just a few. Several sites, including the Senior Center, provide regular senior meals.



Fresh fruits & vegetables (US CDC)

Nonprofits and other community programs that offer food, food education, community gardens, etc. can play a role in alleviating the negative impacts of food access, but economic initiatives can also help. Farmer's markets, food delivery services, and providing incentives for businesses that offer fresh and healthy foods (while limiting or taxing unhealthy foods) within food swamps and food deserts are just a few ways to increase access. For example, in 2020 the US EPA and USDA partnered with the City and NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley to develop a food access Community Action Plan for Woonsocket. This Plan identifies partners to help implement strategies related to growing food businesses in Woonsocket,

improving coordination of the City's food ecosystem, and increasing access to grocery stores and fresh food.

What is a Food Desert? In brief, any geographic area where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is limited or not available at all due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance.

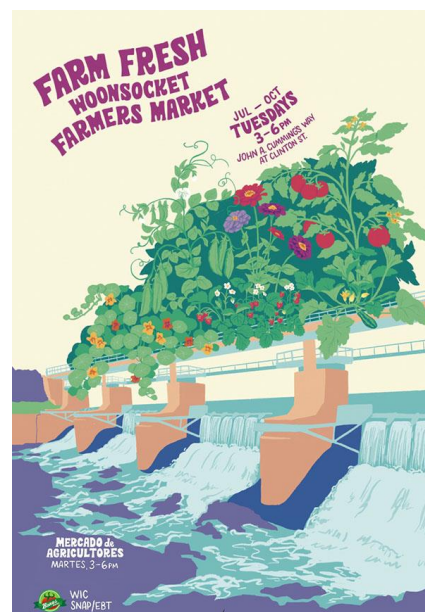
What is a Food Swamp? Different from a food desert; in brief, any geographic area where the only food options available are not nutritious, "junk," or lack any significant nutritional value.

GROCERY STORES

Residents' proximity to food outlets like supermarkets, convenience stores, and cultural markets varies drastically based on the neighborhood you live in and your mode of transportation. Access to healthy and affordable food should be something every resident has. Better distribution of grocery stores and supermarkets throughout the City's neighborhoods is vital. Right now, most supermarkets and grocery stores in the region are located outside City limits. While technically accessible on public transportation, getting to these stores on the bus is generally not fast or easy. Creating incentives for food outlets to open stores in neighborhoods throughout the City where access is limited today will help the City increase food security and boost economic activity. Access can also be improved by working with RIPTA to alter bus routes to provide better and more frequent access between neighborhoods and existing grocery stores and supermarkets. Further, the City can work with local grocery stores to encourage more and more affordable direct food delivery to people's homes.

FARMERS' MARKETS

The Woonsocket Farmer's Market gives local farmers and small vendors the opportunity to sell their fresh and locally grown products to Woonsocket residents at accessible prices. This is a great opportunity for residents to buy locally and have access to affordable and healthy food. Unfortunately, many residents are not fully aware of what the market has to offer. Increasing awareness through promotion and advertising in spaces where the Woonsocket community gathers can bring new shoppers to the market which helps the local vendors thrive. Currently, the market is open July through October every Tuesday from 3:00 – 6:00 PM at 450 Clinton Street (near Thundermist Health Center). The City should continue to partner with Farm Fresh Rhode Island and Thundermist in finding ways to expand the days and hours of operation, and ideally find a new location or locations for year-round vending.



Woonsocket Farmers Market (Farm Fresh RI)

Expanded farmers' markets can play a bigger role in providing residents with access to affordable and healthy food options. While the City works to recruit grocery stores to more neighborhoods, multiple farmer's markets can help fill a gap as well as a long-term need for fresh food access.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

Woonsocket is home to several community gardens and many residents are avid home gardeners, growing a variety of vegetables, fruits, and herbs in their yards. For example, Riverzedge Arts operates a community garden that contains 21 plots free and open to the public, and the Grow Up Community Garden has 40 raised beds available to the public. This is a great way for residents of all ages to learn how to grow and care for their own garden and even grow their own food. Increasing promotion of the gardens can lead to more awareness among the community that this great asset is available. Based on resident demand, the City should look into additional parcels in other neighborhoods that may accommodate community gardens, and can also connect residents with resources for growing fruits and vegetables in their own backyards or in planters, such as the University of Rhode Island's Master Gardener Program. These are all ways to increase food access and decrease food insecurity.



2Grow Up Community Garden



1Mount St. Charles Garden (Rhode Island Catholic)

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL SSPH-1: Continue to invest in social services so that more people have the stability to live healthy and productive lives.

POLICY SSPH-1.1: Maximize the contributions of the various human service providers and provide a coordinated response to clients' needs.

ACTION SSPH-1.1a: Facilitate regular coordination meetings or calls with human service providers across the region to track trends in clients' needs and to coordinate funding requests, programs, and services. Work to consolidate services where appropriate and possible and encourage collaboration among service providers.

ACTION SSPH-1.1b: Expand transportation, cultural enrichment, physical, and other activities at the Senior Center commensurate with demand.

POLICY SSPH-1.2: Alleviate the confusion associated with the complex human services system by providing efficient direction and client referral.

ACTION SSPH-1.2a: Develop a clearinghouse of state and local social services and health resources clearly organized by the types of needs they address. Build this clearinghouse into the City's website, provide hard copies at key City facilities, and train City staff to assist residents navigate these resources in person, over the phone, and via email. Start with existing statewide clearinghouses such as The Point through the Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging.

POLICY SSPH-1.3: Enforce the rights of the disabled in all forms of service provision.

GOAL SSPH-2: Provide and connect residents to basic public health services in order to meet community needs.

POLICY SSPH-2.1: Continue supporting and increasing resources for Woonsocket HEZ to see more improvements in preventing opioid related deaths, teen health, food access, and child maltreatment in Woonsocket.

ACTION SSPH-2.1a: Maintain and seek to expand the operating hours of peer recovery services to support people struggling with addiction.

ACTION SSPH-2.1b: Continue to support health and sexuality education in the public school system.

ACTION SSPH-2.1c: Partner with the Rhode Island Children Cabinet to track indicators of child maltreatment in the City.

POLICY SSPH-2.2: Establish a safe, substance abuse-free community and increase public education of safety procedures and drug awareness.

ACTION SSPH-2.2a: Utilize the services of the Blackstone Valley Prevention Coalition and the Woonsocket Prevention Coalition to implement substance abuse prevention and treatment strategies and campaigns.

ACTION SSPH-2.2b: Utilize the services of the Blackstone Valley Prevention Coalition and the Woonsocket Prevention Coalition to increase public awareness of services for prevention and treatment of substance abuse and of the dangers of substance abuse.

POLICY SSPH-2.3: Prepare and plan for future epidemics or pandemics based off lessons learned from COVID-19.

GOAL SSPH-3: Expand access to healthy foods, not only for public health, but for economic revitalization.

POLICY SSPH-3.1: Actively work to implement the Community Action Plan for Woonsocket: Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance, and serve as a convener for identified action “leads” and “supporting cast.”

POLICY SSPH-3.2: Work to increase the number of and access to full-service grocery stores within Woonsocket.

ACTION SSPH-3.2a: Incentivize grocery retailers to locate in Woonsocket neighborhoods currently experiencing food insecurity or in food deserts based on current food access data. Prepare a market analysis for grocery store sites to demonstrate demand to grocers. Provide incentives for larger scale mixed-use development to include grocery stores as part of their retail mix.

ACTION SSPH-3.2b: Work with RIPTA to analyze existing bus routes to look for ways to improve connections and increase frequency between food insecure neighborhoods and existing grocery stores.

ACTION SSPH-3.2c: Work with local grocery stores to encourage the expansion of home delivery of groceries. Consider offering incentives to provide free delivery in neighborhoods with limited fresh food access and/or to Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) users.

POLICY SSPH-3.3: Work to decrease food insecurity in Woonsocket.

ACTION SSPH-3.3a: Continue to support and expand existing food programs like the Woonsocket Schools Free Lunch Program, WIC, Meals on Wheels,

SNAP, local food pantries, and others. Serve as a connector between local grocery stores and these food programs, encouraging donations of food that can no longer be sold but is still safe and healthy for consumption.

POLICY SSPH-3.4: Work to expand access to fresh and healthy foods in Woonsocket.

ACTION SSPH-3.4a: Expand the Woonsocket Farmers Market to increase days and hours of operation to make it more accessible for working families; work with Farm Fresh RI to find a location or locations for year-round vending and encourage more Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) “farm share” pick up locations at these markets and other accessible spots.

ACTION SSPH-3.4b: Increase public awareness of the farmers market through local community groups and leaders. Emphasize the multiple benefits that SNAP participants can redeem at local markets.

ACTION SSPH-3.4c: Analyze parcels in neighborhoods across the City that could accommodate additional community gardens for residents to grow their own food.

ACTION SSPH-3.4d: Prepare online and hard copy resource documents showing where in the City fresh food and produce can be purchased and where EBT cards are accepted – work with other City departments and local social service providers to distribute this information. Utilize resources from the RI Food Policy Council, such as the Rhode Island Food Access Map.

ACTION SSPH-3.4e: Work with existing organizations and programs to provide education to local residents on gardening, food storage, meal preparation, etc.

VI. NATURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Woonsocket's natural resources provide a variety of health, public safety, and environmental benefits, which are critical to building the resiliency of the City to a variety of challenges. Whether those are environmental, economic, or social challenges, having a strong natural environment will enable Woonsocket to weather whatever storms may come. From improving air and water quality, to providing spaces for people to recreate and interact with nature, to reducing flood damage from increasingly frequent and intense storms, ensuring the maintenance and protection of these natural resources will benefit the environment and the people of Woonsocket.

Vision for Natural Resources

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will invest in the protection and improvement of its natural resources to support the creation of spaces that are safe and accessible, in addition to investing in sustainability and resiliency to coming challenges.

For greater detail on data and statistics related to natural resources, see the Natural Resources chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.



Booth Pond Conservation Area (Booth Pond Community Action)

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on community surveys and other methods of public engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- Improving the health of and access to the Blackstone River.
- Reducing litter in natural resource areas.
- Making green spaces safe and accessible to all members of the community.

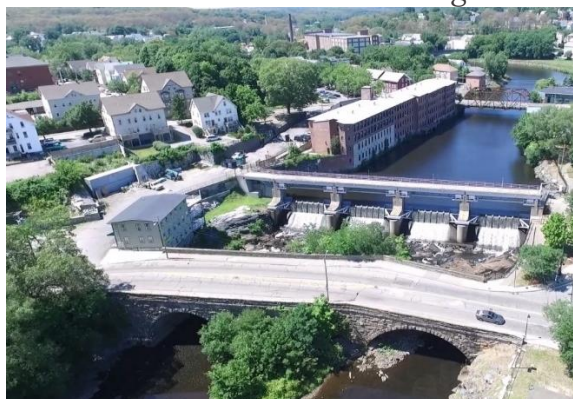
- Greening the City by planting more trees and creating and protecting green spaces/parks.
- Redeveloping vacant and polluted properties in the City.
- Reducing litter and trash pollution in the community.
- Increasing emergency preparedness for severe/extreme weather.

“If we want more people to enjoy our parks and the bike path, we need to keep them clean and functional.” – Survey respondent

“There is always room for more trees. It would be great if there was a beautification effort for the city.” – Survey respondent

PROTECTING, IMPROVING, & EXPANDING OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resources in Woonsocket provide substantial benefits for both the community and local ecosystems. From enhancing resiliency to natural hazard events to providing refuge for wildlife, ensuring the maintenance and protection of these resources is essential to ensure a sustainable future for the next generation of residents.



Left: The Blackstone River in Woonsocket (RocketRoberts). Right: Families fish together during the Early Intervention 3rd annual family fishing day at Cass Park in Woonsocket (Community Care Alliance).

IMPROVING & PROTECTING THE BLACKSTONE RIVER

The Blackstone River watershed's collective streams, ponds, and wetlands provide habitat for many aquatic organisms, including over 30 species of freshwater fish, and support one of the largest freshwater wetlands in Rhode Island. As one of the major birthplaces of the American Industrial Revolution, the Blackstone River played a significant role in the development and prosperity of the Southern New England region. However, over a century of industrial development significantly altered the hydrology and ecology of the Blackstone River, leading to substantial environmental degradation. As a result of the efforts and investments made by municipalities, non-profit organizations, state, and federal agencies, the Blackstone River watershed has seen substantial environmental improvements.

Yet even with these substantial improvements, more work is needed to fully restore the River

and to ensure a healthy and resilient watershed. Like many urban communities, Woonsocket is challenged by significant water and wastewater infrastructure demands that can be difficult to meet with already stretched resources, leading to negative impacts for the Blackstone River. With major investments and repairs needed to meet state and federal requirements, all while providing affordable, consistent services to

residents, the City needs considerable planning and funding resources to tackle these issues piece by piece. A major focus of these efforts will need to include upgrades to the Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility and furthering Citywide stormwater best management practices to capture and retain water during flooding events, as well as reduce the amount of polluted runoff entering local waterways. With these collective investments, the City can begin to improve the health of the Blackstone River, making it a safer place to recreate and making it a point of pride for the City. For more information on wastewater, see the Services & Facilities Element of this Plan.

What is Stormwater?

When rain falls on our streets or when large piles of snow melt in driveways and parking lots, the water that runs off into the storm drain, known as “stormwater,” carries a surprising amount of pollution. These storm drains, often built decades ago, carry the polluted runoff directly to rivers and streams and, even in small storms, the results can be unhealthy for wildlife and people. Over time, these repeated doses of pollution can do long-term damage to the ecosystem and even cause closures of swimming and boating areas.

Residents are overwhelmingly in favor of improving and protecting the Blackstone River. In the community survey, 88% of respondents said, “Protecting and improving the water quality of the Blackstone River and its tributaries” is “Important” or “Very Important.”

BETTER MAINTENANCE & ENHANCEMENT OF GREEN SPACES AND PRIORITIES FOR LAND CONSERVATION

The City has approximately 175 acres of conservation lands within its limits. These spaces include Booth Pond, Iron Rock Brook, Fairmount Conservation Area, Rhodes Avenue Conservation Area, and Wood Estate. Conservation lands are important resources for a variety of reasons, including that they can provide passive recreation opportunities, offer refuge for local wildlife, improve air quality, increase the infiltration of rainwater during storm events to reduce flooding, and offer shade benefits during hot summer months. These areas are invaluable and irreplaceable resources that bring environmental, social, and economic benefits to a community.

It will be important for the City to continue to build on its network of parks and natural areas, especially those along the Blackstone River, to increase water retention during significant rainstorms to reduce local flooding. Residents are generally in favor of expanding conservation areas in Woonsocket. In the community survey nearly 2/3 of respondents said, “Pursuing additional land to be preserved for conservation purposes” is “Important” or “Very Important.” As a largely built-out community, there are few opportunities for additional conservation land and the City does not have a list of specific properties it has targeted for future conservation. However, the City will continue to pursue open space acquisition and

will prioritize acquisition and preservation of properties of high conservation value that abut existing open space properties to support the establishment of wildlife corridors, improve flood retention and water quality, and provide recreational resources.

The City should also emphasize equity in open space and conservation expenditure by targeting the City's densely developed, low-income neighborhoods. To increase the visibility of open space properties, the City should evaluate developing additional open space and conservation area support facilities to enhance personal safety and ease of use. Residents are strongly in favor of improving local conservation areas. In the community survey, 80% of respondents said, "Better maintenance and protection of conservation areas" is "Important" or "Very Important."

Enhancing existing conservation lands, forested areas, and tree resources in Woonsocket should also involve strengthening existing regulations, for example adding provisions requiring existing vegetation on properties that are proposed for development to remain to the greatest extent practicable. Residents are strongly in favor of supporting and expanding tree resources in Woonsocket. In the public policy survey, nearly 3/4 of respondents said, "Planting and better maintaining street trees throughout the City" is "Important" or "Very Important." To support an increase in tree resources, the City should consider establishing a system for residents to request the planting of trees on public properties.



Cass Park in Woonsocket (City of Woonsocket).

INVESTING IN THE CITY'S BROWNFIELDS PROGRAM

As the City and surrounding communities developed historically, many important natural resources were lost or significantly harmed to the point where they could no longer provide the same ecosystem benefits. We see these impacts at our old industrial or commercial sites known as "brownfields" where future use is affected by real or perceived environmental contamination. Woonsocket, like other cities, has several of these sites and has been working steadily over the years to clean them and put them back to use.

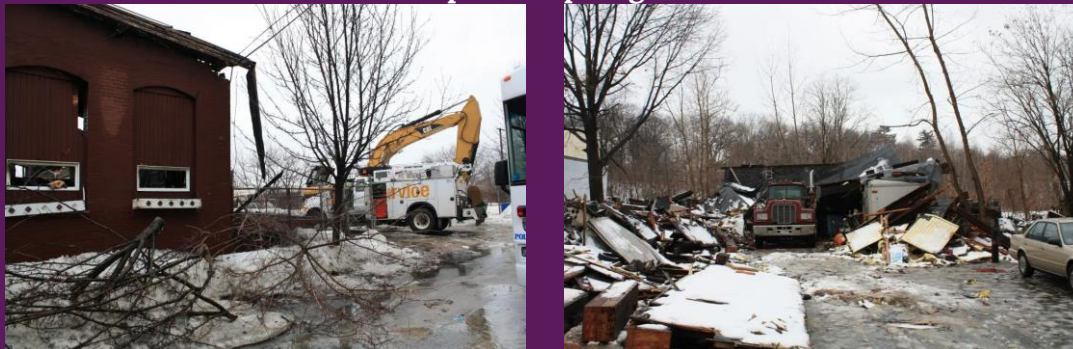
The City's Brownfields Program, managed through the Planning Division of the Department of Planning & Development is committed to remediating contaminated brownfield properties by identifying potential brownfield sites, assessing contamination, developing

remediation strategies, and cleaning the sites up for future development. The City regularly applies for brownfields grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM).

The City must be diligent in continuing to apply for brownfields grant funding through the USEPA, RIDEM, and other sources on a continuous basis. Developers should be required to assess current and former environmental risks associated with brownfields properties and provide narratives of how risks are managed. To ensure that remediation efforts are sustained and implemented strategically, the City should continue to update its Brownfields Inventory when necessary to ensure it remains a useful tool. The City should also work towards developing a systematic outreach program for the owners of suspected or documented brownfields sites to educate them about the benefits, incentive programs, and funding mechanisms available for remediation.

Residents are overwhelmingly in favor of improving brownfields in Woonsocket. In the community survey, over 85% of respondents said, “Investing in the environmental cleanup of old industrial buildings and ‘brownfields’” is “Important” or “Very Important.”

Brownfield Remediation & Redevelopment Spotlight



Seville Dye in Woonsocket prior to redevelopment (Andrew Metcalf, Patch).

In 2020, Seville Dye on 117 & 229 First Avenue, Woonsocket received \$292,800 for redevelopment from the RIDEM Brownfields Remediation and Economic Development Fund. A vacant site currently owned by the City, the property is planned for a 1.5 Megawatt solar array.

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCY INTO OUR COMMUNITY

As Woonsocket continues to develop and progress, it is critical to ensure that our community passes down well-functioning systems, resilient infrastructure, and a healthy environment to the next generation.

INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES TO REDUCE TRASH GOING TO LANDFILLS

Like many communities, Woonsocket has been challenged by the cost, logistical, and environmental challenges of managing waste flows responsibly. Issues such as litter are hardly a unique problem, but solving this issue can be a challenge. Trash collection and litter in green spaces were some of the most commonly mentioned issues by the public related to City services.

To reduce trash going to landfills and encourage proper disposal of waste, it is imperative that the City continues to explore new services and expand existing services that improve recycling rates and reduce the costs of waste being landfilled (e.g., providing more trash receptacles at open space properties and providing more recycling bins per household). In addition, it will be beneficial for the City to fully evaluate options to remove food waste from the local waste stream through composting services and tools, and provide opportunities and incentives for the reuse of items that might otherwise be thrown away.

Residents are strongly in favor of improving local waste management systems. In the public policy survey, over 3/4 of respondents said, “Increasing opportunities for residents/business to reduce trash going to landfill” is “Important” or “Very Important.”



Woonsocket High School students volunteer to help clean up local parks (Woonsocket Recycles).

PROTECT NEIGHBORHOODS, BUSINESSES, & INFRASTRUCTURE FROM FLOODING, STORMS, AND OTHER HAZARDS

Woonsocket is exposed to several natural hazards that vary in potential intensity and impact. The City’s top hazards include major storms such as hurricanes, Nor’easters, and winter storms, flooding along rivers and streams, and epidemics. These hazards and vulnerabilities have direct impacts on residents, critical infrastructure, and community assets.

The City updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2018 through the Woonsocket Hazard Mitigation Plan Working Group. In 2020, the City also participated in a Municipal Resilience Program workshop to further identify key issues. To address the highest risks, the City put

forth several goals and specific mitigation actions. The goals include protecting the lives and property of the City of Woonsocket's residents, protecting the City's critical facilities and infrastructure, and protecting the City's cultural, historical, natural, and economic resources. To meet these goals, it is imperative that as new hazard data become available, this data should be incorporated into local decision-making, particularly as it relates to infrastructure and operations to deliver services to residents. In addition, the City must continue to evaluate local land development policies and regulations to ensure that they encourage resiliency to a changing environment and result in sustainable public and private investments that can withstand increasingly frequent natural hazard events.

Becoming a resilient City requires planning on the part of individuals, businesses, and the community as a whole. While natural hazard events impact everyone, some portions of the community are more vulnerable to these challenges. Factors that contribute to these vulnerabilities include reduced mobility, lack of access to services (including health care, transportation, education, job opportunities), chronic health conditions or mental illness, and poor living conditions. Members of these populations are less likely to be aware of and prepared for, more likely to be impacted by, and less capable of recovering from natural hazard events. Targeted efforts need to be made to ensure vulnerable populations are aware of available resources and involved in resiliency decision-making processes. In addition, first responders should be equipped to mobilize and meet needs as they arise during emergency events.

Residents are generally in favor of improving local resiliency to natural hazard events. In the community survey, nearly 2/3 of respondents said, "Protecting neighborhoods, businesses, and infrastructure from flooding, storms, and other hazards" is "Important" or "Very Important."

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL NR-1: Protect and improve the quality of the City's natural environment.

POLICY NR-1.1: Support efforts to improve the water quality of the Blackstone River and its tributaries.

ACTION NR-1.1a: Continue to seek funding to complete necessary upgrades and improvements to the water and wastewater treatment facilities.

ACTION NR-1.1b: Support the efforts of organizations working to make the Blackstone River fishable and swimmable.

ACTION NR-1.1c: Educate residents about the impacts of fertilizers, lawn chemicals, pesticides, and herbicides on the Blackstone River and other local waterways and promote and encourage the use of alternative environment-friendly options. Evaluate developing a policy to minimize the use of such materials on City owned lands.

ACTION NR-1.1d: Educate residents, property owners, and businesses about the benefits and different ways of managing stormwater on their properties. Promote the use of rain barrels, rain gardens, and permeable pavers for driveways and walkways, as well as the importance of cleaning up pet waste, etc. Consider options for bulk purchase of rain barrels, permeable pavers, and other such items to sell at a reduced rate or provide free of charge to residents.

ACTION NR-1.1e: Encourage nature-based solutions wherever practicable to manage stormwater as part of public projects and investments.

ACTION NR-1.1f: Continue involvement in regional and watershed-based collaborations to help meet common stormwater management and water quality goals and objectives.

ACTION NR-1.1g: Continue to evaluate standards for stormwater management in local regulations to ensure that best practices are required in proposed development and redevelopment projects.

ACTION NR-1.1h: Evaluate updating parking regulations to shift away from parking minimums to parking maximums to reduce the size of new and redeveloped parking lots. Evaluate revising regulations to ensure all parking projects meet stormwater and green infrastructure requirements.

POLICY NR-1.2: Foster recognition and appreciation of the Blackstone River as a valuable resource.

ACTION NR-1.2a: Support projects that achieve this policy such as river walkways, scenic overlooks, education and interpretation programs, fishing piers, and canoe launches.

POLICY NR-1.3: Enhance and increase stewardship of the City's conservation lands, forested areas, and tree resources.

ACTION NR-1.3a: Require existing trees over a certain caliper to be identified on subdivision plans/surveys going before the Planning Board.

ACTION NR-1.3b: Add a provision to the Subdivision Regulations requiring existing vegetation to remain to the greatest extent practicable.

ACTION NR-1.3c: Establish a system for residents to request the planting of trees on public properties.

POLICY NR-1.4: Continue to maintain an active Brownfields Program as a vehicle for investigating, cleaning up, and redeveloping contaminated sites.

ACTION NR-1.4a: Continue to apply for brownfields grant funding through the USEPA, RIDEM, and other sources on a regular and continuous basis.

ACTION NR-1.4b: Continue to update the City's Brownfields Inventory when necessary to ensure it remains a useful tool.

ACTION NR-1.4c: Require developers to assess current and former environmental risks associated with the property and provide a narrative of how risks are managed and addressed as part of the subdivision process.

ACTION NR-1.4d: Develop a systematic outreach program for the owners of suspected or documented brownfields sites to educate them about the benefits, incentive programs, and funding mechanisms available for brownfields remediation.

GOAL NR-2: Preserve and protect significant undeveloped and environmentally sensitive areas.

POLICY NR-2.1: Pursue open space acquisition and appropriate management of open space lands. Prioritize acquisition and preservation of properties of high conservation value that abut existing open space properties.

GOAL NR-3: Increase visitation, quality, and the appropriate use of the City's conservation areas and open space lands.

POLICY NR-3.1: Improve public knowledge and awareness of the City's conservation areas and open space lands.

POLICY NR-3.2: Promote equity in open space and conservation expenditure by targeting the City's densely developed, low-income neighborhoods.

POLICY NR-3.3: Develop open space and conservation area support facilities to enhance patronage, personal safety, and ease of use.

GOAL NR-4: Decrease the amount of litter and trash in the City.

POLICY NR-4.1: Evaluate opportunities for residents and businesses to reduce trash going to landfills.

ACTION NR-4.1a: Explore new services or expand existing services and programs that improve recycling rates and reduce the costs of waste being landfilled.

ACTION NR-4.1b: Study all options for removing food waste from the local

waste stream.

GOAL NR-5: Improve the resiliency of City residents and businesses to natural hazard events.

POLICY NR-5.1: Enhance efforts to ensure that vulnerable populations in the City are prepared for potential hazards.

ACTION NR-5.1a: Develop relationships with key community stakeholders and organizations to create a network of support and communication, as well as a process to collaborate on decision-making around resiliency.

ACTION NR-5.1b: Prioritize vulnerable communities for installations of green infrastructure and other strategies that reduce and minimize the impacts of natural hazards.

ACTION NR-5.1c: Work with local community organizations and nonprofits to develop and perform public outreach and raise awareness within vulnerable populations to assist and prepare them for natural hazards. Erect signs in locations where homeless and vulnerable populations are known to frequent to provide information and resources about where to go and who to call during an event.

ACTION NR-5.1d: Ensure that heating and cooling centers, and other community facilities and staff, are equipped to help homeless and vulnerable populations.

ACTION NR-5.1e: Formalize a procedure for alerting, evacuating, and relocating homeless and other vulnerable populations prior to a severe event.

POLICY NR-5.2: Continue to invest in and ensure that existing infrastructure is well-equipped for future natural hazard events.

ACTION NR-5.2a: Continue to maintain the City's flood control infrastructure to ensure these systems receive certification from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and are capable of managing future storm events.

ACTION NR-5.2b: Continue to implement the actions of the 2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) Update and update the HMP every five years.

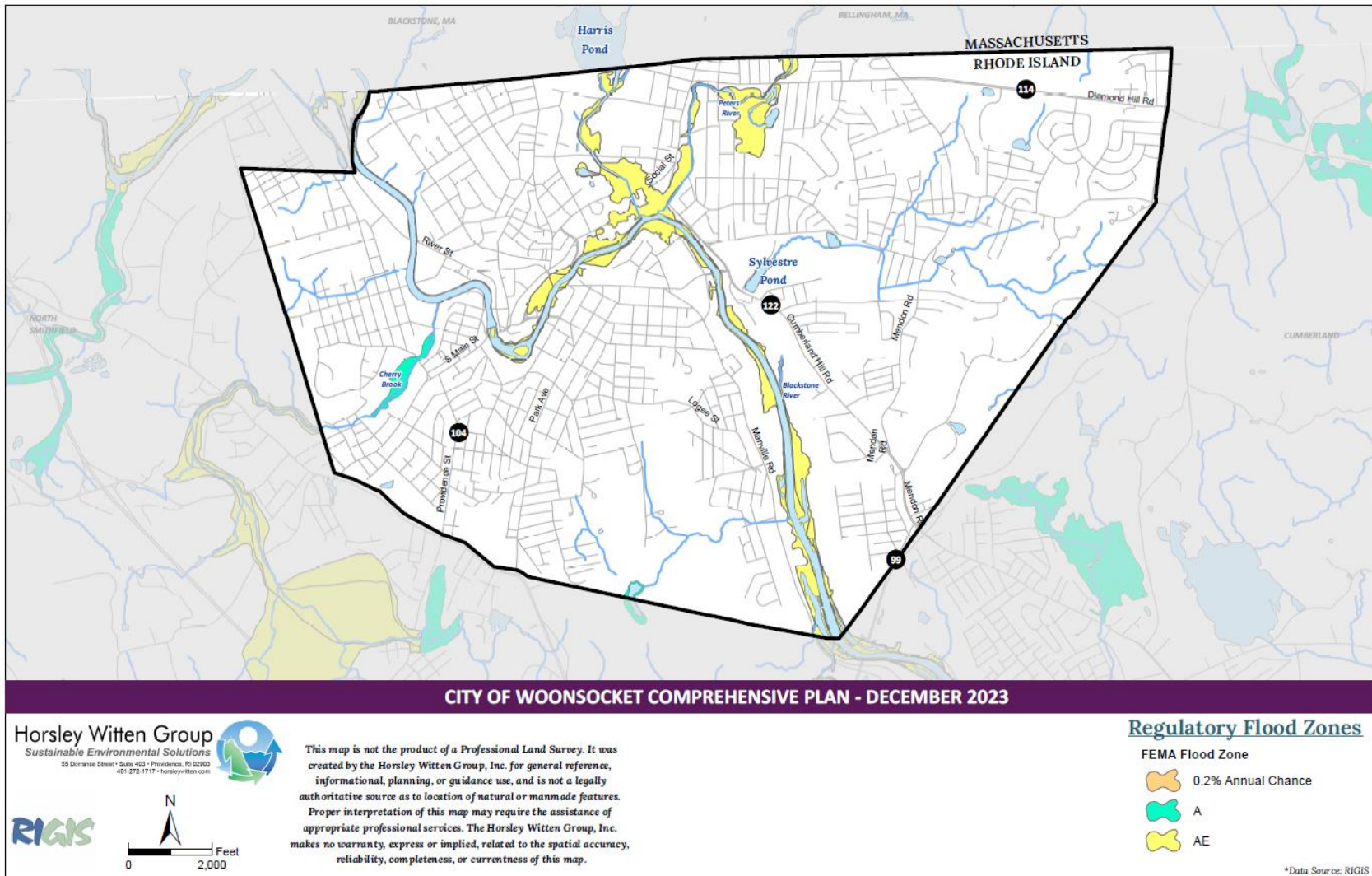
POLICY NR-5.3: Continue to plan for the future with natural hazard events in mind.

ACTION NR-5.3a: Continue to monitor climate data and use this data in land development policy decisions as appropriate.

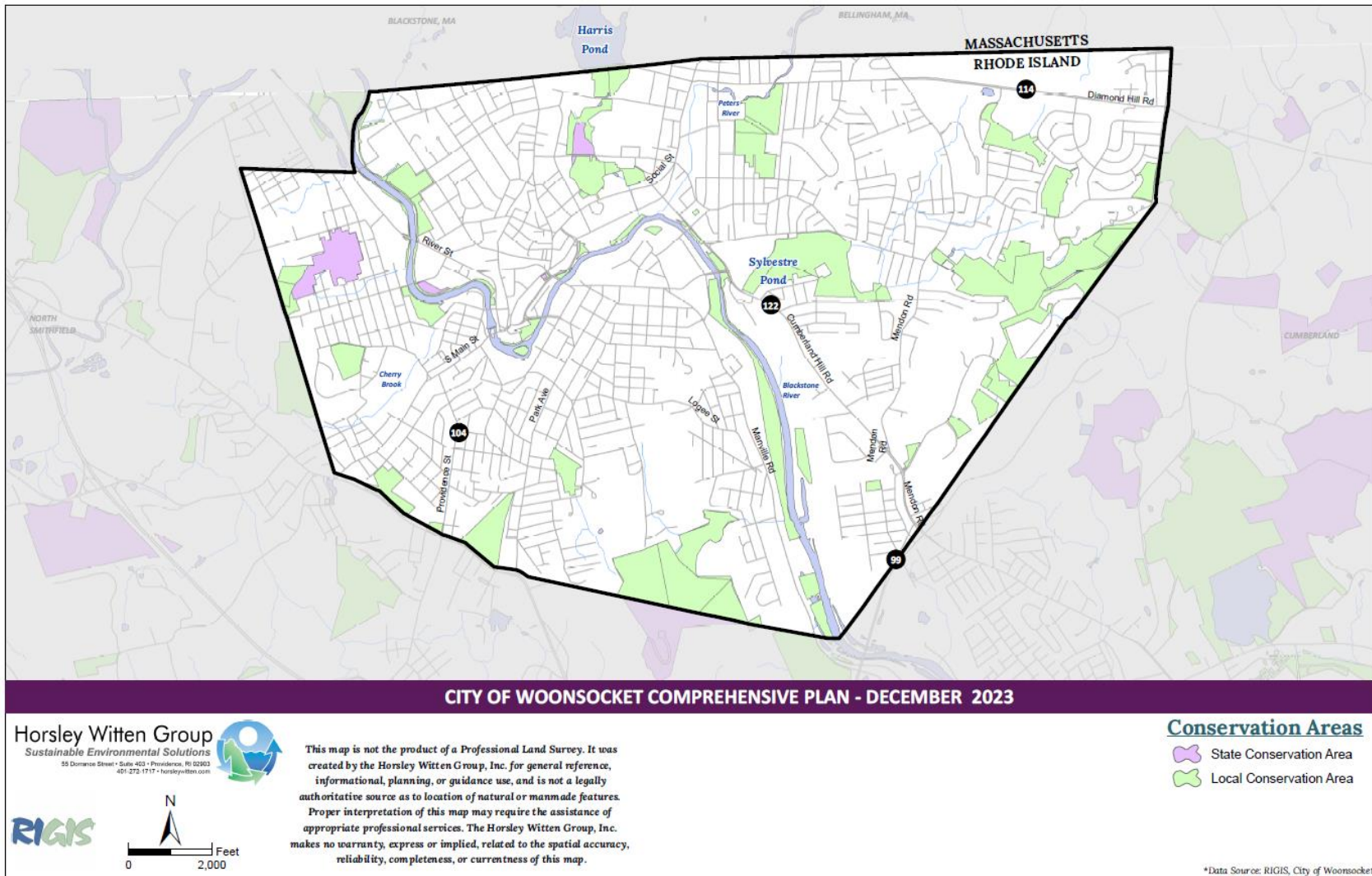
ACTION NR-5.3b: Evaluate the implementation of resilience design standards

for new non-residential and multi-family buildings.

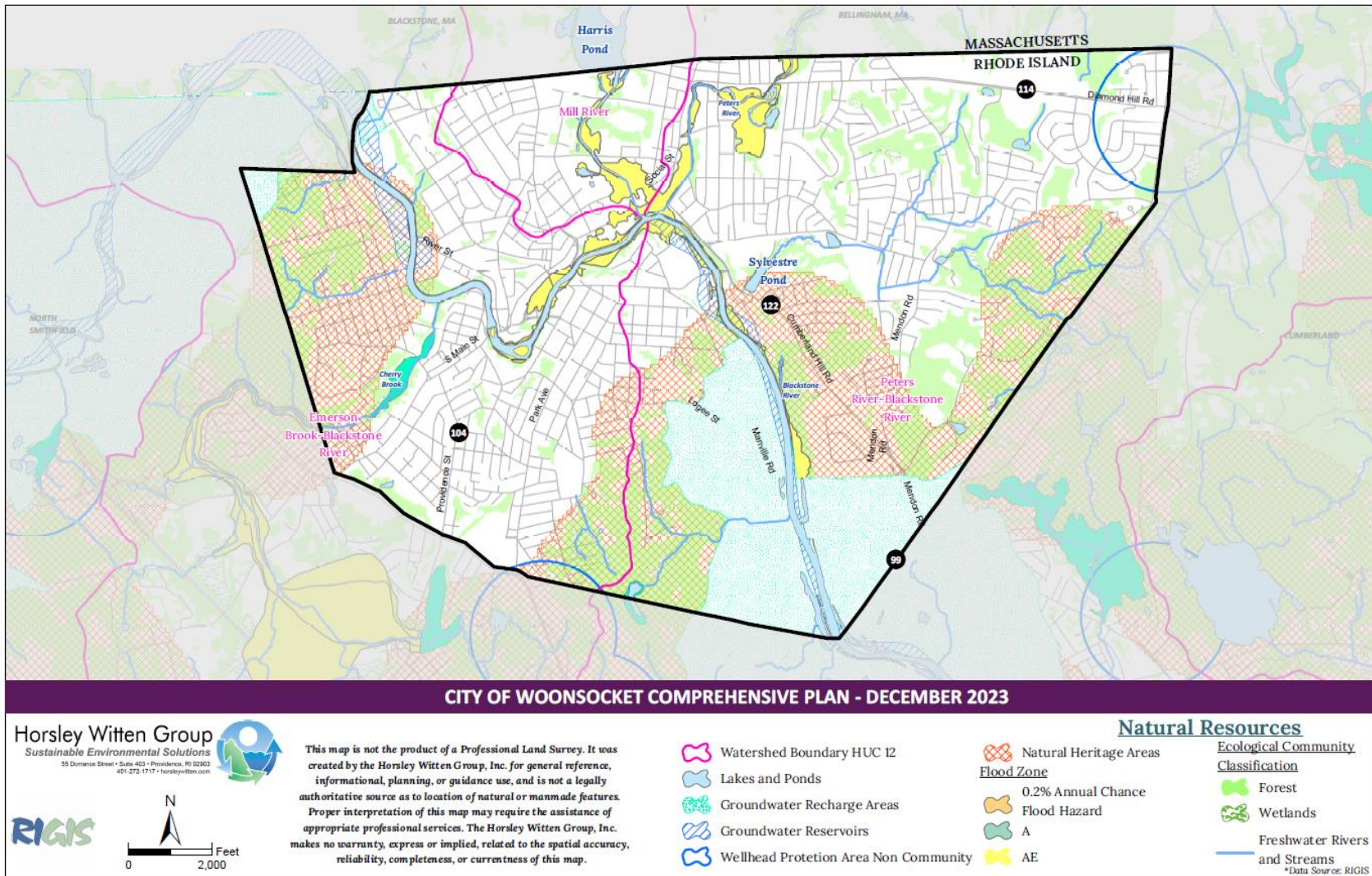
ACTION NR-5.3c: Develop a program for general public education to increase awareness of natural hazards.



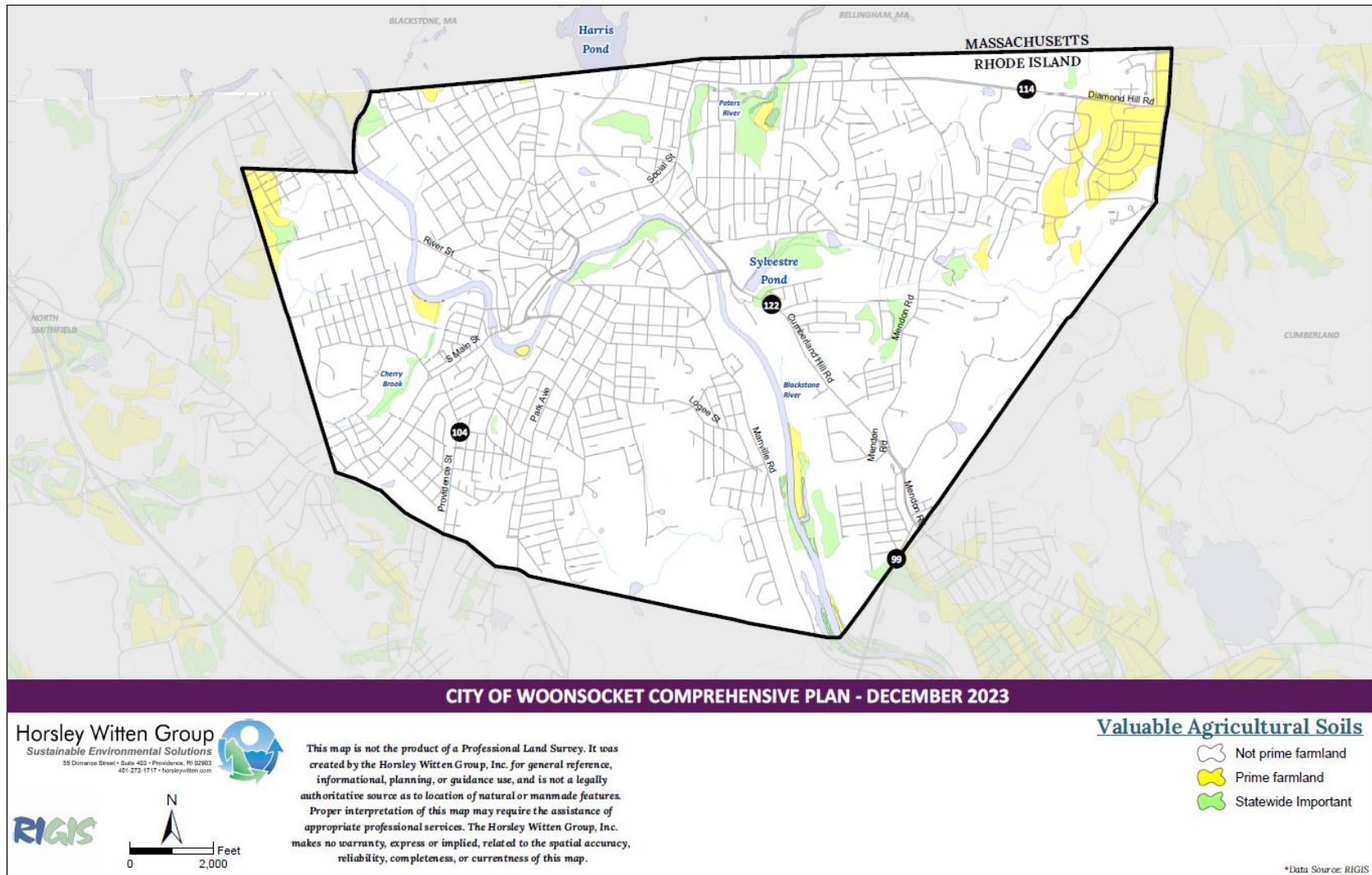
Map NR-1. Flood Exposure



Map NR-2. Conservation Areas



Map NR-3. Natural Resources



Map NR-4. Valuable Agricultural Soils

VII. HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

Historic and cultural resources are arguably among the most crucial aspects of any healthy community and an important quality of life factor. Woonsocket's historic and cultural resources are an integral part of its character. Preserving the City's many historic buildings, landscapes, places, and objects and opening them to the public enhances connections among residents, allowing them to recognize they have a collective past. Cultural resources can also be connected to the City's history, as well as the social and environmental aspects of Woonsocket today. These include the arts, educational institutions, and community traditions and events. All these resources collectively provide a sense of place in Woonsocket.

Vision for Historic & Cultural Resources

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will work to ensure our heritage is maintained and celebrated through preservation of our historic architecture and promotion of our cultural, arts, and tourism resources, including our location in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

For greater detail on data and statistics related to historic and cultural resources, see the Historic & Cultural Resources chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on community surveys and other methods of public engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- Connecting owners of historic properties with the resources to maintain them.
- Balancing the need to preserve buildings against the danger of adding bureaucracy that hinders the redevelopment of older buildings.
- Understanding when historic buildings should be preserved and when old buildings simply need to be torn down (public hazards).
- Working with private developers to renovate neglected historic buildings, including mills.
- Integrating local history into the school curriculum.
- Planning or promoting historic and cultural tours.
- Hosting more culturally diverse events for all ages, including festivals, music, theater, and art.
- Celebrating all the many different cultures and heritages that exist in Woonsocket.
- Collaborating with other communities in the Blackstone Valley to draw more people to the area.

“By promoting pride in [the] community, you provide a foundation for moving

the city in a positive direction.” – Survey respondent

“New England's greatest asset is its mass of culture, including its people, location, and building structures. We should be taking advantage of opportunities to attract artists to this beautiful area, work together with other communities to continue our bike path and public services and be part of a great reinvention.” – Survey respondent

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Woonsocket's historic resources are well documented and impressive, rivaling that of Providence and Newport in many regards. Although many of the City's historic structures and sites remain, others have been lost over the years. While these losses have certainly left gaps in Woonsocket's historical environment, the City's overall character has been largely preserved. Unfortunately, that character is now more fragile than ever, and additional losses could prove devastating. Every effort must be made to ensure that future losses of the City's significant cultural resources do not occur.

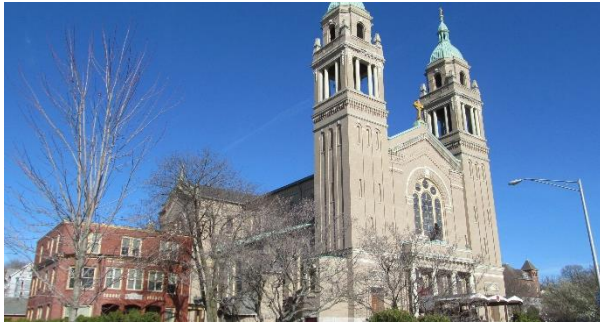
Over recent decades, Woonsocket has experienced an increase in the number of historic properties falling into disrepair and abandonment. There are several examples of historic properties that have been lost to demolition and even more examples of historic properties being renovated in ways that degrade the historic nature of the structures.

The City has a small but active Historical Society, which plays a large role in raising awareness of historic resources in Woonsocket. The Woonsocket Historical Society has offices and a collection of artifacts in a small space Downtown and has been working to increase their advocacy and services. They also conduct educational outreach to local schools and try to make their resources available to the public. They have successfully applied for grants and have added buildings to the historic register. The Society hopes to better promote themselves in the community and is seeking grants to help with marketing and public awareness, as well as working on their first website.

While there are several historic districts in the City as well as buildings and sites on the State and National Historic Registers, there is no local Historic District Commission. There has been general resistance to having a Historic District Commission since the last one was disbanded in the 1990s, but Society members believe this would be a useful tool for protecting and improving historic buildings. For any future Historic District Commission to be successful, it would need to be charged with balancing both a strong value of historic preservation and a realistic understanding of development and redevelopment challenges.

In the community survey, nearly 70% of respondents said “Preserving and protecting culturally and historically significant structures” was Important or Very Important. However, the creation or reestablishment of a local Historic District Commission to regulate the use and appearance of historic structures was viewed less favorably, at just under 50%. Voluntary design guidelines for owners of historic properties were viewed even less favorably, at 44%.

Given this, the City may focus more on the preservation of City-owned, commercial, and institutional buildings and connecting homeowners with outside funding resources for preservation efforts.



The historic resources of Woonsocket demonstrate a wealth of religious, residential, industrial, and civic architecture. Examples include: Upper left: St. Ann's Church, 1913 (Wikipedia). Upper right: Henry Darling House, 1865 (Wikipedia). Lower left: Bernon Worsted Mill, 1919 (Wikipedia). Lower right: Woonsocket District Courthouse, 1896 (Wikipedia).



The Historic Districts of Woonsocket celebrate different eras of Woonsocket's social and economic history. Examples include: Upper left: Cato Hill, listed 1976 (Wikipedia). Upper right: Island Place, listed 1990 (Wikipedia). Lower left: Main Street, listed 1991 (Wikipedia). Lower right: South Main Street, listed 1982 (Wikipedia).

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Culture (including the arts) and history are often intertwined, and all the City's historical resources also have cultural value and significance. It would be impossible to list every cultural resource in Woonsocket, which range from major institutions and organizations to smaller arts and theater groups to cultural food traditions like the dynamite to social clubs and societies. Places such as the Museum of Work and Culture, the Stadium Theatre, and the St. Ann Arts and Cultural Center draw visitors from all over the region. Cultural organizations such as Riverzedge Arts enhance the quality of life for young people and provide opportunities for employment and recreation.

There are many other organizations that support the arts and bring cultural experiences to Woonsocket. In fact, too many to be listed! Dozens of churches provide not only religious services, but enrich the community with music, art, and performances. Fraternal organizations provide activities for their members, families, and the public at large. And multiple organizations representing the wide array of cultural and ethnic communities in Woonsocket host festivals, parades, and other events throughout the year, most notably including Autumnfest. These local organizations play a huge role in the community and culture of Woonsocket, grounding longtime residents and providing a welcome network for newcomers.

The resources discussed above scratch the surface of what Woonsocket has to offer culturally. Combined, they not only make quality of life richer for Woonsocket residents, but they also serve as a draw for visitors and tourists and a boost to the local economy.



Woonsocket's cultural resources enhance quality of life for residents and draw visitors from around the region. Examples include: Upper left: Autumnfest Parade (Autumnfest). Upper right: Stadium Theatre (Wikipedia). Lower left: Museum of Work and Culture (Smithsonian Magazine). Lower right: Riverzedge Arts (Valley Breeze).

Cultural Diversity

Woonsocket is a City of immigrants. From its early days as a center of industry and mill villages, immigrants from Quebec, Italy, Portugal, and more flocked to Woonsocket for jobs. As they established roots in the area, they founded churches, schools, social organizations, and other networks, many of which survive today. That spirit of immigration has continued, with more recent arrivals of immigrants of Latin American and Asian descent, as well as an increase in African Americans. This cultural diversity is a great asset and something the City should celebrate and be known for. Our country, workplaces, and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups, and children raised in Woonsocket will have an advantage, having grown up learning how to interact with people of different backgrounds. Plus, this diversity makes Woonsocket a more fun and interesting place to be.

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

The Blackstone Valley was the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The waters of the Blackstone River powered this country's first textile mills. In recognition of the historical and cultural significance of this area, in 1986 the United States Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. Woonsocket is located at the heart of this Heritage Corridor, created to "preserve and interpret for future generations the unique and significant contribution to our national heritage of certain historic and cultural lands, waterways and structures" within this area. In 1996 and again in 2006, Congress reauthorized the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

In 2014, the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park was established. The same legislation also extended the authorization of the National Heritage Corridor. The National Historical Park, much like the National Heritage Corridor, was established to interpret the nationally significant sites and districts that convey the industrial history of the Blackstone River Valley, and works to support the network of partners, related resources, and facilities throughout the National Heritage Corridor. While the boundaries of the Park have not officially been set, all the resources in the Corridor, including the "Heritage Center" at the Museum of Work and Culture, are a part of the experience for visitors.

The Blackstone River Valley is historically significant for many reasons. It is the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution, influencing the rest of the country through the industrial use of waterpower and the development of the Rhode Island System of Manufacturing. It is an area characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. The Blackstone River Valley's remarkable history is revealed in its concentrations of historic, cultural, and natural resources that have survived through the past two centuries. The context of a "working valley" of mill villages, farms, cities and towns, transportation systems, river, and canal is what makes the individual elements of the Blackstone River Valley significant.

Support for the Corridor and the Park and cooperation with all the other municipalities in Rhode Island and Massachusetts that are part of the Blackstone River Valley should be a continued goal for Woonsocket. A thriving Corridor and Park will mean more visitors to Woonsocket, which will mean more spending at local businesses and restaurants and other boosts to the local economy. To take full advantage of these economic benefits, it is important to maintain a healthy environment in and around the Blackstone River, make investments in transportation – including the Blackstone River Bikeway – to ensure sites in Woonsocket are accessible, and ensure land uses along the river and around important sites are compatible. To this latter point, a River Corridor Review Overlay District has been enacted by the City to better regulate future land use in the most critical areas. The City also has a Design Review Overlay District, which regulates new commercial and mixed-use developments throughout the City. This regulatory tool can continue to ensure that new commercial and mixed-use developments are sensitive to the historical context of Woonsocket as a Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and Historical Park community.

In the community survey, nearly 2/3 of respondents said "Promoting Woonsocket's identity as a Blackstone Valley community" was Important or Very Important. Just over 60% felt the

same for “Promoting cooperation and coordination with other Blackstone Valley communities.” Woonsocket’s identity as a part of the Blackstone River Valley should continue to be a priority for the City.



Scenes from sites associated with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and Historical Park. Upper left: River Island Park (Visit Rhode Island). Upper right: Thunder Mist Falls (US Army Corps of Engineers). Lower left: Costa Park (Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor). Lower right: Cold Spring Park and Canoe Launch (City of Woonsocket).

WHAT WE’RE GOING TO DO

GOAL HCR-1: The City’s historical and cultural resources are protected and preserved in an integrated manner.

POLICY HCR-1.1: Value and prioritize Woonsocket’s historic Main Street (Downtown) and Blackstone riverfront as the central focus for historic preservation and revitalization.

ACTION HCR-1.1a: Review the Design Review and River Corridor Review Overlay Districts to assess what is working and what is not working and consider amendments that will help these districts work better together with the common goal of ensuring appropriate use of historic resources along Main Street (Downtown) and the Blackstone riverfront.

ACTION HCR-1.1b: Apply for funding to implement the changes recommended in the Wayfinding Master Plan for Downtown Woonsocket, the Main Street Livability Plan, and the Main Street Road Safety Assessment.

POLICY HCR-1.2: Focus redevelopment efforts on the adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized historic structures, especially former mill buildings.

POLICY HCR-1.3: Recognize, protect, and preserve key historic and cultural resources utilizing innovative land use management tools, such as zoning regulations and incentives.

ACTION HCR-1.3a: Consider mandatory design review for historic districts tied to voluntary historic district guidelines.

ACTION HCR-1.3b: Strengthen the review process within City Departments when historic properties are involved or affected by development. Consider applying design review to larger residential developments and adding a “Historic Context” section to the City’s Design Guidelines.

ACTION HCR-1.3c: Amend the Planning Board review process to require Applicants to compare their project to resource maps for all sensitive natural, cultural and archaeological resources and provide a narrative of impacts and how they will be mitigated.

POLICY HCR-1.4: Embrace the unique cultural heritage of the City and use it as a selling point.

ACTION HCR-1.4a: Amplify and educate residents about our City’s multitude of cultures, providing and promoting opportunities for people to dialogue and engage with folks outside of their normal social circles.

POLICY HCR-1.5: Coordinate local historic, cultural, and arts organizations to more efficiently use limited resources and volunteer time.

ACTION HCR-1.5a: Partner with local organizations to raise public awareness of cultural resources in Woonsocket through increased signage, marketing, and promotional events.

ACTION HCR-1.5b: Continue to support public art in public and private outdoor spaces, such as murals, sculptures, and temporary works, as well as in public buildings such as City Hall, the library, the senior center, and schools.

GOAL HCR-2: Woonsocket is fully integrated into and identified as a critical part of the broader Blackstone Valley region and is an active partner in regional efforts.

POLICY HCR-2.1: Interpret the Valley’s importance and sponsor activities which lead to public education and engagement about Woonsocket’s and the Valley’s local historic and cultural resources.

ACTION HCR-2.1a: Incorporate interpretive features of historic information into public projects when appropriate, with the assistance of the Woonsocket Historical Society and other partners.

ACTION HCR-2.1b: Encourage the Education Department to develop an interpretive education curriculum for grades K-12 involving the Museum of Work and Culture, the Historical Society, and other key partners.

POLICY HCR-2.2: Expand heritage tourism opportunities as a means of preserving Woonsocket's heritage resources and as a sustainable economic development tool.

ACTION HCR-2.2a: Advocate at the State level for the continued presence of the Blackstone River Valley in the tourism plans for Rhode Island.

ACTION HCR-2.2b: Utilize the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council's Tourism Plan and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor's plans as a basis for developing appropriate local tourism strategies and programs.

POLICY HCR-2.3: Actively partner in Valley-wide historic and cultural heritage projects and initiatives.

ACTION HCR-2.3a: Collaborate with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative, and others for continuation and promotion of events and activities that draw visitors to the region.

GOAL HCR-3: Increase equitable representation in historic preservation and cultural heritage and public awareness of and access to historic and cultural resources and the arts in Woonsocket.

POLICY HCR-3.1: Support local community efforts to protect and enhance important cultural assets and the arts in Woonsocket through equitable and inclusive engagement.

ACTION HCR-3.1a: Conduct a city-wide asset mapping exercise or inventory of historic and cultural assets, including buildings, sites, events, organizations, and traditions that contribute to the City's heritage.

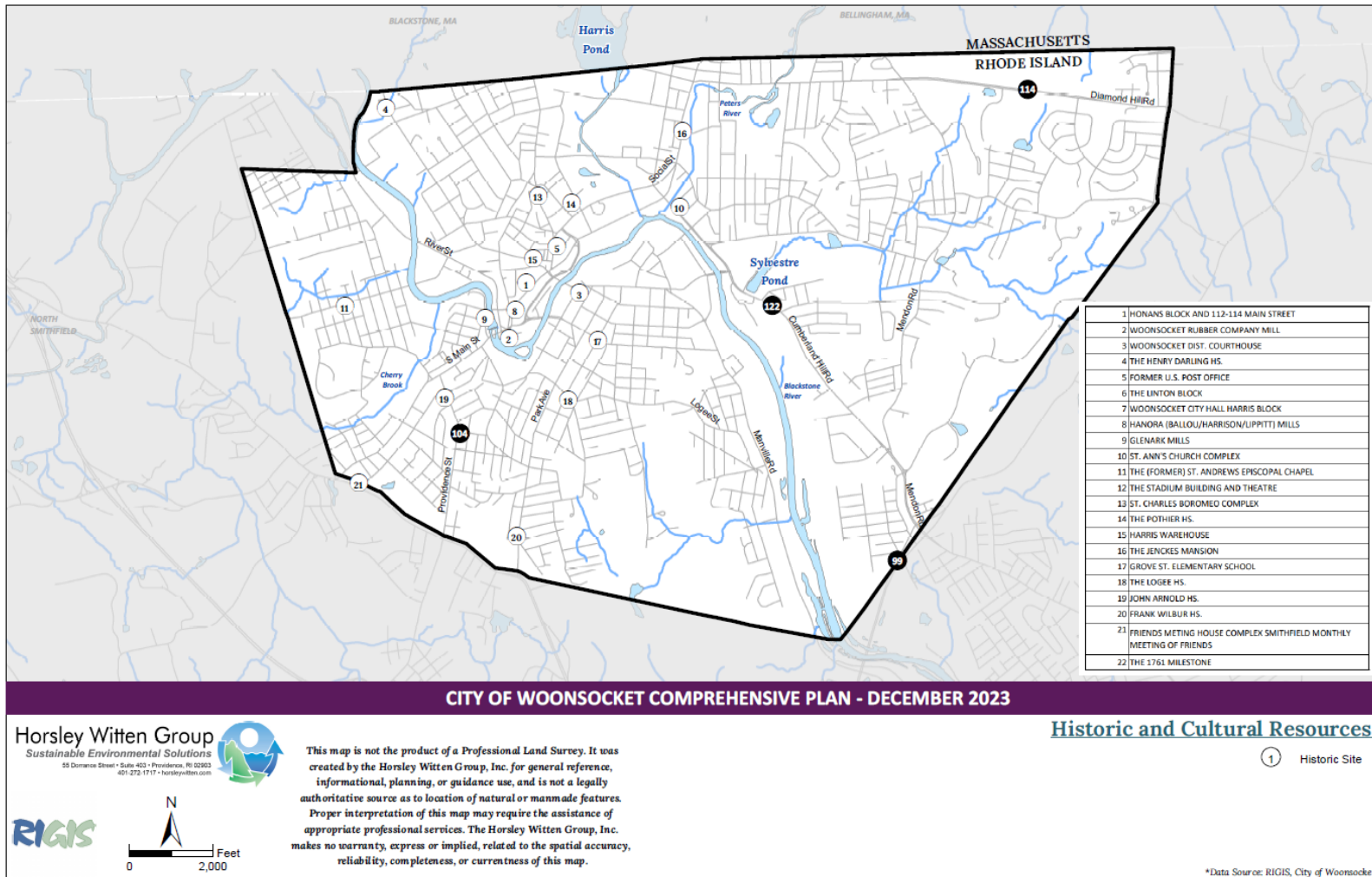
- Engage a broad group of stakeholders, residents, businesses, and others to identify placemaking efforts, targeted investments, and promotional tourism activities that are inclusive of all cultures represented by City residents and the unique experiences of living and working in Woonsocket.
- Build on existing inventories and placemaking efforts to identify new partnerships with cultural groups and fill gaps in inventories.

POLICY HCR-3.2: Preserve, invest in, and raise public awareness of Woonsocket's significant historic structures and sites as valuable heritage resources.

ACTION HCR-3.2a: Encourage and support owners of historic properties to have those properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which provides access to funds for renovations and other benefits.

ACTION HCR-3.2b: Educate developers and property owners about the benefits of placing voluntary preservation easements on their historic properties.

ACTION HCR-3.2c: Update the City's inventory of National Register-listed sites and historic districts as additions are made, and prominently promote these resources on the City's website.



Map HCR-1. Historic and Cultural Resources, Source: RIGIS

VIII. PARKS & RECREATION

Introduction

City parks and recreational areas contribute to the health and wellness of our community. These spaces give residents of all ages and abilities opportunities to be active, interact with nature, and gather with neighbors. Being outdoors improves not only our physical health, but also our mental health. Spending time in parks reduces depression, stress, and anxiety. In urban areas like Woonsocket, where residents may have limited private yards around their homes, city parks become even more important. Safe and inclusive parks and recreational areas are a positive way to impact the health and quality of life of Woonsocket residents.

In addition to local city parks, Woonsocket also has federal and state resources that contribute to recreational opportunities for residents and have the potential to bring visitors to the City.

Vision for Parks & Recreation

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will ensure diverse, high-quality parks and recreational areas that are safe and welcoming to all and contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of residents.

For greater detail on data and statistics related to parks and recreation resources, see the Parks & Recreation chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.

What We Heard

Based on community surveys and other methods of public engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- Increasing the number of parks in Woonsocket.
- Better maintaining City parks, including cleanliness.
- Ensuring safe parks and recreational spaces.
- Increasing recreational facilities and programming for all age groups.



Woonsocket Little League (City of Woonsocket)

Maintain Existing Parks & Recreational Areas

One of Woonsocket's key challenges, as with many communities, is the maintenance and upkeep of existing municipal parks and recreation facilities. The Baseline Report outlines

recent improvements to the City's parks and recreational areas. Additional improvements and upgrades are needed at other City facilities, particularly ensuring that public restrooms are accessible for people with disabilities. Priorities are Menard Field, Cold Spring Park, Bernon Park, and Renaud Field.

The City's Parks & Recreation Division of the Department of Public Works could benefit from a proactive preventative maintenance program to ensure that current and future investments are properly monitored, and facilities are meeting community needs. A basic preventative maintenance program¹⁶ focuses on four areas that give the City a leg up in extending the useful life of equipment and resources as well as promoting sustainable practices in operations and maintenance organization.

1. An annual facility audit/inventory/condition assessment process
2. Regular maintenance schedule
3. Identifying and sustaining operating efficiencies
4. Data collection through maintenance management software

Through this process, facilities that require larger more complex upgrades and maintenance can be planned for over the long-term.



Cass Park (City of Woonsocket)

Create New Opportunities

Creating new recreational opportunities in the City is a need.

Some residents are looking for indoor activities. The City lacks a recreation center to offer indoor programming year-round. Constructing a facility is a large financial expense and requires maintenance and upkeep; investments in staffing and other needs would have to be factored in as well. Grants and other financing are available through government and non-profit sources. Long-range revenue, costs, and other factors would have to be evaluated.

¹⁶ National Recreation and Park Association. *Simple Preventive Maintenance Leads to Sustainable Practices*. (2014) Parks and Recreation Magazine. Available at <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2014/february/simple-preventive-maintenance-leads-to-sustainable-practices/>

For new outdoors spaces, the City should evaluate the feasibility and availability of City properties to be redeveloped as recreational uses. New opportunities can also be accommodated by expanding and improving existing parks and recreation areas with new equipment and new amenities.

Residents want to see expanded recreational programming for all age groups, but particularly for children, teens, and seniors. While the City considers options for expanding programs, it is important to note that the Parks & Recreation Division has limited staff and relies heavily on volunteers for the 25+ programs it currently offers. Should the City want to increase programming for these different age groups, partnerships with local and regional organizations will be critical.



River Island Park (Visit Rhode Island)



WWII Memorial Park (City of Woonsocket)



Dunn Park (Valley Breeze)



Rivers Edge Recreation Complex dog park (WJAR)

Provide Access & Opportunities for All

PARKS & PROGRAMMING FOR EVERYONE

A popular, well-used park is one where everyone feels welcome. They are safe, accessible, and offer amenities and programming that meet the needs and interests of the community. Because parks contribute greatly to quality of life in Woonsocket, it is important to ensure that all residents have access to quality parks and recreational opportunities and feel comfortable in these spaces.

The **safety audit process** is based on participation and feedback from users of a given space. It allows for an evaluation of the physical environment in terms of fear of crime and perceptions of safety. When users become involved in identifying their safety concerns, they become an integral part of the solution. The findings from community-based safety audits are an important starting point for creating and implementing strategies for enhancing personal safety. Audits also provide an inventory of design, operational, and programming solutions to make parks safer.

- NRPA

Safety in parks is an important concern of residents. If a park becomes unsafe or has a perception of being unsafe, fewer people will use it, and the community loses the value and benefit of this critical resource. Park safety is multifaceted and involves park design and programming as well as long-term maintenance and resident involvement.¹⁷ Safety audits engage residents to understand specific safety concerns of a space and develop solutions. Results can help prioritize the City's most at-risk parks.

Accessible parks and playgrounds for people with disabilities is another concern of residents. As the City upgrades its older parks, playgrounds, and recreational areas, it identifies and removes barriers to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

In addition to this, the City should start thinking about the concept of "universal design" to create spaces for all physical and cognitive abilities as it redesigns and upgrades parks and playgrounds. There are eight principles for inclusive playground design,¹⁸ which can also be applied to city parks more globally. They can also meet other design objectives such as safety and increasing recreational opportunities for residents. Four of these principles are particularly relevant in Woonsocket:

- **Equitable Use:** The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
- **Flexibility in Use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- **Simple and Intuitive Use:** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's

¹⁷ National Recreation and Park Association. *Creating Safe Park Environments to Enhance Community Wellness*. (n.d.) Issue Brief. Available at:

<https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/park-safety.pdf>.

¹⁸ Cheri Ruane, FASLA. (September 2022). *Principles of Inclusive Playground Design*. Parks and Recreation Magazine. Available at <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2022/september/principles-of-inclusive-playground-design/>.

experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.

- **Perceptible Information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Finally, the City strives to ensure that all residents have access to the diverse programming it offers at its parks and recreational areas. Understanding the financial, physical, social, or cultural barriers and gaps that may prevent participation can help increase access to these opportunities. Partnerships with local and regional organizations and businesses can help overcome barriers through scholarships, more accessible meeting space (physically or socially), or language interpretation, among other approaches.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

Evaluating accessibility also looks at the geographic distribution of resources to ensure that all neighborhoods have access to parks and recreational areas within walking distance (see more on this below). Some residents indicated that city parks are too far from their homes, which limits their use of them.

Most areas of the City have access to a neighborhood park, except for Oak Grove. Finding an opportunity to add park and/or recreational amenities for these residents should be a priority for the City. Additionally, some residents might not have access to spaces they can use, such as people with disabilities. A neighborhood may have a park, but if it has not been brought up to ADA standards, it is not necessarily accessible to people with disabilities.



Bernon Park (City of Woonsocket)



Globe Park (City of Woonsocket)

Build Walking & Biking Connections

Creating safer walking and biking connections between residential neighborhoods and city parks/recreational areas will make these spaces more accessible and better used by residents. Not only do these amenities provide recreational opportunities, they also promote

active lifestyles and get people out of their cars.

Approaches to creating safer biking can depend on the location and conditions of a roadway. An off-road bike and walking path requires land, which might be a former rail line (typical of existing resources like the Blackstone River Bikeway) or an easement. A dedicated bike lane in a street requires adequate right-of-way to accommodate car traffic and possibly on-street parking. Signage alerting drivers to share travel lanes with bikers is another option. Education on bike safety and rules of the road for both drivers and bikers is essential.

Additionally, the City needs to continue to lobby the State of Rhode Island to complete the Blackstone River Bikeway through Woonsocket. This includes connections to the City's neighborhoods as well as cultural and recreational resources along the bikeway.

The Circulation Plan Element of this Plan touches on the need to inventory and assess the condition of city sidewalks by neighborhood and develop priorities for replacement, repair, and creation. Evaluating the connections from these areas to city parks and recreation areas should support the prioritization of investments. For more discussion on walking and biking, see the Walking & Biking section of the Circulation Element of this Plan.



Blackstone River Bikeway Brochure
(Blackstone Valley Tourism Council)

Promote Parks & Recreational Opportunities

Through the Parks & Recreation Division page on its website, the City publishes information about its parks and recreation areas as well as ongoing seasonal programming and events. The City continues to look for new opportunities to promote these spaces and events to residents. Some ideas include publishing a parks and recreation guide and map that highlights city parks. Guides can include information on parking, public restrooms, and nearby places of interest such as historic and cultural sites or restaurants. Signage along walking routes can also help increase visibility.

The City should also find opportunities to work with the National Heritage Corridor to promote the city park system to regional visitors. The National Heritage Corridor along with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council are able to reach a wider audience and showcase Woonsocket's local destinations.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

The Parks & Recreation Plan Element of the Plan is designed to be consistent with *Land Use 2025 and Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (State Guide Plan Element #152)*. Collectively, the goals and policies below ensure the City is:

Investing in new and improved opportunities for recreation to meet the public's needs, promote wellness, and create economic benefits; Strengthening, expanding, and promoting the recreational networks within the City and those connected to neighboring towns while protecting natural and cultural resources as well as adapting to a changing environment; Ensuring sustainable operation, maintenance, and management of the City's recreation network; and improving access to recreational resources by removing barriers and enhancing information and communication systems.

GOAL PR-1: Promote the City Park System and available opportunities to residents and visitors to the area.

POLICY PR-1.1: Integrate new and existing city park facilities and programming into the promotion of historic and cultural resources with regional and state partners.

ACTION PR-1.1a: Develop a combined master plan for recreation, interpretation, and tourism development along the Blackstone River. Coordinate with the Blackstone River Valley Tourism Council, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Inc., Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT).

ACTION PR-1.1b: Develop a marketing program to increase public awareness of the City's natural resources and recreational opportunities. This can include marketing materials, website page, and/or media coordination.

ACTION PR-1.1c: Continue to monitor progress in the development of the Blackstone River Bikeway, and work closely with State agencies to plan a specific route that maximizes public access to the riverfront and economic development opportunities in the City.

ACTION PR-1.1d: Increase the number of cultural events programmed in local parks, both City-sponsored and hosted by local and regional organizations.

POLICY PR-1.2: Increase local knowledge and awareness of the city's park facilities and programming.

ACTION PR-1.2a: Produce a park and recreation guide/map for public use. Make them accessible on the web and printed.

ACTION PR-1.2b: Continue to maintain the City's website which highlights the parks and recreation amenities and programming in the community.

GOAL PR-2: Ensure that City parks and recreational areas are well maintained, safe, and accessible for all users.

POLICY PR-2.1: Improve the City's capacity to support and invest in park maintenance and develop public support for continued investments.

ACTION PR-2.1a: Conduct an assessment of maintenance and operational needs of the City's parks and recreational areas. Include the evaluation of staffing levels, training, work plans, existing policies and procedures, and overall management. Identify priorities to increase capacity (e.g. additional staffing, equipment) and improve efficiencies (e.g. training, best management practices) to meet current and future demands on City resources.

ACTION PR-2.1b: Identify which City parks and recreation areas have management plans and prioritize the development of plans for those that do not. For those with management plans, review to determine if updates are needed. Management plans should address regular maintenance needs, schedule for equipment and amenity replacement (including ADA requirements), and opportunities for new facilities.

ACTION PR-2.1c: Develop a long-term approach to appropriate funds in the City's Capital Improvement Program for maintenance, upkeep, and updating of parks and recreational areas.

ACTION PR-2.1d: Continue to aggressively pursue state, federal, and private funding for park development and upkeep to supplement existing municipal funding sources.

POLICY PR-2.2: Invest in City park and recreation areas to ensure they are safe, accessible, and welcoming places.

ACTION PR-2.2a: Continue improvements to Cass Park as a way to centralize the City's sports facilities near the high school and increase passive recreation opportunities in the park.

ACTION PR-2.2a: Conduct a safety audit of city parks and recreation areas with extensive community engagement. Develop a long-range plan to address perceived and real barriers. Strategies can be integrated into management plans identified in ACTION PR-2.1b.

GOAL PR-3: Increase visitation and the appropriate use of the City's parks and recreation areas.

POLICY PR-3.1: Improve public knowledge and awareness of the City's parks and recreation areas.

ACTION PR-3.1a: Frequently revisit the Parks & Recreation Division's page on the City's website to make sure that all material is current and accessible,

including park amenities, maps, events, and programming.

ACTION PR-3.1b: Develop and install signage to encourage appropriate use of the City's conservation areas.

GOAL PR-4: Ensure that City and State parks and recreational facilities meet the diverse needs of Woonsocket residents.

POLICY PR-4.1: Provide a variety of recreational areas and facilities for all demographic groups and residential areas in the community.

ACTION PR-4.1a: Conduct a feasibility study with public engagement to understand a recreation or community center that could meet the needs of multiple generations, including youth and teenagers, and provide indoor recreational opportunities.

ACTION PR-4.1b: Continue redevelopment of existing neighborhood parks with an emphasis on family and passive recreation features.

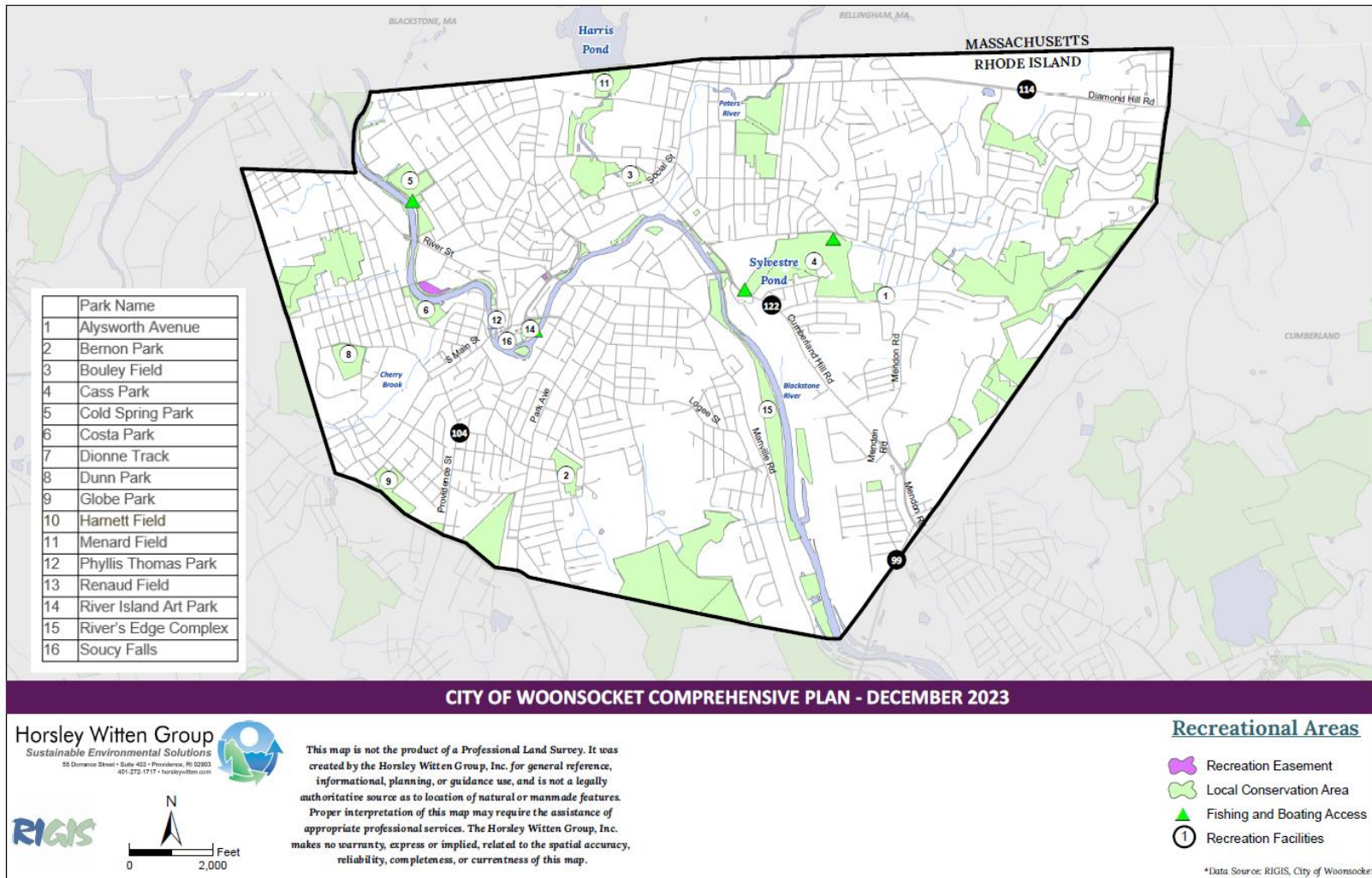
ACTION PR-4.1c: As investments in new equipment and amenities are planned, identify neighborhood parks that have opportunities for "universal design" elements.

POLICY PR-4.2: Promote equity in park, recreation, and open space expenditures by targeting the City's densely developed, low-income neighborhoods.

ACTION PR-4.2a: Develop a strategic plan to increase riverfront access in the River Street/Fairmount Street area. Develop a vision plan with policies that incentivize redevelopment projects to dedicate land or allow public access along the river.

ACTION PR-4.2b: Prioritize new park spaces in areas of the City that lack recreation or dedicated open spaces with public access.

ACTION PR-4.2c: Understand if existing neighborhood parks are meeting the needs of residents through public engagement and incorporate changes into existing management plans or in the development of new plans (see ACTION PR-2.1b).



Map PR-1. Recreational Areas

IX. ENERGY

INTRODUCTION

Energy impacts nearly all aspects of our daily lives. We depend on energy to travel; to heat and cool our buildings; and to power everything from streetlights, to smartphones, and medical equipment. Energy planning is relevant to the City's operations but also to residents and businesses living and working within Woonsocket. This Element will consider strategies to reduce energy consumption as well as the sources of energy, generation, and distribution within the City, security and reliability, efficiency, and the impact on the local and regional economy.

Vision for Energy

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will continue to invest in energy infrastructure that is durable, dependable, and clean, and helps support our business and the quality of life of our residents.

For greater detail on data and statistics related to energy, see the Energy chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.

WHAT WE HEARD

Based on community surveys and other methods of public engagement, residents want the City to focus on:

- The addition of solar panels in Woonsocket, including for residential, municipal, commercial, and industrial buildings.
- Cost concerns related to the transition to renewable energy in Woonsocket.
- Installing more LEDs for streetlights, in addition to transitioning streetlights to solar power where possible.

In the community survey, over 70% of respondents said “Investing in more energy efficient municipal facilities and vehicles and connecting the public with energy efficiency resources” was Important or Very Important.

Additionally, about 64% of respondents said “Investing in more renewable energy for municipal facilities and vehicles and connecting the public with renewable energy resources” was Important or Very Important.

There seems to be strong public support for both energy efficiency and renewable energy efforts.

CITY BUILDINGS, FACILITIES, & FLEET

Energy efficient City facilities, buildings, and operations not only save money, but reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Upgrading insulation and improving HVAC systems in municipal buildings, acquiring more efficient fleet vehicles, installing more efficient indoor lighting, and upgrading streetlights are examples of how Woonsocket can reduce energy costs.

Energy Use

To begin reducing energy consumption it is essential that we understand how much energy we use currently. The RI Office of Energy Resources encourages municipalities to collect energy usage data for all publicly owned buildings to establish baseline energy consumption information. This data can be logged into a free online database developed by ENERGY STAR called Portfolio Manager. The City can use Portfolio Manager to develop baseline energy data and an energy profile for each municipal building in Woonsocket, addressing both electricity use and heating fuel costs. The City simply needs to enter data from past energy bills, as well as information on particular municipal facilities such as square footage, number of employees, hours of use, etc., and Portfolio Manager does the rest, calculating energy use per square foot so that facilities can be more accurately compared with one another. The City can use this baseline energy data along with data for ongoing energy expenses to track Woonsocket's energy consumption rates over time. By identifying the structures with the highest energy consumption rates, the City can prioritize future conservation investments where they will have the greatest impact.

Energy Efficiency

By simply reducing the amount of energy it takes to power our systems, we can ensure that the energy we produce goes further. Woonsocket can explore energy efficiency improvements to City facilities and encourage private property owners to pursue efficiency improvements of their own. Many steps can be taken to improve energy efficiency in City buildings, such as replacing older windows with newer energy efficient models that can reduce heating costs in the winter and cooling costs in the summer. Even efforts as simple as replacing conventional light bulbs with LED models and turning off lights when leaving a room significantly reduce energy consumption. Energy efficiency improvements come at a wide variety of costs, ranging from no- and low-cost solutions to more extensive upgrades. This means that many energy efficiency improvements are within the reach of all property owners and residents of Woonsocket.



New LED lighting Veterans Memorial Park (City of Woonsocket)

ADI Energy prepared an Energy Efficiency Plan for the City in 2015. This plan focused on

energy efficiency upgrades at City Hall, Harris Library, and the decorative street lighting throughout the City. ADI Energy identified five key Energy Conservation Measures, which the City has been working to implement.

The City purchased its streetlights in spring 2021 and is investing in converting them to LED. Energy usage is expected to be reduced by about 50%.

RESIDENCES & BUSINESSES

The City promotes programs available to Woonsocket residents and businesses to help them be more energy efficient and reduce their energy costs. Currently, residents can receive an energy assessment of their homes from Rhode Island Energy/PPL and become eligible for rebates for insulation and energy-efficient appliances. Rebates are also available for small businesses for costs associated with energy efficiency electrical upgrades. Weatherization programs are available through Rhode Island's Weatherization Assistance Program for low-income residents, including rental units with landlord approval. The Weatherization Assistance Program is managed by local community action agencies, including the Community Care Alliance and the Blackstone Valley Community Action Program, and will cover 100% of the cost of improving heating, air conditioning, and appliances of income-eligible homes.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Solar

In Woonsocket, small scale solar is allowed in all zoning districts except for Public Recreation, as a way to encourage more people to add solar panels to their homes or businesses. Larger scale residential solar is allowed, but with a special use permit in residential zoning districts. Commercial/industrial solar is only allowed in the City's Industrial or Mixed-Use Commercial/Industrial zoning districts. There has been increased interest from developers in ground mounted solar in Woonsocket. While the City has a Zoning Ordinance regulating solar already, it needs to be amended based on the experience gained in the approval process for recent solar projects.

Wind

Woonsocket allows wind energy facilities by special-use permit in its industrial, mixed-use industrial/commercial, and major commercial zoning districts. However, wind power generation in inland locations, such as Woonsocket, has less potential than in coastal parts of the state, and will likely not be a significant source of energy in Woonsocket (at least not with existing technologies).



Example of residential rooftop solar – Logee Street, Woonsocket (Compass Real Estate)



Solar array at former Alice Mill site, Fairmount Street, Woonsocket (The Call)



Examples of 3-family homes in Worcester, MA renovated for energy efficiency (WBUR)

Hydropower

Woonsocket is home to the Thundermist Hydroelectric Plant, located along the Blackstone River at 118 S. Main Street. This facility, first opened in 1983, was not originally very profitable, and was closed by RI DEM in 2003 because of perceived harmful fluctuations in



3Thundermist Hydroelectric Plant (US Army Corps of Engineers)

the River's water level. However, after being repaired, the City-owned facility (now leased to a private operator) was reopened and now generates 1.2 megawatts of power, or enough for about 600 homes. This plant represents the only major energy production facility within the City.

BROADBAND

The term broadband refers to high-speed internet access. The City is well-served by commercial broadband (e.g., Verizon and Cox), but is also served in some locations by OSHEAN, a non-profit provider. There is an upfront cost to build out the OSHEAN network, but this is often heavily subsidized with public funding. A few years ago, the City's public schools and library were wired with OSHEAN fiber. This left the City with a robust network in place that can be further built on efficiently and affordably.

Expanding access to broadband services is important for business expansion and retention, improved opportunities for home-based businesses and entrepreneurship, and access to educational and health resources. Anything the City can do to expand broadband access to as many people and businesses as possible will be a boon to economic development and community well-being.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL E-1: Realize more cost-efficient, clean, and reliable energy through energy efficiency measures and use of renewable energy by the City, residents, and businesses.

POLICY E-1.1: Build municipal capacity to improve energy efficiency and reduce energy consumption of City buildings, facilities, and operations.

ACTION E-1.1a: Establish a new energy use baseline for assessment of the amount of energy currently being used by municipal buildings, vehicles, and equipment, and establish a protocol for tracking this data over time.

ACTION E-1.1b: Based on the energy usage assessment, update the City's 2015 Energy Efficiency Plan to refine and outline energy reduction goals, strategies to reduce energy consumption and improve energy efficiency, and how progress towards goals will be tracked.

ACTION E-1.1c: The City will give preference to energy efficient fleet vehicles and equipment when replacement is required, such as high fuel efficiency and/or electric vehicles, as viable.

ACTION E-1.1d: Establish an energy committee within city government, or a collaborative city/resident/business energy commission to be responsible for implementing the Energy Efficiency Plan and act in an advisory role for local decision makers.

POLICY E-1.2: Coordinate with the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources to explore alternative energy solutions, including solar, wind, and hydropower, and energy efficiency techniques for all municipal operations.

POLICY E-1.3: Support residents and businesses to be more energy efficient and use more renewable energy.

ACTION E-1.3a: Support solar and other alternative energy opportunities for interested residents and businesses through the RI Office of Energy Resources and other sources.

ACTION E-1.3b: City staff will remain aware of and participate in local, statewide, and national educational initiatives to promote energy efficiency and the increased use of renewable energy.

ACTION E-1.3c: Continually update a clearinghouse of resources for residents to use more renewable energy and improve and maintain the energy efficiency of their homes and rental properties.

GOAL E-2: Continue to assess the Zoning Ordinance to allow the establishment of various renewable energy production facilities (wind, solar, hydropower, etc.) in appropriate areas.

POLICY E-2.1: Explore ways to encourage more local renewable energy production facilities in harmony with new and existing uses.

ACTION E-2.1a: Identify municipally-owned lands and buildings that might be suitable for locating renewable energy production facilities.

ACTION E-2.1b: Encourage the installation of on-site renewable energy production facilities for new developments.

POLICY E-2.2: Continue to support local energy production through hydroelectric power.

POLICY E-2.3: Promote development of solar energy that minimizes impacts to land uses, properties, and the environment.

ACTION E-2.3a: Assess the City's solar energy standards to reduce barriers to and incentivize small-scale solar energy systems such as roof-top solar.

ACTION E-2.3b: Assess the City's solar energy standards to ensure that larger scale solar energy systems have minimal impacts on the environment and neighboring uses.

GOAL E-3: Continue to expand broadband opportunities for residents and businesses.

POLICY E-3.1: Ensure that broadband fiber is laid throughout the City in an effort to ensure that key areas are “broadband-ready” for interested residents and businesses.

ACTION E-3.1a: Facilitate OSHEAN expansion to institutions near the existing network where connection costs would be limited. Potential sites include schools, medical facilities, and public housing.

ACTION E-3.1b: Explore building Wi-Fi hotspots off the OSHEAN network to offer free wi-fi within Downtown and low-income neighborhoods.

X. LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

The types of land uses allowed and where they occur influence economic, environmental, and social aspects of a community. Woonsocket uses several tools to manage land development. The Zoning Ordinance regulates where a particular use can happen, its placement within a parcel, and performance standards a development must demonstrate to meet community objectives around environmental quality and other impacts. The Subdivision & Land Development Regulations ensure standards are met in the subdivision of land and development of new roads and lay out the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance administered by the Planning Board.

Woonsocket's land is largely densely developed, with much of its area committed to older building stock and patterns of development. Its evolving history can be seen in its denser residential neighborhoods and industrial buildings, its historic Main Street, and its strip shopping centers and more suburban-style residential neighborhoods, all overlaying the original mill villages and outlying agricultural areas that merged to form the City's present boundaries. Today, Woonsocket has very limited land for new development, and must concentrate on better and more productive land use and the redevelopment of existing property.

Vision for Land Use

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will make integrated land use decisions based on the needs of our changing demographics, economy, housing, environment, and all the other components of this Comprehensive Plan.

The Land Use Plan Element is placed toward the end of the Comprehensive Plan because it sums up everything that precedes it. The earlier Plan Elements lay out a vision for housing, business, transportation, natural resources, and more. This Plan Element makes sure the City's land use policies and zoning can accommodate the vision for all these things.

WHAT WE HEARD

As discussed above, policy decisions around transportation, economic development, housing, natural resources, parks, services & facilities, and more all guide how land will be used in the future. Consequently, few public engagement questions specifically targeted land use. However, based on surveys and other engagement, Woonsocket residents

Land Use – what's happening on the ground, including development and natural land cover.

Zoning – local regulations that determine what can be built where, how it can be used, and how big it is, among other development standards.

want the City to focus on:

- Protecting undeveloped land and developing in areas that are already built out.
- Redevelopment of Woonsocket's Downtown and particularly Main Street.
- Redevelopment or removal of blighted buildings.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY

The State's Comprehensive Plan Standards recommend that municipalities assess future development capacity, based on the regulations of the existing zoning districts, by including estimates of total future population at anticipated build-out and the year by which residential build-out is anticipated, based on historic trends. However, Woonsocket is already largely built out, and much of its land use strategy in the next 20 years will be about reusing and repurposing existing buildings or areas of the City that have already been developed. Strategic new infill development and expanding and connecting the open space and recreation resources throughout the City will also be important. Per the City Administration's longstanding policies, population is likely to shift in Woonsocket, with residential densities declining in currently dense and overcrowded neighborhoods and increasing where new residential development is desired (notably downtown and in converted mill buildings).

COMPATIBILITY OF LAND USES WITH ADJACENT COMMUNITIES

Cumberland

The expansion of the Highland Corporate Park has been a long-time joint effort between the City of Woonsocket and the Town of Cumberland. Nearly all vacant parcels in Woonsocket's Highland I have been sold and developed, and there is little opportunity for expansion in the Woonsocket portion of the park. Some land is still available in Cumberland's Highland II area. The uses along this border continue to be well coordinated and compatible.

The Forte Brothers quarry site lies both in Cumberland and in Woonsocket. The site is zoned for industrial use in Cumberland but existed as a non-conforming use in a residential zone in Woonsocket. The Woonsocket side is currently being developed into a four-phase residential subdivision, while the Cumberland side remains an active quarry site. However, most of the active quarry is located east of State Route 99 and should not serve as a significant conflict once the subdivision in Woonsocket is completed. The remainder of the border with Cumberland consists mostly of open space or residential subdivisions on the Woonsocket side and open space or low density residential on the Cumberland side, with no projected conflicts.

North Smithfield

Woonsocket's border with North Smithfield to the west largely marks a clear shift from denser, more urban residential development in Woonsocket to a variety of uses on the North Smithfield side. The North Smithfield side of the border includes many older mill villages,

such as Union Village and Branch Village that serve as a transition from urban Woonsocket to more suburban and rural aspects of the Town. Farther south is the Dowling Village Shopping Center, behind which runs a significant swath of open space, including the Booth Pond Conservation Area on the Woonsocket side, that runs all the way to the Blackstone River. Development on the Woonsocket side is generally more intense, except where parks and open spaces line the border. However, most of the Woonsocket side is zoned for residential purposes, with just a few commercially zoned properties abutting other commercial zones in North Smithfield.

Lincoln

Woonsocket and the Town of Lincoln share a limited boundary, and the area along this boundary is along the Blackstone River and primarily undeveloped.

Blackstone & Bellingham

The Towns of Blackstone and Bellingham in Massachusetts border Woonsocket to the north. Much of the more urbanized portion of these Towns is located along the border with Woonsocket, again providing a smooth transition from the City to the neighboring mill villages to the more suburban and rural areas beyond. Further east along the northern border, the retail centers along Diamond Hill Road abut the New England Country Club in Bellingham.

FUTURE LAND USE & THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP

One of the most important aspects of the Comprehensive Plan is mapping how the City wishes to change in the future. Map LU-1 Existing Land Uses and Map LU-2 Existing Zoning Districts show what the City is like today. Based on analysis and feedback from the public, this Comprehensive Plan has determined where the vision for Woonsocket's future requires changes to land use. This is reflected in a new Future Land Use Map (FLUM). The FLUM will ultimately be used to update the City's zoning, to make sure that land is zoned to achieve what the City and the community wants. This section explores future land uses across the City and includes Map LU-3 Future Land Use Map (FLUM).

FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES

The FLUM is divided into 12 categories as follows:

Commercial, Urban

These areas correspond with the C-1 zoning district and are characterized by more walkable commercial areas including Downtown. These areas are meant to accommodate a wide range of commercial uses as well as residential uses, including multi-family housing on upper stories. Ground floor residential uses are prohibited.



Downtown Woonsocket (Providence Journal)

Commercial, Major

These areas correspond with the C-2 zoning district and are characterized by more auto-oriented commercial areas including the shopping plazas along Diamond Hill Road. Residential development is prohibited in these areas.

Industrial, Light

These areas correspond with the I-1 zoning district and are characterized by lighter industrial uses that do not include heavy manufacturing. Residential development is prohibited in these areas.

Industrial, Heavy

These areas correspond with the I-2 zoning district and are characterized by industrial uses including heavy manufacturing. Residential development is prohibited in these areas.

Mixed-Use, Commercial/Residential

These areas correspond with the MU-1 zoning district and are generally located along commercial corridors adjacent to more densely developed areas such as Hamlet Avenue, Social Street, and parts of Diamond Hill Road and Cumberland Hill Road. This will also include the proposed MU-3 zoning district in the Social District area currently zoned C-2. All types of residential development are allowed in these areas at densities generally between seven and 11 dwelling units per acre. Minimum lot size is 6,000 square feet for a single-family residence plus 4,000 square feet for each additional dwelling on a lot. Greater residential densities will be considered within the proposed MU-3 district.

Mixed-Use, Industrial/Commercial

These areas correspond with the MU-2 zoning district and are generally located near industrial zones. They provide space for lower impact industrial uses paired with commercial uses such as office space and retail. Residential uses are only allowed accessory to these primary uses for people conducting industrial or commercial uses on site.

Public Recreation, Active

These areas correspond with the PR-1 zoning district and are characterized by active public recreation facilities such as playgrounds and sports fields. Residential development is prohibited in these areas.

Public Recreation, Passive

These areas correspond with the PR-2 zoning district and are characterized by natural open spaces set aside for conservation. Residential development is prohibited in these areas.

Residential, Very Low Density

These areas correspond with the R-1 zoning district and predominately include single-family homes at densities generally less than two dwelling units per acre. Minimum lot size is 25,000 square feet.

Residential, Low Density

These areas correspond with the R-2 zoning district and predominately include single-family homes at densities generally between four and five dwelling units per acre. Minimum lot size is 10,000 square feet. Non-conforming residential structures (two- or three-family) and neighborhood-scale commercial uses may exist, particularly in areas that transition to a higher density or commercial area.

Residential, Medium Density

These areas correspond with the R-3 zoning district and predominately include single-family and two-family homes at densities generally between six and ten dwelling units per acre. Minimum lot size is 7,000 square feet for single-family residences and 9,000 square feet for two-family residences. Higher densities and non-conforming commercial uses are typically found in areas that transition to higher-density residential and commercial areas.

Residential, High Density

These areas correspond with the R-4 zoning district and include a significant mix of single-family, two-family, three-family, and larger multi-family homes at densities generally between seven and 11 dwelling units per acre. Minimum lot size is 6,000 square feet for a single-family residence plus 4,000 square feet for each additional dwelling on a lot. However, historically many lots in these areas were created at 5,000 square feet. Non-conforming neighborhood commercial development can also be found in some areas, particularly along areas that border commercial corridors.



Glenark Landing Apartments (Trinity Management)

CONFORMANCE WITH STATE DENSITY TARGETS

Note that the vast majority of Woonsocket is in the Sewered Urban Development category, with the remainder in the Urban Development category. Woonsocket's current zoning by and large complies with the standards above. In Urban Development areas, all underlying zoning districts meet the residential density standards. In Sewered Urban Development areas, the minimum residential density requirement works out to 8,712 square feet per dwelling. This is just a little less than the minimum lot size in the R-2 district (10,000 square feet) and much less than that in the R-1 district (25,000 square feet). All other zoning districts

in the Sewered Urban Development areas (that permit residential uses) comply. Given the higher residential densities allowed in the R-3, R-4, C-1, and MU-1 districts, the average residential density across the Sewered Urban Development areas of the City is greater than the required five units per acre.

PROPOSED ZONING TEXT & MAP REVISIONS

As required by the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, the City will be revising its Zoning Ordinance and Official Zoning Map to be consistent with the revised FLUM and other aspects of the Comprehensive Plan.

Proposed Zoning Text Revisions

Below is a summary of the zoning text amendments the City will be exploring over the life of this Plan.

State Law

Many State laws were newly passed or amended in 2022 and 2023 related to zoning and land use. The City will stay abreast of these changes and make amendments to its ordinances accordingly.

Introduction

The introduction to the Zoning Ordinance includes generic language on the purposes of zoning. This could be rewritten to be specific to the conditions, character, and needs of Woonsocket.

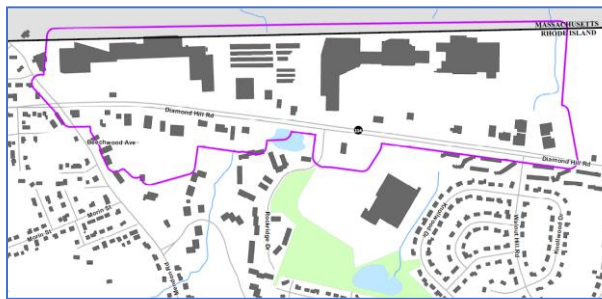
Diamond Hill Road & the Social District

Both these areas have the same zoning today, C-2. However, they are very different places with different characters. Diamond Hill Road is home to several strip commercial centers with large parking lots in front. While vacancy rates are low, this area has difficulty attracting and maintaining the big box stores it was designed for. The Social District was originally meant to be a new, modern downtown adjacent to the historic old downtown. Over time, it has become an area defined by pavement (roadways and parking lots), spread out, low-slung commercial buildings, and a handful of taller buildings.

Diamond Hill Road may remain more auto-centric but should also allow high density housing to activate and support adjacent commercial development. The issue is attracting and retaining quality tenants, a challenge due to market fluctuations. As traditional “big box” retail struggles to stay afloat throughout the country, different commercial uses must be cultivated. In addition, the strong demand for housing means that new housing development can be an anchor that helps support business growth and retention. Targeted, technical changes in zoning could assist with attracting and retaining new business and allowing the housing needed to support it.

The Social District should be reimagined with a new “MU-3” zoning district, with reduced

parking, increased height, mixed-use by-right, etc.



Diamond Hill Road



Social District

Table of Use Regulations

This table shows what uses are permitted, prohibited, permitted with a special use permit, or permitted as an accessory use, in each zoning district. The table should be reviewed and updated to meet several purposes:

- All modern uses are currently not represented in the table.
- New uses needed in the table.
- Check for out-of-date uses that should be removed.
- All uses that don't have a very clear, common meaning should be defined. Ensure the use, definition, parking, and requirements are all consistent.
- It should be easier to permit the uses the City wants where it wants them. For example, if the City is regularly granting variances for a use that is prohibited in a certain zone, perhaps that use should be permitted by right or with a special use permit instead.

Mill Redevelopment & Adaptive Reuse

Mill buildings remain a significant land use in Woonsocket, whether still actively used for manufacturing and other industrial uses, or with potential to be converted to commercial, residential or mixed-use. Mill buildings that are no longer viable for industrial uses have for many years been encouraged in Woonsocket to convert to other uses, such as residential apartments. However, it can be difficult to redevelop these properties according to the density standards for the underlying zoning, which generally allow a maximum number of units per acre (or may not allow residential at all). Rather than having such redevelopment projects go through a number of variances, the City should explore an overlay zone that permits density based on net usable floor area as opposed to density based on land area, along with other performance standards to ensure the redevelopment is a good neighbor. The City already has something similar in its Historic Structures Floating Overlay District, which allows this flexibility for the conversion of schools and other government buildings into residential space.

Signage

Signage standards should be evaluated to make sure they reflect the character of different locations and do not detract from their surroundings. For example, sign standards are currently the same for the C-2 and C-1 districts, which means large signs more appropriate for heavily trafficked corridors are also allowed in smaller neighborhood commercial areas. Other concerns include the need to require a permit for all commercial signage, management of LED signs, and ensuring that lighting of signs is dark-sky compliant.



*Signage on Diamond Hill Road
(LoopNet)*

Housing & Residential Zones

Explore ways to make it easier to build and renovate the types of housing most needed in the community in a way that makes sense for each type of neighborhood. For example, based on feedback from City staff, many people are illegally subdividing homes. This suggests that there is a strong demand for smaller, more affordable units. Housing policy can be explored to provide for such housing legally. For example, accessory dwelling units are currently allowed only within an existing structure and only for family members. This must be amended at a minimum to comply with State law.

Design Review Overlay District

Differentiate guidelines based on type, (mixed-use, commercial, industrial, solar, etc.) then formalize differentiated guidelines into separate Design Regulations, subsequently referenced in the Zoning Ordinance.

Planned Residential Development Overlay District

This is essentially the City's cluster or conservation development zoning code. There are not many large parcels left in the City that can utilize this. It should be reviewed to determine how it can better cater to the City's existing, highly developed conditions. The overlay district currently applies to projects of 10 acres or greater. That number should be significantly reduced to 5 acres so that it can be used for more projects. Establish maximum setbacks to ensure structures are closer to roadways and accomplish the intent of cluster development.

River Corridor Review Overlay District

This overlay needs firmer guidance on what staff are supposed to be reviewing projects for. The language in this section is very vague. Distinct findings and design guidelines could help guide decision making in this overlay district.

Downtown Overlay District

- This should be amended to include a statement that residential density within the district is encouraged.
- Dimensional requirements within the downtown overlay district are questionable because they are based on underlying zoning. This creates street wall issues in all but C-1 zones. The Main Street Master Plan has recommendations to include dimensional requirements for the Downtown Overlay District that supersede the underlying dimensional requirements (e.g., 0-10-foot setback for all buildings, no parking in front of structure). These recommendations should be seriously considered.



Main Street (Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative)

- Micro-loft unit calculation is currently based on parcel area, making them basically irrelevant. Consider basing them on parking requirements and then net building footprint.
- Commercial is currently required on the first floor throughout the entire overlay. This is difficult to comply with given the weak demand for commercial uses. Consider targeting the first-floor commercial requirement to key nodes only.
- Consider expanding the overlay district to include:
 - South Main Street to Providence Street
 - Gateway corners at Front Street and Bernon Street, Front Street at Hamlet/Court, and South Main Street at Front Street and Blackstone and North Main and Miller.
- District boundaries should be reassessed in the Arnold/High Street neighborhood. May encompass too much of a residential neighborhood.

Historic Structures Floating Overlay District

Consider amending this overlay district to include a broader set of building types such as historic mills and culturally significant structures such as churches, rectories, parish centers, etc. Ensure the Planning Board is the review authority.

Multiple Structures on One Parcel

Only one principal structure is allowed on any given parcel. Therefore, if a developer is proposing a multi-use, multi-structure development, there has to be a subdivision and, usually, reciprocal easements for common areas. Explore ways to allow multiple structures on a single parcel in certain zoning districts, with the option of using a condominium structure if multiple owners are desired.

Parking Standards

A parking study should be conducted to determine if parking space requirements need to be adjusted for certain uses and/or for certain locations. This is particularly true for commercial uses, where many parking lots remain underutilized. By strategically reassessing and adjusting parking requirements, the City can spur new development and increase property tax and sales tax revenue.

Proposed Official Zoning Map Revisions

As required by the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, the City will be revising its Zoning Ordinance and Official Zoning Map to be consistent with the revised FLUM. A number of specific revisions are recommended for responding to development pressures and controlling land use in Woonsocket. Some are protective, while others facilitate and encourage development and provide direction. The proposed amendments are as follows:

Split-Lot Zoning District Changes			
Parcel ID	Address	Current Zoning	Proposed Zoning
Map A5, Lot 38-221	786 Diamond Hill Rd.	MU-1, R-2	MU-1
Map A5, Lot 38-223	758 Diamond Hill Rd.	MU-1, R-2	MU-1
Map B3, Lot 20-84	565 North Main St.	I-2, R-4	I-2
Map B6, Lot 46-47	1305 Diamond Hill Rd.	R-3, MU-1	R-3
Map C2, Lot 1-44	740 Third Ave.	R-2, R-3	R-3
Map C3, Lot 8-6	55 Highland St.	R-2, R-3	R-2
Map C3, Lot 8-47	45 Highland St.	R-2, R-3	R-2
Map C5, Lot 36-264	578 Elm St.	R-4, MU-1	R-4
Map D3, Lot 14-134	High St.	R-4, C-1	C-1
Map D4, Lot 27-85	103 Hamlet Ave.	R-4, MU-1	MU-1
Map E3, Lot 9-92	257 South Main St.	R-4, MU-1	MU-1
Map E3, Lot 9-93	257 South Main St.	R-4, MU-1	MU-1
Map E3, Lot 9-109	215 South Main St.	R-4, MU-1	MU-1
Map E3, Lot 9-110	195 South Main St.	R-4, MU-1	MU-1
Map E3, Lot 9-148	South Main St.	R-4, MU-1	MU-1
Map E3, Lot 10-76	579 Front St.	R-4, C-1	C-1
Map E3, Lot 10-313	719 Front St.	MU-1, C-1, R-4	C-1
Map E3, Lot 10-384	664 Front St.	R-4, MU-1	MU-1
Map E5, Lot 29-23	413 Manville Rd.	R-4, I-1	R-4
Map E5, Lot 29-40	51 Circle St.	MU-2, I-1	MU-2
Map E5, Lot 29-44	320 Manville Rd.	R-3, I-1	R-3
Map F3, Lot 17-66	63 Blakeley St.	R-3, MU-1	MU-1
Map F6, Lot 43-4	50 Founders Dr.	R-2, MU-2	MU-2
Map F6, Lot 43-20	1175 Cumberland Hill Rd.	R-2, MU-2	MU-2
Map F6, Lot 43-52	1175 Cumberland Hill Rd.	R-2, MU-2	MU-2
Map F6, Lot 50-4	176 Park East Dr.	R-2, I-1	I-1
Map G4, Lot 26-1	Hillview Ter.	R-1, R-2	R-2

Table LU-1. Proposed Zoning Changes for Split Lots (See Map LU-4)

Other Zoning District Changes			
Parcel ID	Address	Current Zoning	Proposed Zoning
Map E5, Lot 29-43	352 Manville Rd.	I-1	R-3
Map E5, Lot 29-106	Manville Rd.	I-1	MU-2
Map F6, Lot 51-109	Mendon Rd.	MU-2	R-2
Map D2, Lot 6-117	117 First Ave.	I-1	MU-1
Map D2, Lot 6-118	229 First Ave.	I-1	MU-1
Map D6, Lot 49-246	115 Ricard St.	I-1	MU-2
Map D6, Lot 49-2	117 Ricard St.	I-1	MU-2
Map D4, Lot 27-172	148 Hamlet Ave.	I-1	MU-2
Map D5, Lot 28-12	153 Hamlet Ave.	I-1	MU-2
Map D3, Lots 14-21, 142, 387, 371, 143, 144, 145, 428, 154, 155, 174, 175, 176, 177, 407, 178, 342, 418	Truman Dr., Market Sq., and Island Pl.	MU-1	C-1
Map C3, Lots 13-36, 13-75, 13-76, 13-77, 78, 36	East School St. at Pond St.	I-2	R-4
Map E3, Lots 4-271, 4-272, 4-273, 4-31, 4-171, 4-67, 4-274, 4-136, 4-250	Asylum St., Roberta Ave., Rockland Ave.	MU-2	R-2
Map G3, Lot 11-90	Barry Field	PR-1	C-1
Map G3, Lot 11-91	1409 Park Ave.	R-3	C-1
Maps G5, H5, Lots 33-1, 33-2, 33-5, 33-19	Booth Pond Conservation Area	PR-1	PR-2
	Social District	C-2	MU-3

Table LU-2. Proposed Zoning Changes Other than for Split Lots (See Map LU-5)



Woonsocket from Above (WorldAtlas)

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL LU-1: Retain the City's character through the application of its regulatory functions.

POLICY LU-1.1: Continue using specific design guidelines for Design Review to assist property owners in appropriate design.

ACTION LU-1.1a: Continue to ensure that minimum landscape requirements are included in new development and redevelopment projects within the City's commercial and mixed-use districts.

ACTION LU-1.1b: Review and revise the design guidelines to include consideration of the historic context and the more urban nature of the City.

GOAL LU-2: Ensure housing availability appropriate to the income levels of the residents of the City.

POLICY LU-2.1: Provide a balanced range of housing.

POLICY LU-2.2: Encourage the provision of affordable housing opportunities in the Northern Rhode Island region.

GOAL LU-3: Support the industrialized nature of the City and make necessary adaptations to meet modern developmental constraints.

POLICY LU-3.1: Ensure that enough land remains zoned for industrial uses to maintain opportunities for industrial businesses and jobs.

ACTION LU-3.1a: Improve and enforce performance criteria for the regulation

of all industrial uses, with regard to varying degrees of noise, traffic generation, air pollution, sewer usage, solid waste production, effects on water quality, production of odors, the use or storage of hazardous materials, stormwater management, erosion control, site design, landscaping, and exterior lighting.

POLICY LU-3.2: Allow for innovative adaptation and mixed uses in the City's aging mill structures.

GOAL LU-4: Protect Woonsocket's few remaining natural areas and preserve and enhance the physical remains and sites associated with its cultural heritage.

POLICY LU-4.1: Incorporate natural and cultural resource protection in development and redevelopment processes.

ACTION LU-4.1a: Continue to administer the Soil Erosion Control Ordinance to prevent non-point source pollution of the City's water bodies, and to preserve the integrity of Woonsocket's landscape.

POLICY LU-4.2: Provide for the stewardship of critical resource areas.

ACTION LU-4.2a: Develop policy standards to guide and prioritize the acquisition of critical resource areas.

POLICY LU-4.3: Encourage the preservation and thoughtful redevelopment of historic properties.

ACTION LU-4.3a: Explore options for establishing voluntary historic design guidelines in particular neighborhoods.

GOAL LU-5: Effectively implement the land use goals of the City while protecting the rights of individuals.

POLICY LU-5.1: Develop a revised Zoning Ordinance, consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

ACTION LU-5.1a: Explore and implement as determined appropriate the zoning text amendments described in this Land Use Plan Element.

ACTION LU-5.1b: Adopt the zoning map amendments described in this Land Use Plan Element.

ACTION LU-5.1c: Develop a new MU-3 zoning district for the Social District that allows for a mix of commercial and residential uses and creates a more walkable neighborhood.

POLICY LU-5.2: Review and revise all land use regulatory measures to ensure consistency.

POLICY LU-5.3: Streamline the regulatory process.

POLICY LU-5.4: Provide training for agents of the City on the consistent application of their powers.

GOAL LU-6: Provide access to open space for all residents and bring environmental values into the City.

POLICY LU-6.1: Provide a variety of recreational areas and facilities for all residential areas in the community.

POLICY LU-6.2: Preserve and protect significant undeveloped and environmentally sensitive areas through acquisition and regulatory programs.

GOAL LU-7: Plan for Land Use anticipated with the improvement of the City's transportation network and coordinate its accommodation of all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobile drivers.

POLICY LU-7.1: Review land use policies along those areas directly affected by transportation improvements.

POLICY LU-7.2: Continue to adjust standards for parking and site layouts in the City's regulatory processes to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

ACTION LU-7.2a: Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to encourage or require most parking to be located to the rear of side of buildings.

GOAL LU-8: Encourage the development of the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor.

POLICY LU-8.1: Continue to develop recreational areas related to the Corridor system.

ACTION: LU-8.1a: Produce a Master Plan for parks, interpretation, and tourism development along the River.

POLICY LU-8.2: Continue to review all development proposals on parcels within the River Corridor Review Overlay District to ensure environmental protection and visual integrity to this critical area.

ACTION: LU-8.2a: Consider adding a standard to the River Corridor Review Overlay District that would require analyzing opportunities to provide public

access to the river.

GOAL LU-9: Maintain a Planning & Development Department that satisfactorily plans for Woonsocket's optimum physical, economic, and community development.

POLICY LU-9.1: Coordinate the actions of the various boards and agencies in areas where overlap occurs.

ACTION: LU-9.1a: Conduct periodic reviews of building permit fees and other fees.

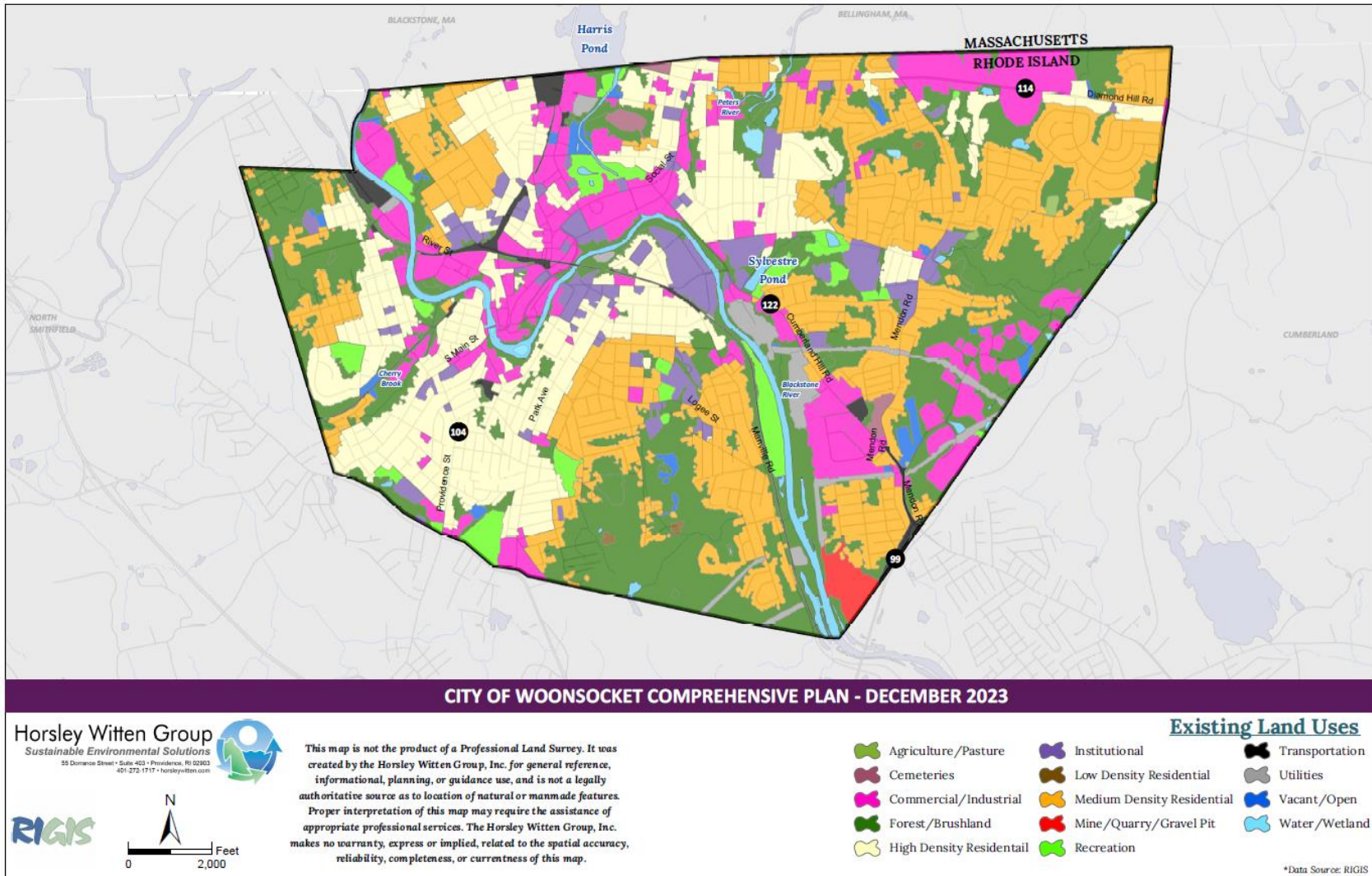
ACTION: LU-9.1b: Provide regular updates to various boards about relevant business conducted by the Planning & Development Department and Planning Board.

POLICY LU-9.2: Ensure that the City boards and agencies are well informed of the components and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan, so they may routinely follow the Plan's intent in decision-making processes.

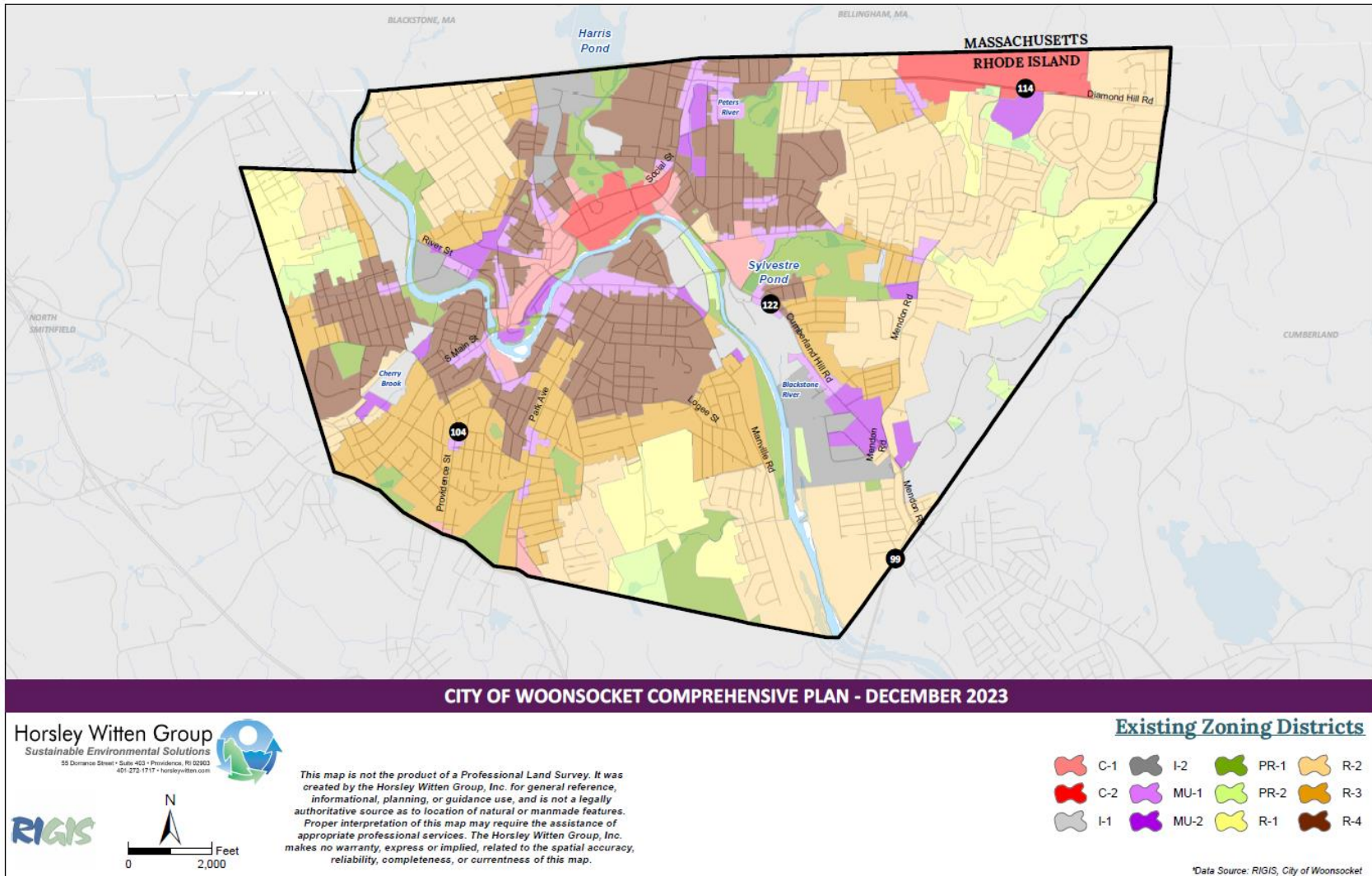
ACTION: LU-9.2a: Carefully review and update regulatory documents, (i.e., Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision & Land Development Regulations, etc.) as part of the Comprehensive Planning process to be more aligned with the City's goals and developer's needs.

ACTION: LU-9.2b: Conduct workshops for the purpose of familiarizing the various boards and agencies with the City's goals and policies as established in this Comprehensive Plan Update.

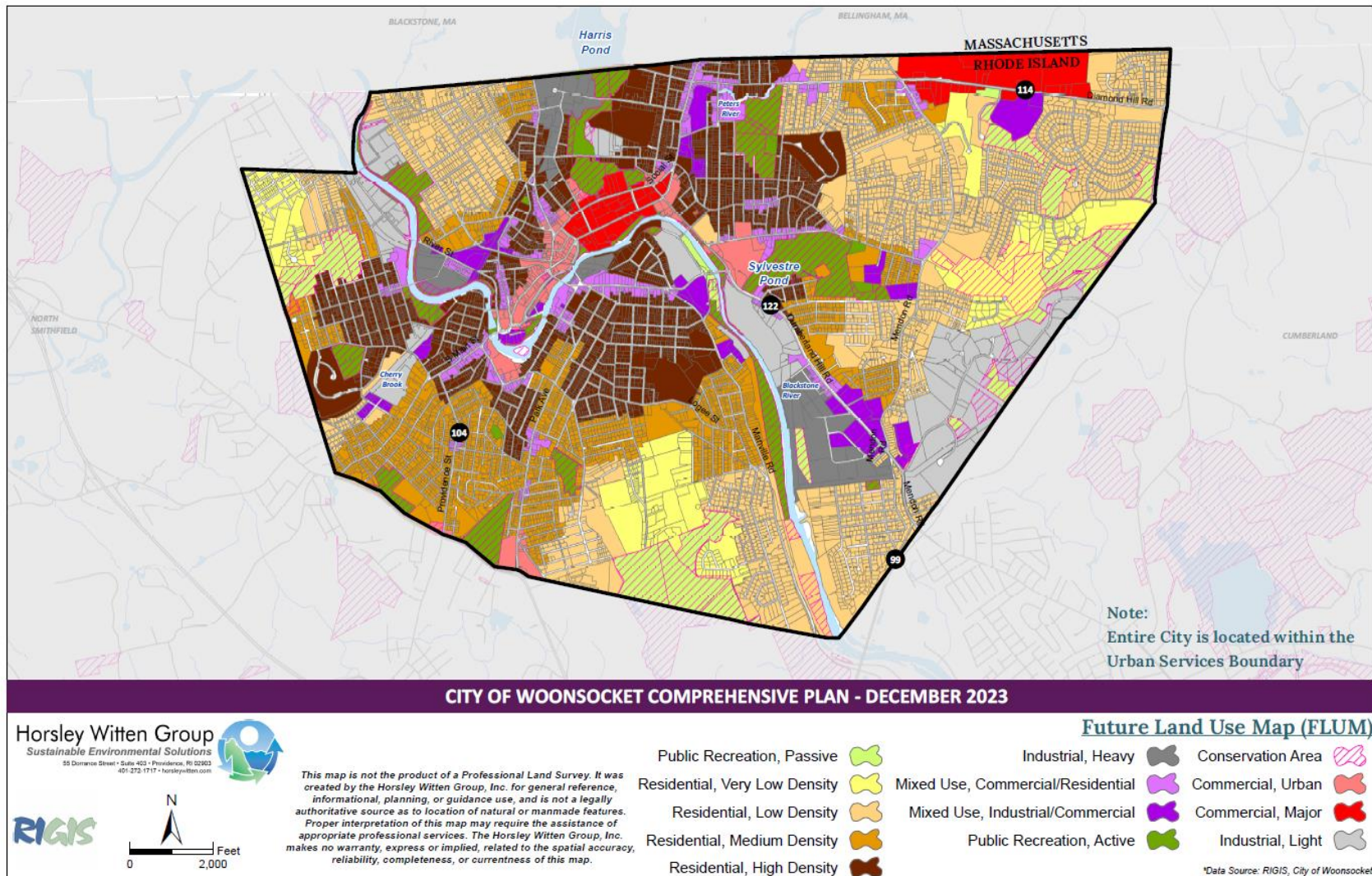
ACTION: LU-9.2c: Provide opportunities for board members to participate in outside training including those required by State law or others as deemed appropriate.



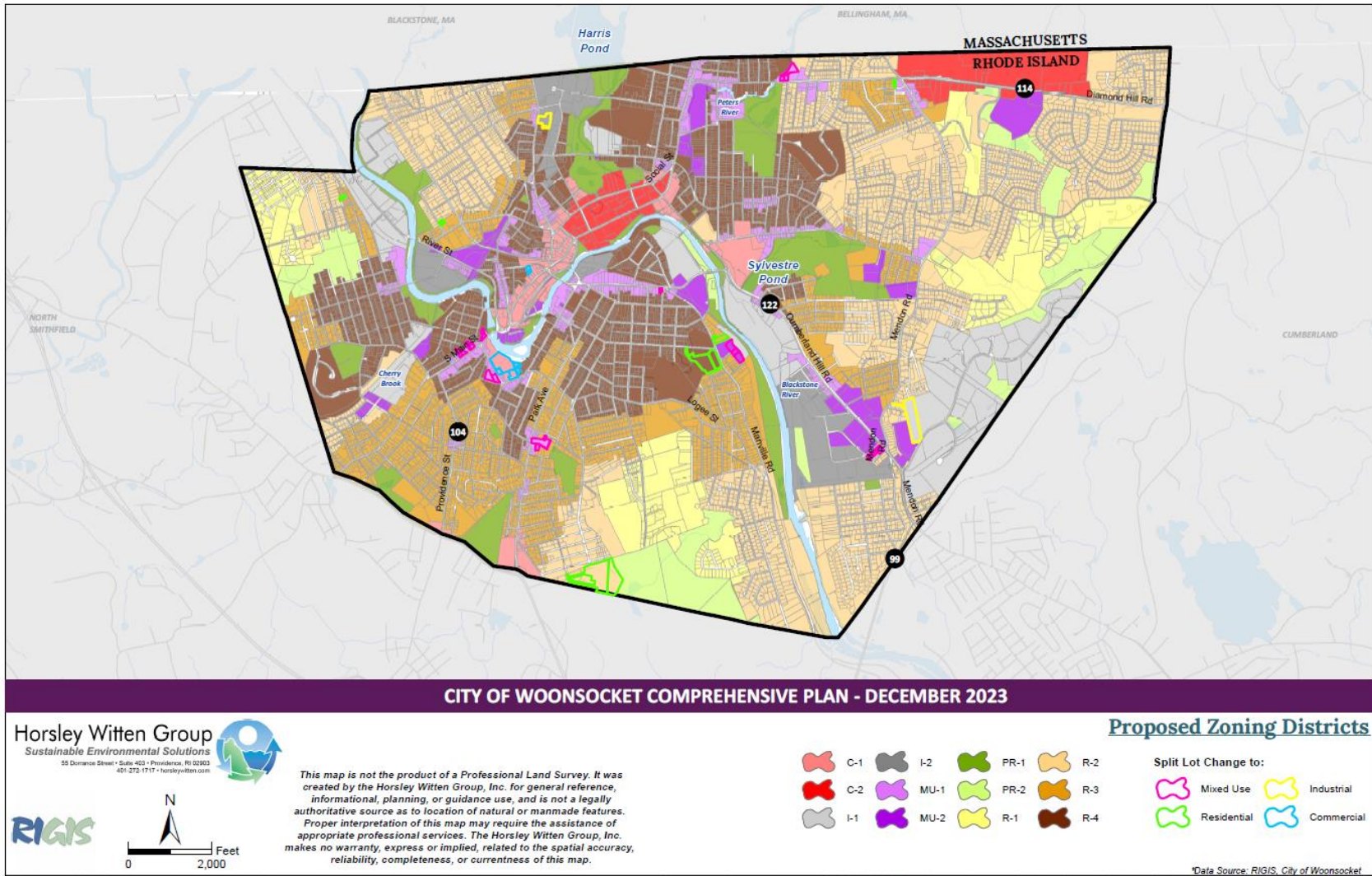
Map LU-1. Existing Land Uses



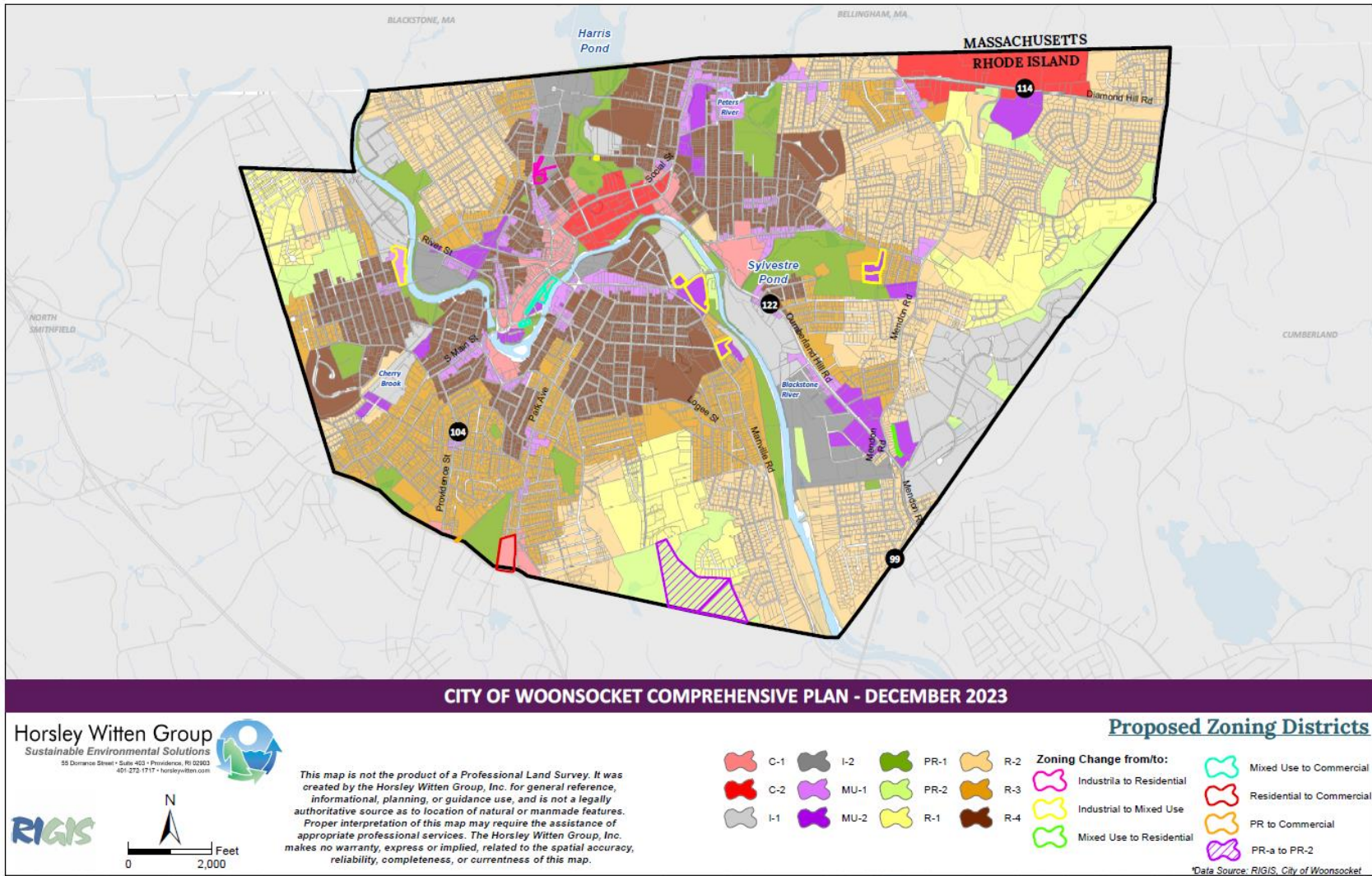
Map LU-2. Existing Zoning Districts



Map LU-3. Future Land Use Map



Map LU-4. Proposed Zoning Changes for Split Lots



Map LU-5. Proposed Zoning Changes Other than for Split Lots

XI. IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The Implementation Program is designed to keep the Comprehensive Plan from growing dusty on a shelf. It sets a framework for how different groups and individuals will use the Plan, how the City holds itself accountable for implementing actions, and how new volunteers and elected officials learn about the content of the Plan. The Implementation Program also includes a separate spreadsheet matrix of the action items from each chapter of the plan (“Getting it Done”) in one place.

The Program focuses on four major objectives:

1. Developing a framework to ensure implementation.
2. Educating all boards, commissions, City staff, and elected officials on the content of the plan.
3. Establishing administrative policies that support implementation.
4. Maintaining a comprehensive list of action items that can be tracked over time.

While identification of actions is important, there must be buy-in from everyone and a system for making sure things get done. This Implementation Program must be maintained and updated on a regular basis by:

- Assessing how implementation is proceeding.
- Adding or deleting actions as the Plan is amended from time to time.
- Refining actions already under way in order to enhance their implementation or improve their effectiveness.
- Archiving actions when they are fully completed.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

This process is intended to cultivate a culture of planning within Woonsocket where the overall framework of the Plan is periodically reviewed and the supporting actions are regularly revised to respond to changing conditions. This approach will help the Plan remain effective and relevant until it is time for a full update and will also help meet the state’s new requirement that communities must have a strategic plan for comprehensive plan implementation that is reviewed annually by the City.

Implementation of the Plan will be a gradual and continual process. While some actions should (and will) be carried out right away, others may take a decade or more to fully realize. Further, since some recommendations will involve additional study or a commitment of fiscal or staff resources, their implementation may take place over several years or occur in stages. For the Comprehensive Plan to be successfully realized, it must serve as a guide to all residents, businesses, and individuals interested in a thriving future for Woonsocket. Consequently, Woonsocket needs a system for multiple people and groups to monitor implementation progress. The City may consider including all or parts of the ideas below in

its City Code of Ordinances, making them more enforceable. The roles for various entities may include:

Implementation Committee

Experience in other communities has shown that implementation can be much more effective if the City establishes an Implementation Committee (IC) to oversee implementation. The IC would be established and appointed by the Mayor's Office. The IC would be responsible for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Plan. The IC would be tasked with assessing the status of specific actions, evaluating priorities, and suggesting new implementation techniques where appropriate. Job responsibilities the IC should be empowered to pursue include the following:

- The IC should meet at least two times per year and be the primary coordinators for gathering the information needed to track progress, with the assistance of Planning & Development Department Staff.
- IC members should contact all entities identified as "leads" in the implementation matrix once a year. Staff should prepare a check sheet for each lead, listing the tactical actions they are responsible for. This sheet should provide space for leads to report on the status of the actions for which they are responsible. It should also note any actions that have other "supporters."
- Once received, the IC should compile all the responses into an Annual Report and work with planning staff and leads if there are any discrepancies. This report should also include a summary of the major successes of the past year, explanations or justifications for any actions that appear to be inconsistent with the goals and strategies of the Plan, implementation plans for the coming year, and recommendations, if any, on future Plan amendments.
- The IC may also serve as an adjudicator of sorts, taking complaints or concerns throughout the year regarding actions that may be inconsistent with the plan and providing advice to the Mayor's Office and City Council on how to respond.

This document presumes the establishment of an IC. If an IC is not established, then references to the IC should be interpreted as meaning whatever City entity/entities is/are tasked with overseeing Plan implementation.

Leads

These should include City department heads or their designees, the Mayor's Office, City Council, and City boards and commissions.

- Leads should be asked each year to report on the status of the actions they are responsible for.
- Government-related entities could be required by ordinance to fill out the check sheet provided by the IC.
- Further, each lead will be responsible for getting updates from any "supporters" identified in the implementation matrix.

Planning Board

As the Board will likely be the lead implementer for a large number of actions, it should set aside for its official meeting agendas at least two hours every four months dedicated to working on these actions. The Board should have the authority, in advance of such items on their agenda, to request updates from any other leads or supporting implementers for the actions being discussed.

Mayor's Office

The Mayor's Office should be responsible for holding the IC accountable for its responsibilities and may formally request of the IC further information or explanation if the Mayor concludes that an action has not been thoroughly addressed or has been misrepresented in some way.

Communications & Transparency

The Annual Report should be posted on the City's website and be advertised through any communication strategies that will reach the greatest number of residents (whether local media, social media, e-mail notifications, etc.). For the sake of transparency, contact information for each lead should be provided. All residents should be welcome to reach out with any questions or concerns, or to express an interest in volunteering their time and expertise in implementing any action. Copies of the Annual Report (in hard copy or electronically) should be shared with the administrations of each of the municipalities bordering Woonsocket.

Education

Several simple steps may be taken to make sure that City staff, volunteers, and elected officials are aware of the Plan in terms of what it is for and what it includes.

- Every City facility or department should maintain a hard copy of the Plan for staff reference.
- Each new member of any City board or commission, local elected official, and City staff should take a brief tutorial on the Plan given by Staff and the IC.

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO

GOAL: Develop a process for Plan implementation that ensures the Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan is referred to in all City decision making and that lead implementers are held accountable for furthering the action(s) for which they are responsible.

POLICY: Develop and officially adopt a system for multiple people and groups to monitor implementation progress of the Plan.

POLICY: Reserve meeting time each year for the Planning Board to focus on Plan implementation and encourage other lead implementers to do the same.

POLICY: Develop a system for ensuring that all City staff, volunteer board and committee members, and elected officials are educated on the content of the Plan

and how to use it.

POLICY: Develop a public communications strategy to ensure the general public knows where to find information on Plan implementation or to volunteer to help.



WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Baseline Report – September 2023

Prepared for the City of Woonsocket by the Horsley Witten Group



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1. INTRODUCTION

What is this all about?

WHAT IS THE WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The City of Woonsocket is updating its Comprehensive Plan. A Comprehensive Plan is a shared vision for Woonsocket's future and a roadmap that guides how we get there together. It helps us make the things we love about Woonsocket even better and fix the things that need to be fixed. A good Comprehensive Plan is a tool that can be used frequently by City leaders, staff, boards, and committees to make decisions about:

- What new development looks like and where it happens
- How the City can protect environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites
- Prioritizing future investments in community services and infrastructure to make sure they go where they are needed most
- Better supporting local business development
- How to work with private developers to spur public and private investments across the City

Its most important goal is to protect and enhance the things in Woonsocket that make it a great place to live, both for today's residents and future generations.

WHY DO WE NEED A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The Comprehensive Plan helps the City . . .

- Make better decisions about where to invest public infrastructure and improve municipal services.
- Understand changing demographics and how shifts might impact housing, municipal services, transportation needs, and other aspects of City life.
- Bring residents together to talk about the City's future.
- Be eligible for funding opportunities, showing how projects have been vetted with the public and are local priorities.
- Stay in line with Rhode Island state law. *RI Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act: All municipalities are to prepare and adopt a single comprehensive plan that is to be updated and re-adopted not less than ten years.*

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

- **Existing Plans:** We're not starting from scratch! The City has done a lot of planning over the years. The updated Comprehensive Plan is built on the current plan and other existing work to pull all the best ideas into one place.
- **Facts and Data:** In order to have the most useful plan, we need to understand who lives in Woonsocket, how old we are, where we come from, where we work, and how we get from place to place, in order to make solid decisions for our future.

- **Needs and Big Ideas:** Beyond the numbers, we need to bring residents together to talk about the City's future and address our needs.

The Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan is made up of three volumes:

Baseline Report: This document, the Baseline Report, is a snapshot of existing conditions in Woonsocket. It includes inventories of what exists today as well as projections of future needs and trends. This information is collected through City staff interviews, public meetings, outreach to key stakeholders, and review of existing reports and other documents. The Baseline Report was prepared at the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan update process and completed in 2021 with some minor edits before adoption. The purpose of this document is to provide the foundation for sound policy development moving forward.

Plan: The main body of the comprehensive plan, which includes the most important information to make sure everyone in the City is working toward the same goals. The document begins by describing a vision for how residents see the City 20 years from now. It then identifies the formative issues that will shape policy for each of the focus areas within the plan (e.g., Housing, Economic Development, etc.). Finally, the Plan lays out the framework for how the City will reach its vision through goals, objectives, and implementation actions.

Implementation Report: The final volume of the comprehensive plan, which provides greater detail on individual implementation actions. Responsible parties, such as City departments or boards and commissions, are identified along with implementation timeframes. Since the Comprehensive Plan has a 20-year outlook, implementation actions are divided into short term (to be completed within five years), mid-term (to be completed between five and 10 years), and long-term (to be completed in 10 to 20 years) implementation periods.

WOONSOCKET: WHO WE ARE

The City of Woonsocket was formed in 1871 by the coalescence of six mill villages clustered on either side of the Blackstone River and incorporated as a city in 1888. The city saw an extraordinary boom period of industrialization that lasted well into the twentieth century. The deindustrialization of the Northeast affected Woonsocket, resulting in a net and continual loss of population since the 1950s.

Woonsocket is a city of distinct character and presence. Its physical quality is defined, in part, by a rough topographic profile. The steeply sloping terrain is so prevalent that in the Social Area of the City, the exceptional difference of its landform has resulted in it being called the "Flatlands." The old sections of the City show remarkable achievements of building in areas with great physical constraints.

Certainly, the determining influence on Woonsocket's physical character and development is the presence of the Blackstone River, which twists its way through the entire City. The

power engendered in the rapid descent of the river, especially at Woonsocket Falls, led to the clustering of mill villages in the area which eventually coalesced to become the Town, and then the City of Woonsocket.

The City's special character is not only defined by its physical presence: its social character also has a distinctive quality. A small city, in a small state, Woonsocket is close-knit and inward-looking, with the positive attributes of a shared identity and feeling of community. The self-contained nature of the City may be rooted in the fact that it was for many years a predominantly French-Canadian enclave in an English-speaking state. Today, Woonsocket residents come from a wide diversity of backgrounds. They are hardworking and mostly working class, with strong ethnic and family ties.

2.DEMOGRAPHICS

What is Woonsocket like today and where is it heading?

WHY DEMOGRAPHICS MATTER

Understanding the make-up of the people who live in the community gives the City of Woonsocket guidance into future needs for housing, social services, recreation, transportation, and other factors that contribute to a resident's quality of life. Important attributes of a population to consider are age, racial and ethnic background, household composition, income, and special needs. Shifts in these characteristics within Woonsocket and the region can give insight into trends and changing preferences.

POPULATION

HISTORIC AND CURRENT POPULATION

Figure 2-1 shows how the City's population has trended over the years since 1910. As of 2019, the estimated population of the City was 41,603. The City's population peaked in 1950 and has been slowly but steadily declining since then. However, the estimate for 2019 shows a slight (1.0%) increase in population from 2010. U.S. Census 2020 numbers should be released soon, and it will be interesting to see if this increase is confirmed. If so, it will be the first decade-over-decade population increase in 70 years – a very positive sign for Woonsocket's future.

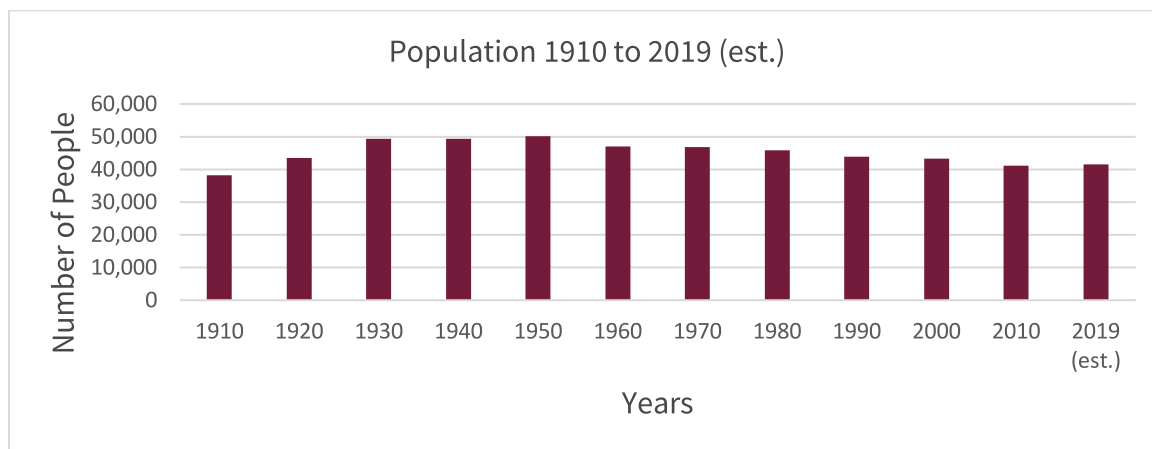


Figure 2-1. Woonsocket Population Trends

Source: U.S. Census

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Population projections were prepared by the Rhode Island Division of Planning in 2013, as shown in **Table 2-1**. Note that current U.S. Census estimates already show a greater population for 2019 than these projections do for 2020. These projections are simply a snapshot in time, and there is really no way to predict future population with certainty. If Woonsocket is successful in planning for jobs and housing, these trends in declining population could very well reverse.

20-YEAR POPULATION PROJECTIONS				
2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
38,587	37,874	37,027	35,992	34,752

Table 2-1. Woonsocket Population Projections, 2020-2040

Source: RI Department of Administration, Division of Planning

AGE OF POPULATION

The age range in Woonsocket, as shown in **Table 2-2**, is fairly similar to Rhode Island overall, with a few key exceptions. Woonsocket has a higher proportion of children under 10 years old (12.9% vs. 8.5% in RI) and young adults ages 25-34 (17.6% vs. 13.7% in RI), and a lower proportion of older residents ages 65 and older (13.7% vs. 16.8% in RI). These may seem like small differences, but they could have large impacts over time. If the City continues to attract or maintain young adults, there could be even more young children and more working age adults to help support the local economy.

AGE	POPULATION	% OF POPULATION
Under 5 years	2,925	7.0%
5 to 9 years	2,455	5.9%
10 to 14 years	2,040	4.9%
15 to 19 years	2,478	6.0%
20 to 24 years	2,762	6.6%
25 to 34 years	7,330	17.6%
35 to 44 years	4,925	11.8%
45 to 54 years	5,461	13.1%
55 to 64 years	5,520	13.3%
65 to 74 years	3,173	7.6%
75 to 84 years	1,651	4.0%
85 years and over	883	2.1%
TOTAL	41,603	100%

Table 2-2. Woonsocket Population by Age, 2019 Estimates

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2019 estimates

POPULATION BY RACE

Woonsocket remains a predominantly White community, as shown in **Table 2-3**. However, the city is becoming increasingly diverse. For example, since 2010, the Black or African American population has increased from 5.0% to 9.6% and people identifying as being of Two or More Races has increased from 2.7% to 5.4%. Much of the White population continues to reflect the long-standing French-Canadian, Italian, and other communities of Woonsocket. This diversity and sense of community among the various ethnic communities of Woonsocket continues to be a strength for the City.

RACE	POPULATION	% OF POPULATION
White	30,578	73.5%
Black or African American	3,994	9.6%
Asian	2,413	5.8%
Other	2,371	5.7%
Two or More Races	2,247	5.4%
Total	41,603	100%

Table 2-3. Woonsocket Population by Race, 2019 Estimates

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2019 estimates

POPULATION BY ETHNICITY

The Hispanic/Latino population has been growing rapidly in Woonsocket, as it has across much of Rhode Island, as shown in **Table 2-4**. Since 2010, that demographic has increased from 12.2% to 18.8% of the City's population. By far, the largest proportion of this population has Puerto Rican heritage, followed more distantly by people of Dominican and Mexican heritage.

ETHNICITY	POPULATION	% OF POPULATION
Hispanic or Latino (any race)	7,818	18.8%
Not Hispanic or Latino	33,785	81.2%
TOTAL	41,603	100%

Table 2-4. Woonsocket Population by Ethnicity, 2019 Estimates

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2019 estimates

EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational attainment in Woonsocket has long been well below average compared with Rhode Island overall, but has been rising steadily over the years. Just between 2010 and 2019, the percent of adults 25 years and over without a high school degree has dropped from 27.7% to 18.3%. While this is still well above the statewide average of 11.2%, it is a

remarkably positive trend over such a short period of time. The percentage of residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher has increased from 12.9% in 2010 to 17.8% in 2019. Again, this is well below the statewide average of 34.2%, but marks a positive trend. Low education levels can limit the types of businesses interested in locating or expanding in Woonsocket, if they feel they cannot find the types of educated employees they need. The increasing trends in educational attainment in Woonsocket should be a positive signal for employers.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	POPULATION 25-YRS & OLDER	% OF POPULATION 25-YRS & OLDER
Less than 9 th grade	1,955	6.8%
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	3,324	11.5%
High School diploma/GED equivalency	10,163	35.1%
Completed some college	5,990	20.7%
Associate's Degree	2,364	8.2%
Bachelor's Degree	3,357	11.6%
Graduate or Professional Degree	1,790	6.2%
TOTAL	28,943	100%

Table 2-1. Woonsocket Educational Attainment, 2019 Estimates

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2019 estimates

INCOME

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Median household incomes in Woonsocket are a little less than 2/3 of the median for Rhode Island overall (\$42,595 vs. \$67,167). The range of incomes in Woonsocket is bottom heavy, with over 40% of households earning less than \$35,000 per year, which is roughly half the median income for Rhode Island or less. At the same time, there is a disproportionately small percentage of higher income earners making \$150,000 a year or more (4.7% of households in Woonsocket compared with 14.9% in Rhode Island). This disparity in incomes means for many Woonsocket households that everything from housing to utilities to health care to consumer products cost a higher share of their incomes than for their neighbors elsewhere in Rhode Island. For the City, this translates into lower tax revenues and greater expenses on social services.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	HOUSEHOLDS	% OF OCCUPIED HOUSEHOLDS
Less than \$10,000	1,766	10.6%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1,066	6.4%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	2,166	13.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	1,766	10.6%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	2,583	15.5%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	2,716	16.3%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	1,816	10.9%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	1,983	11.9%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	500	3.0%
\$200,000 or more	283	1.7%
TOTAL	16,663	100%
Median Household Income	\$42,595	

Table 2-6. Woonsocket Median Household Income, 2019 Estimates

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2019 estimates

TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATION STATISTICS

For an urban community, Woonsocket is highly dependent on private vehicles for day-to-day transportation, with over $\frac{3}{4}$ of people driving alone on their commutes. However, approximately 18% of the City's population lives in a household without access to a private vehicle (see **Figure 2-2**). This suggests that alternative transportation options (whether RIPTA bus routes, ride services for senior citizens, commuter rail, etc.) remain a very important need in the City. The percent of people who take transit or walk to work is surprisingly low for an urban community (see **Figure 2-3**) and is actually less than the state overall (5.4% vs. 5.9%). This is explored further in the Circulation section.

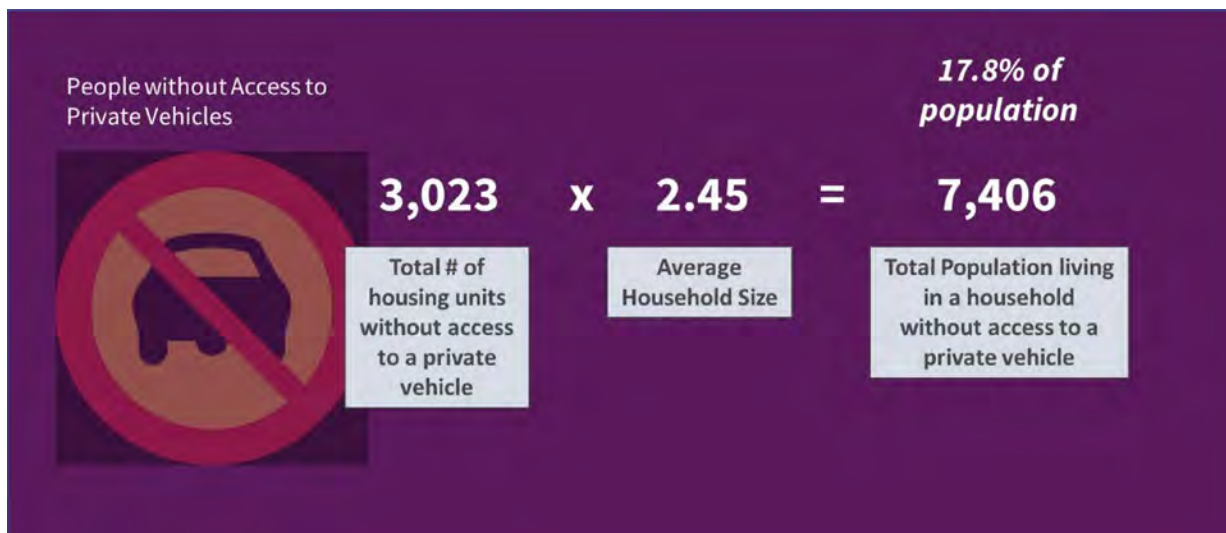


Figure 2-2. People without Access to Private Vehicles

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2019 estimates

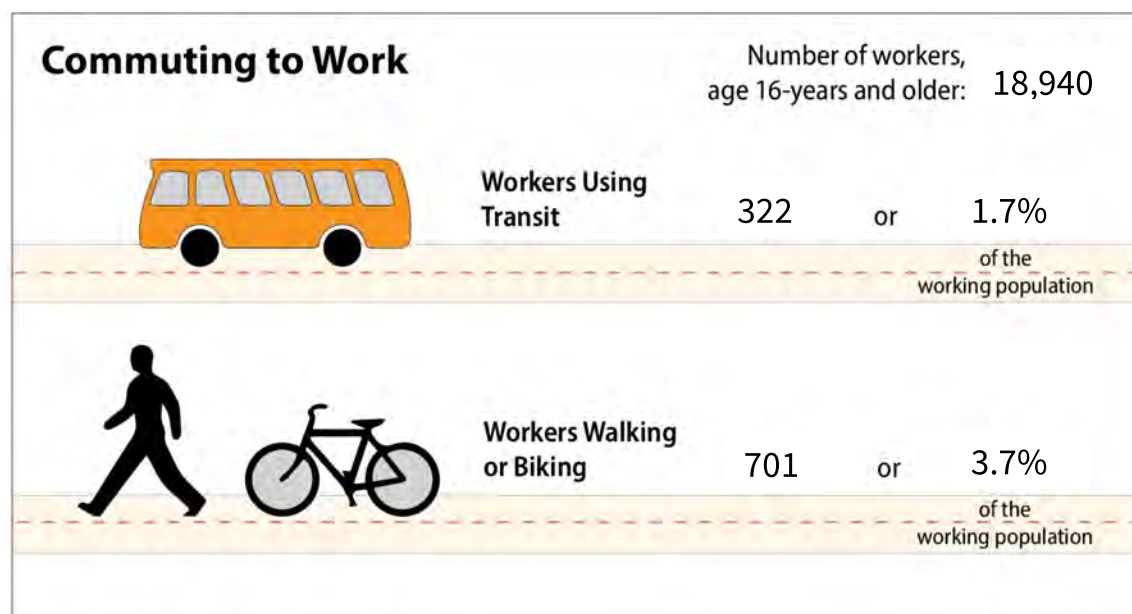


Figure 2-3. Commuting to Work

Source: Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2019 estimates

3. LAND USE

How does Woonsocket use its land? Plus, an overview of Zoning.

WHY LAND USE MATTERS

The types of land uses allowed and where they occur influence economic, environmental, and social aspects of a community. Woonsocket uses several tools to manage land development. The zoning ordinance regulates where a particular use can happen, its placement within a parcel, and performance standards a development must demonstrate to meet community objectives around environmental quality and other impacts. The Subdivision and Land Development Regulations ensure standards are met in the subdivision of land and development of new roads and lay out the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance administered by the Planning Board.

LAND MANAGEMENT TOOLS

ZONING ORDINANCE

Most cities and towns throughout the United States, including Woonsocket, use zoning to regulate the use of land within their borders. The Zoning Map divides the City into “districts” or “zones.” For example, Woonsocket has numerous “residential zones,” “commercial and business zones,” and “industrial zones.” The City’s online GIS map viewer, which includes a Zoning layer, can be [viewed here](#).

Zoning became common about 100 years ago, and Woonsocket was an early adopter, with its first Zoning Law passed in 1923. Originally, the main goal of zoning was to keep people safe. For example, many cities used zoning to ensure that residential neighborhoods were not located too close to dangerous industrial uses. Over time, zoning has evolved to achieve many different objectives, from meeting housing and transportation needs, to facilitating the adequate provision of public services and utilities, to the conservation of natural resources and the prevention of blight and pollution.

The original zoning ordinance has been edited as needed over time, but in a lot of ways it no longer works the way the City wants it to. Anecdotally, a lot of property owners seek variances, and many of them are easily granted. This is a good sign that zoning does not

Land Use – what’s happening on the ground, including development and natural land cover.

Zoning – local regulations that determine what can be built where, how it can be used, and how big it is, among other development standards.

always match the type of development the City desires. It is time for an overhaul to ensure that Woonsocket's zoning is meeting the needs and realities of people *today*. This plan can be used to guide any future zoning overhaul. In discussions with City staff, the following Zoning Ordinance issues were identified to be explored and discussed in the Comprehensive Plan to the extent they can be. Ultimately, the City will need a more detailed plan to overhaul its zoning.

Language Specific to Woonsocket – The introduction to the Zoning Ordinance includes generic language on the purposes of zoning. This could be rewritten to be specific to the conditions, character, and needs of Woonsocket.

Diamond Hill Road and the Social District – Both of these areas have the same zoning today, C-2. However, these are very different places with different characters. Diamond Hill Road is home to several strip commercial centers with large parking lots in front. While vacancy rates are low, this area has difficulty attracting and maintaining the big box stores it was designed for. The Social District was originally meant to be a new, modern downtown adjacent to the historic old downtown. Over time, it has become an area defined by pavement (roadways and parking lots), spread out, low-slung commercial buildings, and a handful of taller buildings. Should there be new visions for these two corridors? Should the visions be different from one another? Are there other things the community would like to see in these places? The Comprehensive Planning process will explore these questions with the community and describe what the preferred land uses and development types are for the future. The zoning ordinance should then be revised, possibly creating different zoning districts for these two areas, to better achieve the vision.

Table of Use Regulations – This table shows what uses are permitted, prohibited, permitted with a special use permit, or permitted as an accessory use, in each zoning district. The table should be reviewed and updated to meet several purposes:

- Are all modern uses represented in the table? Are new uses needed? Are there out-of-date uses that should be removed?
- Is it clear what each use means? All uses that don't have a very clear, common meaning should be defined.
- Do the use allowances make sense in each zoning district? It should be easier to permit the uses the City wants where it wants them. For example, if the City is regularly granting variances for a use that is prohibited in a certain zone, perhaps that use should be permitted by right or with a special use permit instead.

Parking – The parking regulations need to be evaluated to make sure they are meeting actual demand. It is bad to have too much parking **or** too little. Anecdotally, Woonsocket approves many variances for parking, which suggests the regulations should be adjusted. Many of Woonsocket's commercial areas appear to have too much parking. This ends up taking up space that could be used for other development or landscaping. The City has recently instituted reduced parking requirements in the Downtown Overlay District. So far, this has been working out well, and should be explored in other commercial and mixed-use areas of the City. On the other hand, many of the City's older, denser residential

neighborhoods don't have enough room to provide onsite parking for everyone who lives there. Residential parking standards in these neighborhoods need to balance the real need for accommodating parking demand without precluding redevelopment of properties that simply cannot fit all the required parking on site. Parking regulations are often written from the perspective of a brand-new development on wide open land, which just isn't the case for most of Woonsocket. Woonsocket's parking regulations acknowledge that most of the City is built out already. For commercial, industrial, and multi-family parking lots, standards for landscaping and pedestrian circulation should be reviewed to make sure these lots are attractive and safe.

Mill Redevelopment and Adaptive Reuse – Mill buildings remain a significant land use in Woonsocket, whether still actively used for manufacturing and other industrial uses, or with potential to be converted to commercial, residential or mixed-use. Mill buildings that are no longer viable for industrial uses have for many years been encouraged in Woonsocket to convert to other uses, such as residential apartments. However, it can be difficult to redevelop these properties according to the density standards for underlying zoning, which generally allow a maximum number of units per acre (or may not allow residential at all). Rather than having such redevelopment projects go through a number of variances, the City should explore an overlay zone that permits density based on net usable floor area as opposed to density based on land area, along with other performance standards to ensure the redevelopment is a good neighbor. The City already has something similar in its Historic Structures Floating Overlay Zone, which allows flexibility for the conversion of schools and other government buildings into residential space.

Signage – Signage standards should be evaluated to make sure they reflect the character of different locations. For example, sign standards are currently the same for the C-2 and C-1 districts, which means large signs more appropriate for heavily trafficked corridors are also allowed in smaller neighborhood commercial areas.

Housing and Residential Zones – Explore ways to make it easier to build and renovate the types of housing most needed in the community in a way that makes sense for each type of neighborhood. For example, based on feedback from City staff, many people are illegally subdividing homes. This suggests that there is a strong demand for smaller, more affordable units. Housing policy can be explored to provide for such housing legally. For example, accessory dwelling units are currently allowed only within an existing structure and only for family members. It may be worthwhile for the City to allow and regulate these in accessory buildings and for non-family members. On the other hand, there may be some neighborhoods that are too dense and would benefit from more land area per unit to make room for yards, gardens, and parking areas.

Number of Structures on a Parcel – Currently, only one primary structure is allowed on any parcel. Consequently, multi-use, multi-structure development (which can often be the case for mill building reuse) requires a subdivision and often reciprocal easements for common areas. The City may wish to explore allowing more than one primary structure on a parcel within particular zoning districts and on parcels of a certain size.

ZONING DISTRICTS

The City has a wide range of zoning districts, allowing for various residential, business, commercial, industrial, and mixed-uses. Industrial zones, including mixed-use industrial/commercial zones, tend to be located along the Blackstone River, where, historically, mill buildings and other early industrial activities were centered. Other major areas of industrially zoned land include the industrial park along the central eastern border of the City, areas adjacent to railroad tracks, the North Main Street corridor, and other smaller sites scattered around the City. Commercial zones are split into two major types: Urban and Major. Urban commercial zoning is more neighborhood/City-center oriented, and along with mixed-use commercial/residential zones is clustered in downtown Woonsocket, along Hamlet Street, around the Landmark Medical Center, and other smaller sites scattered around the City. More vehicle-oriented Major commercial zoning is located primarily in the Social District and the major shopping plazas along Diamond Hill Road. Woonsocket maintains two zones for public recreation, one geared toward active recreation such as playgrounds and sports fields, and the other toward passive recreation such as hiking or general conservation. The remainder of the City is zoned for residential use, ranging from single-family homes to triple-deckers and apartment buildings. Generally speaking, the higher density residential zoning districts are located near downtown and the City's traditional employment centers, while the lower density residential districts are located around the edges of the City.

ZONING DISTRICT	AREA IN ACRES	% OF TOTAL AREA
R-1 – Very Low Density Single-Family Residential District	371.9	7.5%
R-2 - Low Density Single-Family Residential District	1,331.4	26.7%
R-3 – Medium Density Single- and Two-Family Residential District	752.9	15.1%
R-4 - High Density Single- and Multifamily Residential District	858.6	17.2%
C-1 – Urban Commercial District	104.7	2.1%
C-2 – Major Commercial District	164.9	3.3%
MU-1 – Mixed-Use Commercial/Residential District	165.3	3.3%
MU-2 – Mixed-Use Industrial/Commercial District	134.6	2.7%
I-1 – Light Industrial District	394.7	7.9%
I-2 – Heavy Industrial District	159.5	3.2%
PR-1 – Active Public Recreation District	367.5	7.4%
PR-2 – Passive Public Recreation District	182.2	3.6%
TOTAL	4,988.2	100%

Table 3-1. Zoning Districts by Land Area

Source: City of Woonsocket GIS

The City's Zoning Ordinance also includes a number of special overlay zones. These are designed for several different purposes, from adding special protections to certain areas to allowing or incentivizing redevelopment of properties that might not otherwise be allowed. These additional zoning districts include:

Design Review Overlay District: *Regulates the design of new and existing commercial and mixed-use development to ensure positive impacts on the surrounding area.* The City currently has a Design Review body that uses both general design guidelines and downtown design guidelines to improve the aesthetics of local development in this overlay. However, it can be difficult to get developers to follow design guidelines, since they are not required. The City should explore what aspects of its design guidelines are most important and consider incorporating them into the zoning ordinance as standards – things that developers *must* follow. Further, the downtown design guidelines do a good job of encouraging good design specific to downtown. However, the general design guidelines don't always fit with the development they are meant to guide. The City should explore specific guidelines for specific contexts – for example, mixed-use neighborhood centers vs. more car-oriented shopping centers.

Planned Residential Development Overlay District: *Allows for more efficient use of land in the development of larger tracts of residential property.* Currently, this overlay is only allowed for properties of 10 acres or more. However, with such limited land left for residential subdivision, the City may consider reducing the minimum acres so that more land is conserved.

River Corridor Overlay District: *Regulates the use of land along the Blackstone River to maintain a healthy environment, public access, and high visual quality.* Staff finds the language in this section vague and feel it would be more useful if there were more explicit design or performance standards to guide review and decisions. Also, this overlay sometimes conflicts with the Design Review Overlay District, and these review processes should be better coordinated.

Special Flood Hazard Overlay District: *Restricts development in areas prone to flood damage.* This is a fairly standard overlay district for all communities in the state.

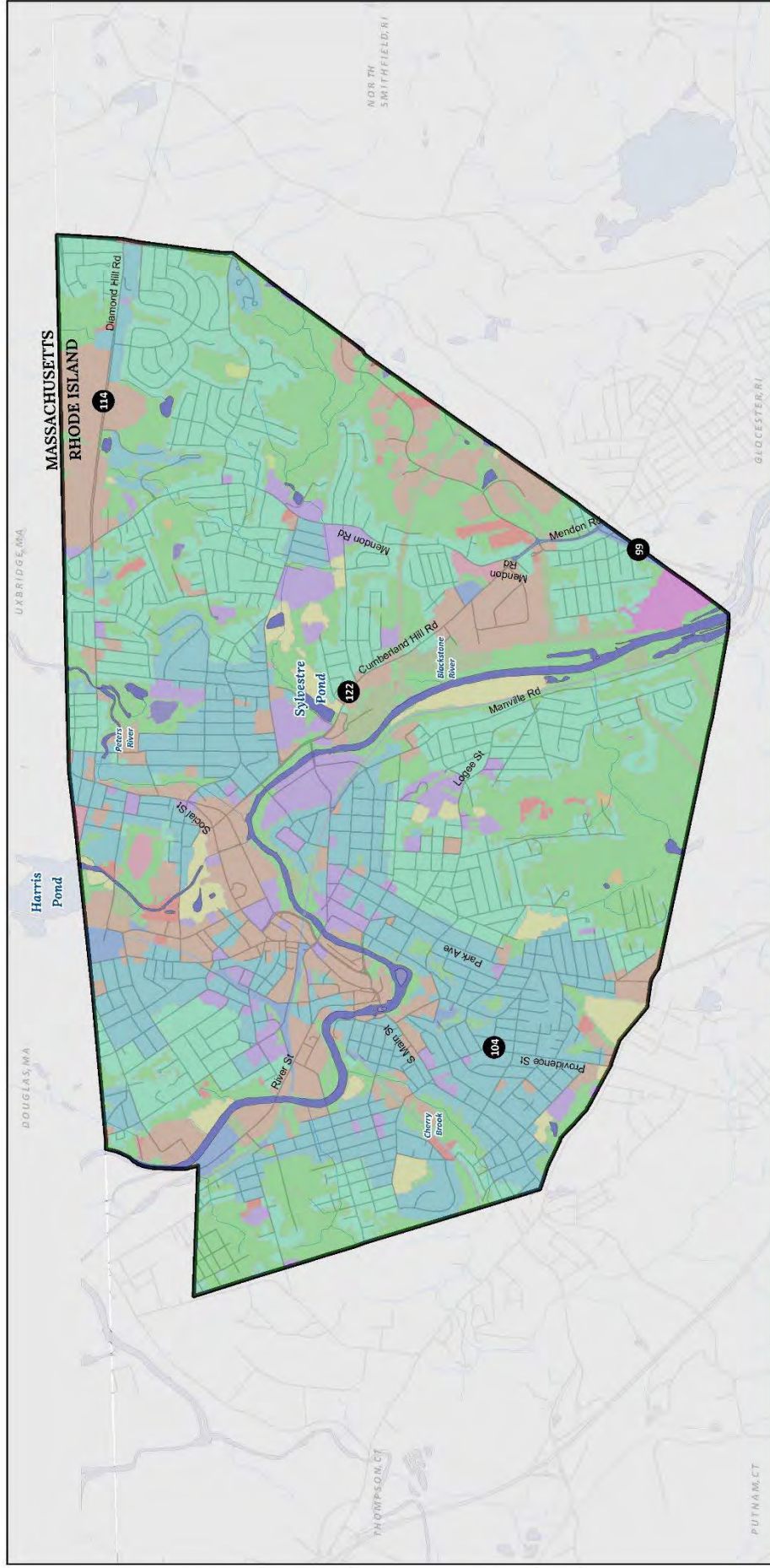
Downtown Overlay District: *Regulates development in downtown Woonsocket in order to allow additional permitted uses that encourage further growth and concentration of art, cultural and entertainment attractions; promote the use of vacant and underutilized properties; and encourage a walkable vibrant environment.* It may be valuable to reassess the boundaries of this district, to make sure it includes all blocks the City wants to have a “downtown” character and potentially remove blocks that should have a more residential character. That said, the overlay can be used to explicitly promote more residential density downtown to help support local business. According to staff, it is sometimes problematic that dimensional standards are set according to the underlying zoning district. The City should consider establishing a set of consistent dimensional standards across the downtown area. The overlay currently has a well-intended policy to require commercial

uses on all ground floors. However, demand for commercial space has been plummeting across the country and remains particularly low in Woonsocket. In order to reduce first floor vacancies, the City may consider allowing a more flexible range of uses, including residential, on ground floors, and targeting commercial-only policies to key streets or intersections.

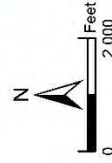
Historic Structures Floating Overlay District: *Allows for more flexible re-use and redevelopment of historic government structures.* For example, this overlay could be applied to a surplus school property to convert it into residential apartments. This overlay has a narrow focus, but a good premise that could perhaps be expanded to non-governmental buildings in need of adaptive reuse, such as mills, churches, private schools, and other institutions.

ZONING MAP

Another goal of this comprehensive plan will be to map how the City wishes to change in the future. **Map 3-1** Existing Land Uses and **Map 3-2** Existing Zoning Districts show what the City is like today. Based on analysis and feedback from the public, the Comprehensive Plan will determine where the vision for Woonsocket's future requires changes to land use. This will be reflected in a new Future Land Use Map. The Future Land Use Map will ultimately be used to update the City's zoning, to make sure that land is zoned to achieve what the City wants. For example, if the City envisions mixed-use redevelopment for a mill building zoned for industrial use, the zoning for that property will need to change to accommodate that.



CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



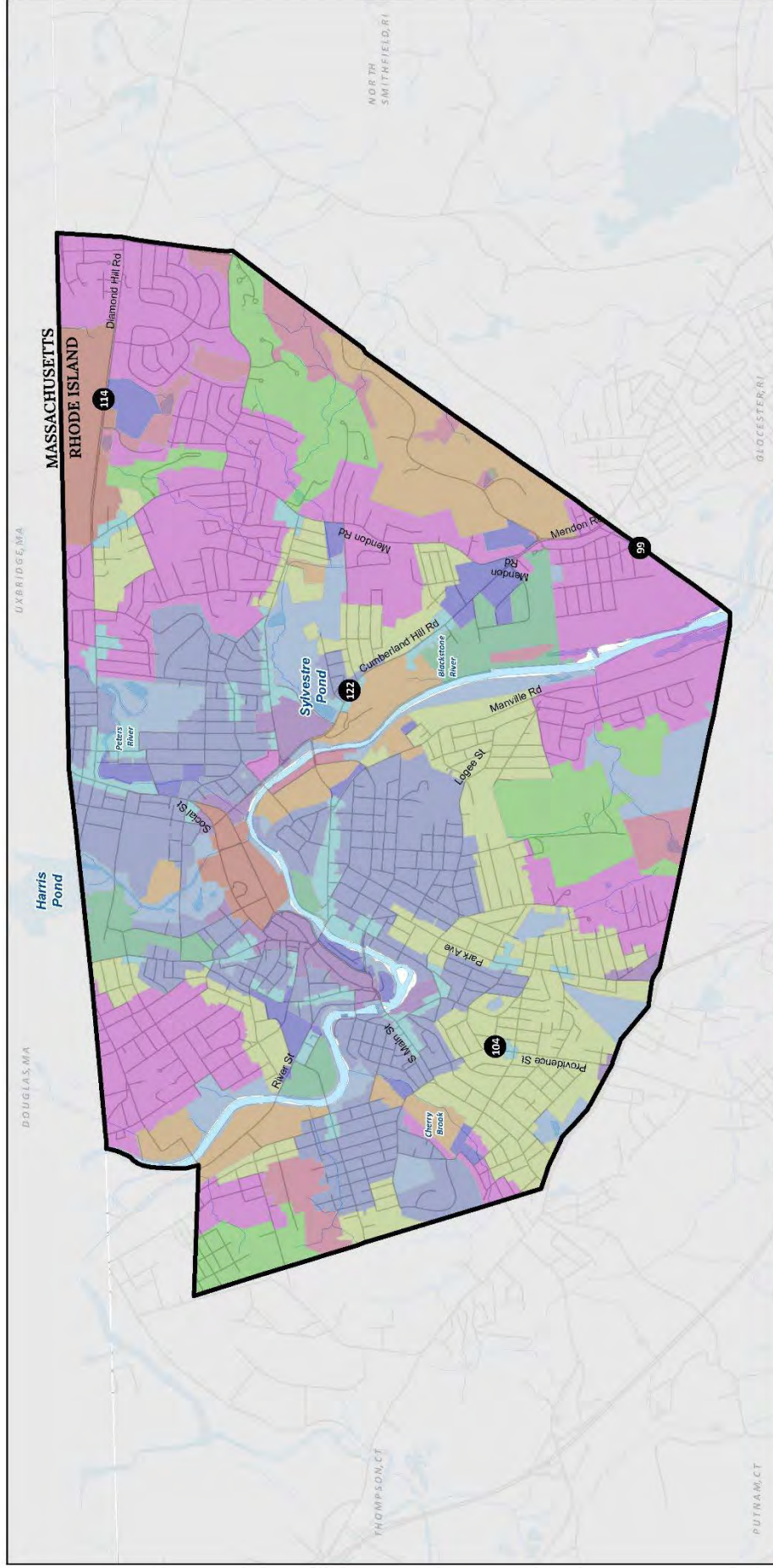
Existing Land Uses

Agriculture/Pasture	Institutional	Transportation
Cemeteries	Low Density Residential	Utilities
Commercial/Industrial	Medium Density Residential	Vacant/Open
Forest/Brushland	Mine/Quarry/Gravel Pit	Water/Wetland
High Density Residential	Recreation	

*Data Source: RIGIS

Map 3-1. Existing Land Uses

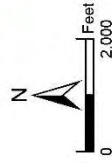
Source: RIGIS



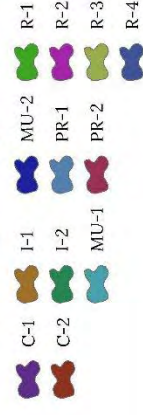
CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



This map is not the product of a Professional Land Survey. It was created by the Horsley Witten Group, Inc. for general reference, informational, planning, or guidance use, and is not a legally authoritative source as to location of natural or manmade features. Proper interpretation of this map may require the assistance of appropriate professional services. The Horsley Witten Group, Inc. makes no warranty, express or implied, related to the spatial accuracy, reliability, completeness, or currentness of this map.



Existing Zoning Districts



*Data Source: RIGIS, City of Woonsocket

Map 3-2. Existing Zoning Districts

Source: RIGIS

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR LAND USE

Decisions about future land use are a result of all the other topics in this plan combined. Having goals for transportation, economic development, the environment, and more will drive how land is used in the future.

- Woonsocket is largely built out, and much of its land use strategy in the next 20 years will be about reusing and repurposing existing buildings or areas of the City that have already been developed.*
- Strategic new infill development and expanding and connecting the open space and recreation resources throughout the City will also be important.*
- The City's zoning ordinance must be reviewed after this plan is updated, to make sure zoning allows for the things envisioned in the plan and meets the needs and realities of our residents today and in the future.*

4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Woonsocket's workforce composition, industry breakdown, real estate trends, and economic development programs.

WHY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

Economic development is essential to a community's quality of life, allowing its residents to procure meaningful and gainful employment, patronize local businesses, educate a high-quality workforce, and provide services to those who want to start, develop, or grow a business. This requires continual re-investment with help from partnerships, programs, and incentives that enhance human, built, and natural resources.

This chapter offers an outlook on the economic situation in the City of Woonsocket. It provides an evaluation of the city's current economic wellbeing and provides insight into future trends that could affect the local economy. Conclusions are based on data from a variety of sources and interviews with employers, service providers, developers, real estate agents, and City officials.

WOONSOCKET'S LABOR FORCE

JOBS AND POPULATION

Woonsocket had 16,452 jobs in 2001 and 16,986 in 2020, an increase of 3.2%. This compares to a decrease of 2.6% in Providence County and 0.9% in the state over the same time frame. Between 2015-2020, Woonsocket has seen a decline of 1.0% while the county has seen a 1.8% drop and the state has seen a 1.6% drop. **Figure 4-1** illustrates the change in number of jobs over time, indexed to 2001.¹

¹ Note that 2020 job counts reflect an average of the last two quarters of 2019 and the first two quarters of 2020 and therefore do not count jobs regained since the COVID recovery has been underway (since April 2020).

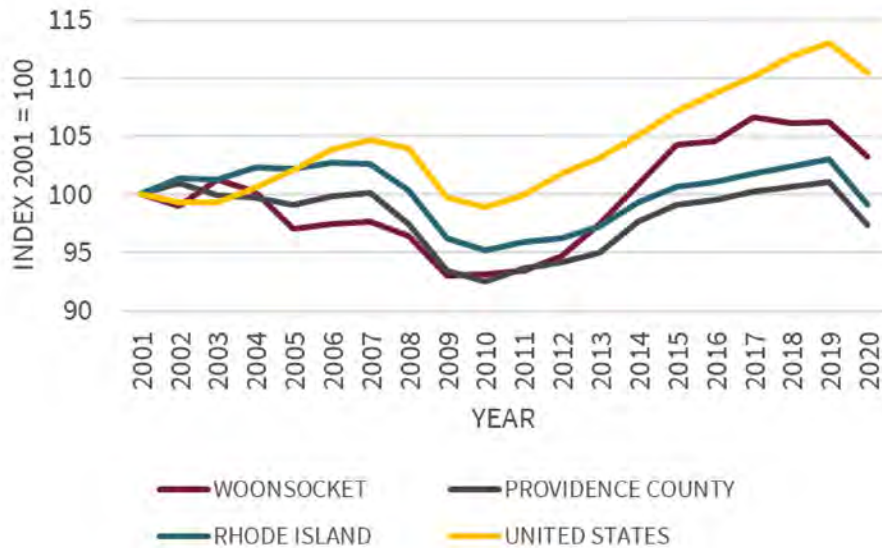


Figure 4-1. Jobs 2001-2020

Source: Emsi

Population growth is one of the main drivers of economic growth. **Figure 4-2** illustrates population growth from 2001 to 2020. While there is steady growth nationwide, the state and county experienced flat growth during this timeframe. The City of Woonsocket has seen negative growth during this time, decreasing by 5.1%, though estimates for recent years show a slightly upward trend. Strategies that work to increase the population of Woonsocket will have impacts that reverberate throughout the economy, as residents contribute to the tax base, enroll their children in local schools, support local businesses, and participate in community activities.

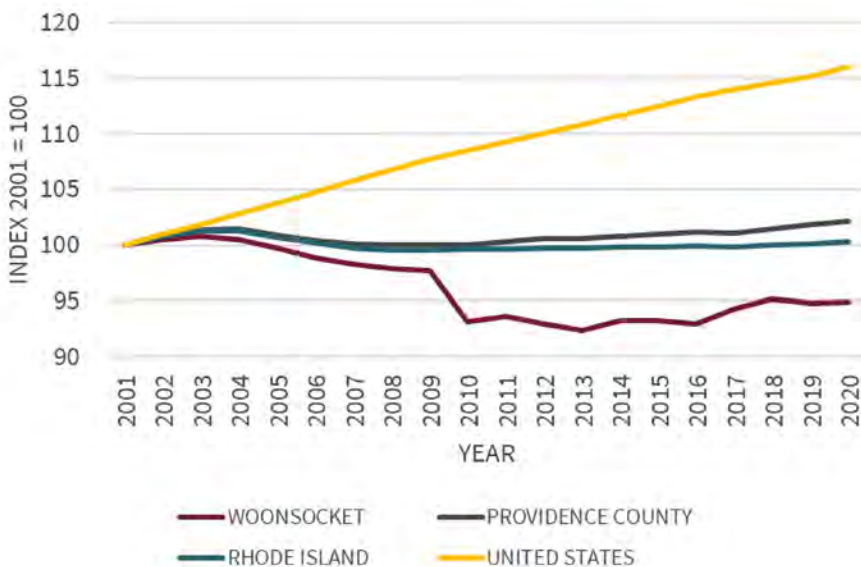


Figure 4-2. Population 2001-2020

Source: Emsi

The employment-to-population ratio quantifies the number of people employed against the total working age population (age 16 and up) and is a measure of how an economy creates employment. At 58.3% in Woonsocket, versus 60.3% in the county and 60.9% in the state, the city has a slightly lower share of its working age population actively employed (**Figure 4-3**).

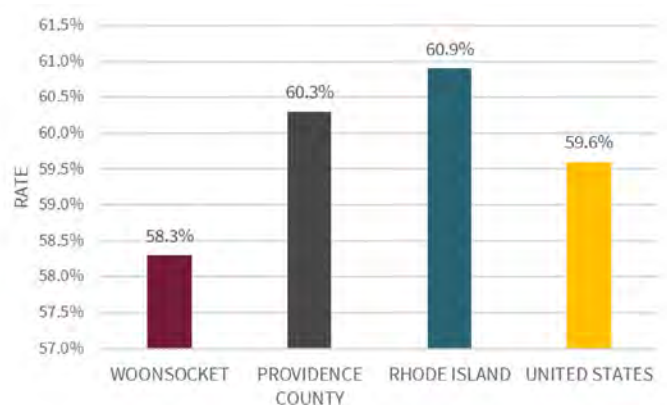


Figure 4-3. Employment/Population Ratio

Source: American Community Survey, 2019 5- Year Estimates

UNEMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Unemployment rates for 2020 are shown in **Figure 4-4**. The unemployment rate is the percent of the labor force that is looking for work but cannot find it. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, rates spiked from March to April of 2020 but are on the rebound. As of March 2021, Woonsocket's unemployment rate was at 9.8%, compared to 7.7% in the county and 7.2% statewide.

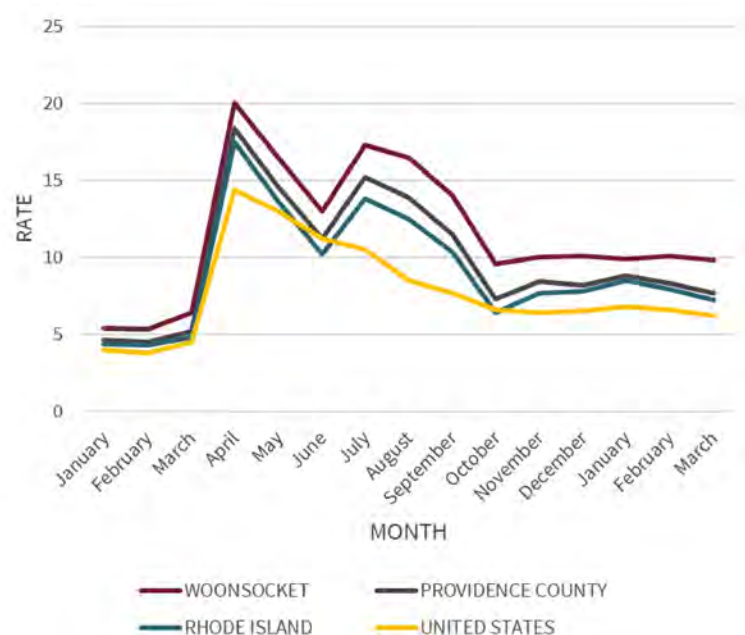


Figure 4-4. Unemployment Rates, 2020

Source: BLS, Department of Labor and Training, Rhode Island

Figure 4-5 outlines the labor force participation rate, which is the percent of the population over age 16 who is in the workforce (either employed or unemployed). While Woonsocket's labor force participation rate is lower than the county or state (63.3% versus 64.2% and 64.8%, respectively), it is on par with the nation's rate.

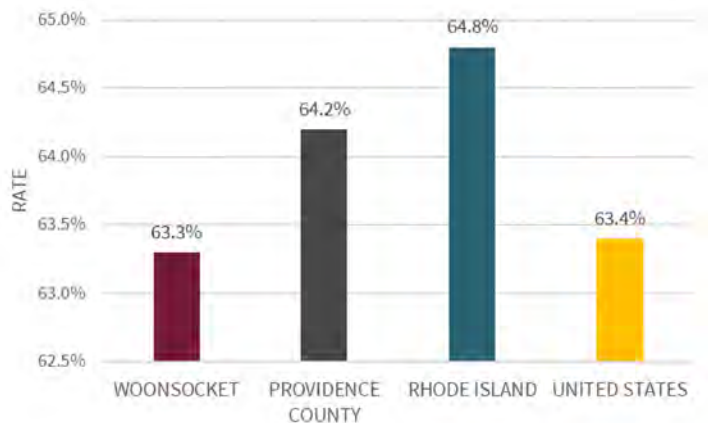


Figure 4-5. Labor Force Participation Rate

Source: American Community Survey, 2019 5- Year Estimates

The labor force participation rate is an important metric used by potential employers to understand quickly how residents are engaged in the economy. It represents the relative amount of labor available. A lower or declining rate reflects potential demographic changes (e.g., an aging demographic with many people retiring), a lack of available services (e.g., a lack of childcare forces parents to remove themselves from the workforce), or an increase in educational attainment (e.g., working-age citizens spending more time in school).

EDUCATION

The educational attainment of Woonsocket is somewhat lower than the county, state, and nation. Only 18% of Woonsocket residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30% in the county and 35% in the state. Educational attainment is tied to earnings potential, unemployment, health status, and housing, among other factors.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2020				
	United States	Rhode Island	Providence County	Woonsocket
Less than High School	11%	10%	13%	17%
High school or equivalent	27%	28%	31%	36%
Associate's/some college	29%	26%	26%	28%
Bachelor's or higher	33%	35%	30%	18%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4-1. Educational Attainment

Source: Esri

Schools in Woonsocket are consistently outperformed by schools in surrounding districts. This poses an issue for the entire city as cited by many stakeholders interviewed.

Employers have a hard time recruiting employees that do not already live in the area, new families are drawn to other areas, and students are not as well prepared as they could be for future employment. This impacts the long-term home-grown business potential, contributes to the continual population decline, encourages a commuter-dependent economy, and may not adequately prepare some students to obtain the higher-waged jobs that exist within the city.

COMMUTING

More than 80% of Woonsocket's employees commute into the city to work. Just 18% of workers both live and work in Woonsocket. Almost 70% of residents work outside the city, with 32% of all resident workers both living and working in Woonsocket. Workers live in a variety of places outside Woonsocket and top locations include Cumberland (6%), Providence (6%), Pawtucket (5%), and North Smithfield (4%). The city's relatively high level of in-commuting points to a mismatch between the skills of residents and the jobs located within the city.

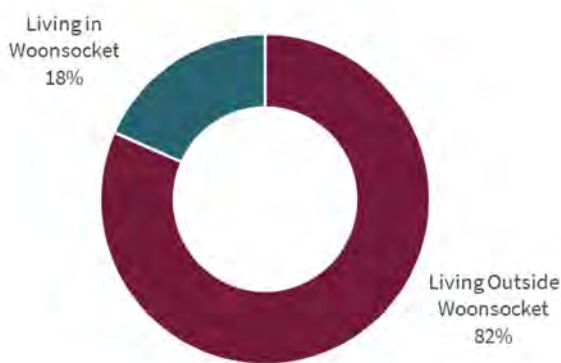


Figure 4-6. Commuting Patterns for Woonsocket's Employees

Source: 2018 OnTheMap US Census

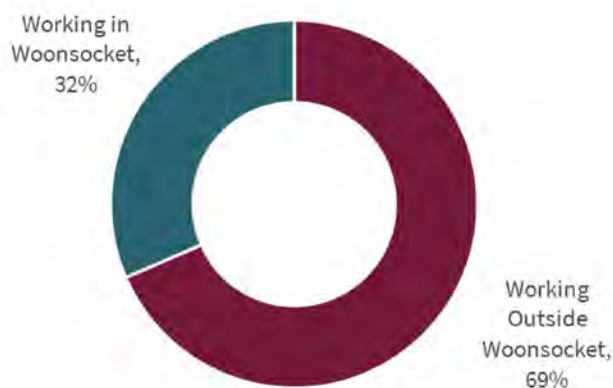


Figure 4-7. Commuting Patterns for Woonsocket's Resident Workers

Source: 2018 OnTheMap US Census

EMPLOYMENT IN WOONSOCKET

JOBS AND EARNINGS

Nearly a third (31.5%) of all jobs in Woonsocket are in the health care field. Other top sectors include management (14.1%), government (10.5%), and retail trade (9.8%).

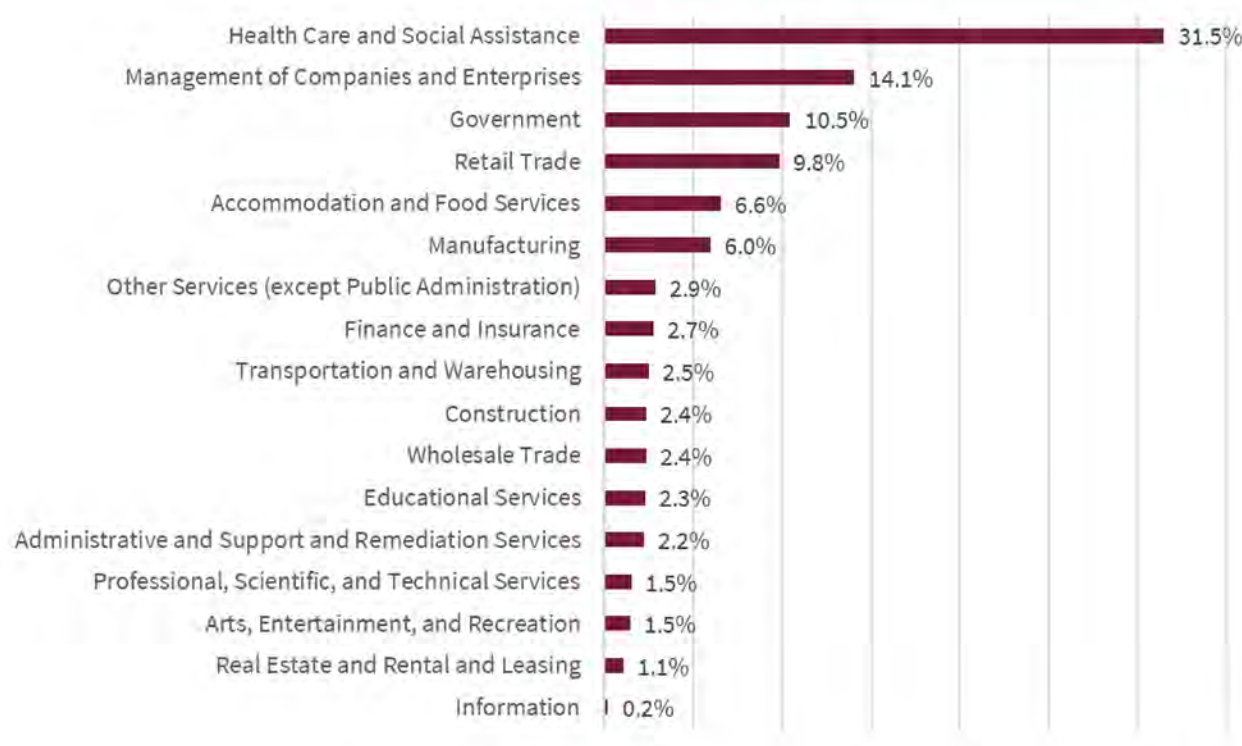


Figure 4-8. Sector Share of Woonsocket's Jobs, 2020

Source: Emsi

Growth or contraction in these industries from 2015-2020 is outlined in **Table 4-2**. The largest job gainers were transportation and warehousing (+96 jobs), arts and recreation (+67), government (+49), and construction (+38). The industries that lost the most jobs include manufacturing (-167), wholesale trade (-74), retail trade (-54), and administration (-50). Overall, Woonsocket lost 167 jobs, 1% of all jobs from 2015-2020. Comparatively, Providence County has lost 2% of all jobs during this same time frame. Due to a lag in data availability, it is likely some of these losses have been made up as the economy continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

WOONSOCKET INDUSTRY OVERVIEW							
NAICS	Industry Description	2015 Jobs	2020 Jobs	2015 - 2020 Change	2015 - 2020 % Change	Avg. Earnings Per Job	2020 GRP
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	5,376	5,345	(31)	(1%)	\$62,625	\$409,140,957
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	2,368	2,389	21	1%	\$143,332	\$388,786,191
90	Government	1,727	1,776	49	3%	\$93,369	\$180,379,249
44	Retail Trade	1,726	1,672	(54)	(3%)	\$43,924	\$131,046,042
72	Accommodation and Food Services	1,123	1,114	(9)	(1%)	\$24,544	\$45,123,199
31	Manufacturing	1,184	1,017	(167)	(14%)	\$75,182	\$144,608,962
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	529	489	(40)	(8%)	\$37,249	\$31,771,321
52	Finance and Insurance	478	466	(12)	(3%)	\$97,406	\$85,537,630
48	Transportation and Warehousing	325	422	96	30%	\$48,417	\$33,306,204
23	Construction	366	404	38	11%	\$65,807	\$38,174,969
42	Wholesale Trade	474	401	(74)	(16%)	\$89,685	\$111,904,774
61	Educational Services	379	387	8	2%	\$50,374	\$21,069,107
56	Administrative and Support and Remediation Services	426	376	(50)	(12%)	\$50,467	\$32,044,585
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	246	259	13	5%	\$89,424	\$44,536,273
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	179	247	67	38%	\$46,328	\$19,808,474
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	171	180	9	5%	\$60,160	\$36,279,228
51	Information	73	33	(39)	(54%)	\$71,745	\$8,143,019
22	Utilities	<10	<10	Insf. Data	Insf. Data	Insf. Data	\$1,342,606
TOTAL		17,153	16,986	(167)	(1%)	\$73,810	

Table 4-2. Woonsocket Industry Overview

Source: Emsi

Average earnings for jobs located in Woonsocket are about \$74,000. However, we know that 82% of these earnings are effectively exported to other places where Woonsocket workers live. The 2019 5-year estimates from the American Community Survey show average annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers who live in Woonsocket at just under \$50,000, nearly \$24,000 less than average earnings for jobs located in the city. This further points to a disparity between the well-paying employment opportunities available in the city and the ability of the city's residents to secure these positions.

LOCAL EMPLOYERS

Top employers in Woonsocket include CVS, Honeywell, Summer Infant, Landmark Medical Center, City of Woonsocket, and Woonsocket Health & Rehab. Local employers cite that it is difficult to fill higher-waged jobs with people who live in Woonsocket, so very often these employees are coming from outside the area. Employers also cited the lack of amenities in Woonsocket, often having to take out-of-town clients out of the city as there is a lack of dining and entertainment options.

PRINCIPAL TAXPAYERS

Principal taxpayers in Woonsocket are listed in **Table 4-3**. The top 20 taxpayers contribute \$9.4 million in taxes and comprise just over 17% of the tax levy.

PRINCIPAL TAXPAYERS, 2019-2020				
Name	Description	Assessed Value	Taxes	% of Levy
Rhode Island Economic Dev. Corp.	General Service	\$ 93,968,570	\$ 2,255,246	4.08%
Narragansett Electric Co.	Utility	\$ 28,758,300	\$ 1,339,562	2.43%
CVS Pharmacy	General Service	\$ 15,591,900	\$ 726,271	1.31%
Narragansett Electric Gas	Utility	\$ 14,257,600	\$ 664,119	1.20%
Woonsocket Mall LLC	Retail Plaza	\$ 14,752,800	\$ 519,889	0.94%
Plaza Village Group	Apts	\$ 12,286,800	\$ 432,987	0.78%
Stericycle Inc.	Medical Waste	\$ 8,478,800	\$ 394,943	0.72%
Summit Woonsocket LLC	REIT	\$ 9,777,000	\$ 344,541	0.62%
Is This Hand Shucked SPE LLC	Apts	\$ 9,461,800	\$ 333,434	0.60%
Northern RI Apartments LLC	Apts	\$ 8,392,200	\$ 295,741	0.54%
Walnut Hill Holdings	Retail Plaza	\$ 8,352,500	\$ 294,342	0.53%
Woonsocket Nursing Centre	Healthcare	\$ 7,819,300	\$ 275,552	0.50%
Oakland Grove Landlord LLC	Healthcare	\$ 6,768,600	\$ 238,525	0.43%
Verizon Online LLC	Utility	\$ 4,866,100	\$ 226,663	0.41%
HLM/PAG Limited Partnership	Apts	\$ 6,221,700	\$ 219,253	0.40%
Cubsmart LP	Self Storage	\$ 5,718,400	\$ 201,516	0.37%
OSJ of Woonsocket LLC	Retail Plaza	\$ 4,966,300	\$ 175,012	0.32%
Stryker	General Service	\$ 3,535,900	\$ 164,702	0.30%
Chateau Claire	Apts	\$ 4,511,100	\$ 158,971	0.29%
Cox Communication Inc.	General Service	\$ 3,355,100	\$ 156,281	0.28%
Top 20 Taxpayers as a % of Total Levy		\$ 271,840,770	\$ 9,417,550	17.05%

Table 4-3. Principal Taxpayers, 2019-2020

Source: City of Woonsocket

REAL ESTATE

The ability for businesses (potential and existing) to find real estate is critical to developing an economy. Availability of adequate commercial space allows for economic development to occur. It is important to not only have enough quality in-demand space, but to also have programs in place that market this space and connect potential occupants to the real estate.

Table 4-4 outlines availability rates and market rents in both the Woonsocket submarket and the larger Providence market, which covers the five counties of Rhode Island. The availability rate is the percent of space available for lease as a share of all rentable building area in the market. Excluded from this figure are any buildings that are not occupied or available for occupancy. A healthy availability rate for commercial real estate is typically between 5% and 8%, ensuring that there is a variety of available space in the market to give

potential tenants a choice, but not so much that rents are driven downward due to excess supply. Woonsocket has a relatively low availability rate for both office and industrial space, indicating that potential space users may have a difficult time finding the type and quality of space they need. Availability is higher in Woonsocket's retail market, suggesting a broader variety of spaces from which to choose.

Across space types, rents are lower in the Woonsocket submarket as compared to the Providence market. Low rents were cited as a major advantage of doing business in Woonsocket from the tenant perspective, but at the same time create challenges when it comes to supporting investment in new development or rehabilitation of existing buildings.

REAL ESTATE OVERVIEW				
	Providence Market		Woonsocket Submarket	
	Availability Rate	Market Rent (SF)	Availability Rate	Market Rent (SF)
Retail	6.1%	\$17.10	7.8%	\$13.06
Office	7.7%	\$21.86	4.3%	\$20.09
Industrial	6.4%	\$7.65	4.5%	\$6.61

Table 4-4. Real Estate Overview

Source: CoStar, March 2021

Interviews revealed that the city has several home-grown developers that have worked in recent years to increase the amount of residential, retail, and office space in Downtown Woonsocket, which are subsequently being filled by new businesses and residents (primarily from a younger generation from outside of Woonsocket). Additionally, the advocacy group Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative touts that downtown vacancies have been reduced from 50% in 2015 to 20% today.

A tax rate comparison reveals that Woonsocket has some of the highest residential and commercial rates in the area, 2nd highest for residential taxes (behind Providence) and 3rd highest for commercial taxes (behind Central Falls and Providence). Many developers and employers interviewed mentioned high taxes as an impediment to doing business.

FY 2021 TAX RATES BY CLASS OF PROPERTY		
	Residential	Commercial
Central Falls	\$ 23.69	\$ 37.95
Providence	\$ 24.56	\$ 36.70
Woonsocket	\$ 24.00	\$ 35.24
Pawtucket	\$ 20.89	\$ 34.47
Cranston	\$ 20.77	\$ 31.16
North Providence	\$ 22.81	\$ 29.55
Warwick	\$ 18.73	\$ 28.10
Cumberland	\$ 14.32	\$ 14.32

Table 4-5. FY 2021 Tax Rates by Class of Property

Source: State of Rhode Island Division of Municipal Finance

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The current economic development related work being done within the City is aimed at redeveloping properties, updating parks, and improving the streetscape, and other initiatives, all of which contribute to the community's quality of life and support improving economic conditions.

Brownfields Program. The City continues to implement the \$300,000 EPA brownfields assessment grant. The City is targeting 719 River Street, 20 Privilege Street, 162 Main Street, and 1265 Mendon Road with the funding. The grant is also funding a River Street Visioning process to develop a plan for River Street and Singleton Street. Additionally, the City applied for two brownfield grants targeting Seville Dye/First Avenue for cleanup funds and 92 & 176 Sunnyside Avenue for assessment funds.

Grant Writing. The City has worked diligently to apply for grants to improve the current built environment. Grants have been realized for community gardens, disaster resiliency planning, and streetscape improvements.

Developer and Business Incentives. In addition, the City offers the following incentives to developers and business owners.

- Omnibus Tax Stabilization Plan for Woonsocket Downtown Redevelopment Area
- Historic Structures Floating Overlay District
- Highland Corporate Park/Woonsocket Redevelopment Plan & Tax Increment Financing Project
- Opportunity Zones
- Commercial Façade Restoration Grant Program (CDBG)
- Small Business Loan (CDBG)
- Micro-enterprise Grant (CDBG)²

² City of Woonsocket, RI Developer Incentives Booklet

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development will be one of the most prominent issues in Woonsocket's Comprehensive Plan. The Plan will need to:

- Explore ways to make it easier, clearer, and faster to start and grow a business in Woonsocket and advertise what tools are available to help.*
- Place a particular emphasis on “home-grown” businesses and local developers and entrepreneurs.*
- Continue promoting businesses and organizations that provide more things for people to do in Woonsocket, from restaurants and cafes, to entertainment, to the arts. This improves quality of life for everyone AND is a draw for other businesses.*
- Recognize that EVERYTHING is economic development – Woonsocket's economy depends on the housing options people need, better transportation connections to job opportunities, a strong education system for children as well as continuing education for adults, and beautiful, historic landscapes and buildings to attract visitors.*

5. HOUSING

Woonsocket's housing needs.

WHY HOUSING MATTERS

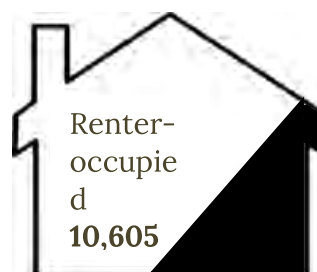
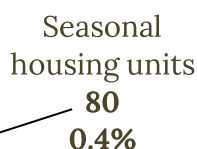
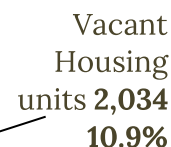
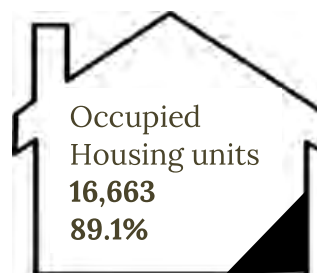
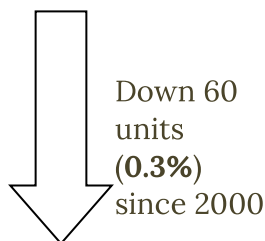
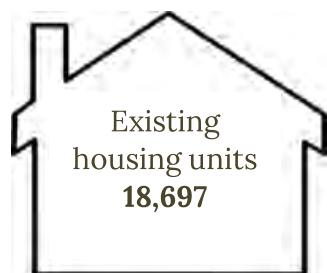
Providing residents with opportunities to have safe, affordable homes is a cornerstone of the economic and social health in any community. A balance of diverse housing opportunities and adequate supply can build the local labor workforce and support the spectrum of housing needs through a lifetime – an apartment after graduation, a family's first home, or downsizing for empty-nesters or retirees. The type of housing available, its cost, and its condition are key attributes families and individuals evaluate when choosing a place to live.

INTRODUCTION

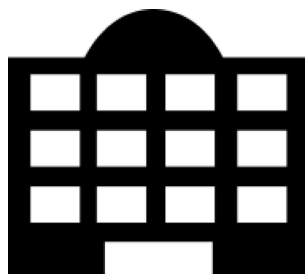
The industrial revolution in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the catalyst of Woonsocket's urbanization. This development was marked by the construction of modest multi-story wood frame tenements, in a high-density configuration, in the Social, Globe, Lower Bernon, Constitution Hill, and Fairmount neighborhoods. Large single-family homes for the affluent business owners were constructed in the City's North End. The environment shaped and built during this period is in large part the same one that exists today in many of the City's neighborhoods, particularly in and around downtown. Since the 1950's, housing construction in the outlying neighborhoods, while decreasing the amount of undeveloped land in the City, has provided a broader range of single-family housing options on larger lots for Woonsocket's residents.

The City of Woonsocket recognizes that maintaining and constructing safe, high-quality homes is important for the quality of life of our residents and the health of our local economy. The whole city benefits when people have access to a variety of housing types and prices that meet their needs at various stages of life. One of the major objectives of the Housing Chapter is to make sure Woonsocket remains in compliance with the Rhode Island Low and Moderate Housing Income Act. Further, this Housing Chapter recognizes that market rate housing development and renovation of the existing housing stock are just as important for meeting the long-term housing needs of the community.

Throughout this chapter, the term “**LMI Housing**” or “**Low-Moderate Income Housing**” will refer to subsidized housing units that count toward the City's low or moderate income housing goals. The term “**affordable housing**” will refer to any home that is generally affordable to the occupant, whether market rate, subsidized, owner-occupied, or renter-occupied.



Single-family detached housing units **4,627**
24.7%



Multi-family (3+) housing units **10,542**
56.4%



Other types of housing units **3,528**
18.8%

DATA AND TRENDS: A SNAPSHOT

The data in all the graphics above come from the 2019 American Community Survey.

The number of housing units in Woonsocket has been relatively stable over the past 20 years, declining only slightly. Units being lost to demolition are not quite outweighed by new construction. The vacancy rate is relatively high at nearly 11%, but still lower than the statewide estimate of 12.4% (however there are proportionally more seasonal homes in Rhode Island as a whole than in Woonsocket). Rental units in Woonsocket (and across Rhode Island) tend to have much higher vacancy rates than owner-occupied units. The owner occupancy rate is just over 36%, significantly lower than Rhode Island overall (60%). Woonsocket has a highly diverse housing stock, with a majority of housing units located in multi-family buildings of three or more units. In fact, the ubiquitous triple-decker, a historically and culturally important housing type in Woonsocket and across other industrial communities throughout New England, still makes up close to 25% of the housing units in the City.

HOUSING DATA

FOR-SALE HOUSING COSTS

In terms of housing cost, Woonsocket's housing stock has fluctuated greatly over the past 20 years, particularly in the wake of the Great Recession (as shown in **Table 5-1**). Single-family home prices plummeted 40% between 2005 and 2010 and multi-family buildings dropped a staggering 65%. While the post-recession recovery was slow and uneven compared to other communities in Rhode Island, prices have been shooting back up in the last few years and now exceed immediate pre-recession prices across all housing types. Multi-family buildings in particular have risen 112% between 2015 and 2020, with single-family homes up over 80% and condos up nearly as much. On the one hand, increasing home values can help increase local tax revenues and build equity for owners. On the other hand, it can be a tax burden, particularly for owners on fixed incomes, and can put housing out of reach, for both renters and owners, given the persistent low incomes of Woonsocket residents.

YEAR END MEDIAN SALES PRICE	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Single-Family	\$116,400	\$236,750	\$142,000	\$138,500	\$251,000
Multi-Family	\$105,000	\$270,000	\$95,000	\$129,950	\$275,500
Condo	\$70,000	\$151,500	\$99,900	\$92,000	\$165,000

Table 5-1. Woonsocket Median Home Price Trends, 2000-2020

Source: www.riliving.com

According to the 2019 Housing Works RI Factbook, the 2018 median sales price of \$202,750 (which has already increased nearly 24% to the 2020 median) is affordable to households earning \$66,950 per year. According to 2019 American Community Survey estimates, Woonsocket's median household income is \$42,595. This means the median priced home was already well out of reach for many Woonsocket households in 2018 and is even more so today.

RENTAL HOUSING COSTS

Prices for rental units of all sizes have been slowly but steadily increasing over the past ten years. While rents remain lower than in Rhode Island overall (a 1-bedroom in Rhode Island in 2020 was \$1,315 per month compared with \$1,003 in Woonsocket, according to Rhode Island Housing), they are increasing at a faster rate than median household income. Rent for a 1-bedroom unit in Woonsocket increased by 13.2% between 2011 and 2020 while household incomes rose just 8.3%.

YEAR	1-BEDROOM UNIT	2-BEDROOM UNIT	3-BEDROOM UNIT
2020	\$1,003	\$1,054	\$1,184
2019	\$985	\$1,043	\$1,181
2018	\$962	\$1,021	\$1,147
2017	\$943	\$1,003	\$1,126
2016	\$929	\$989	\$1,104
2015	\$920	\$973	\$1,082
2014	\$900	\$935	\$1,031
2013	\$892	\$928	\$1,027
2012	\$894	\$893	\$991
2011	\$886	\$887	\$984

Table 5-2. Woonsocket Median Rental Prices, 2011-2020

Source: Rhode Island Housing Rent Survey

HOUSING CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION/DEMOLITION

The records of building permits issued by the City over the last decade (see **Table 5-3** below) show the relationship between new single-family and multi-family residential development. Coming out of the Great Recession, new housing development in Woonsocket slowed significantly, with some years reporting no new housing at all. This has started to change slowly over the past five years, picking up some steam over the past two years. As of May 2021, a total of 60 new units have been approved, which is already greater than the total number of units approved in 2020 and very nearly as much as all the units approved between 2011 and 2018. This is a good sign that momentum is building in Woonsocket's housing market, even over the course of the pandemic. A more notable statistic over this time period is a decrease in vacant or unoccupied residential properties. The City has been making a big push to reduce vacancies either through renovation and reoccupation or demolition and replacement with things like yards, gardens, pocket parks, and parking. As of 2012, coming off the Great Recession, the City recorded 234 vacant or unoccupied residential properties representing 551 housing units. As of May 2021, this has been reduced to 66 properties and 156 housing units, a 72% reduction in both properties and units. This is an impressive accomplishment. While new housing starts have been low, the City has been making sure that more of the existing housing stock is available for occupancy.

YEAR OF CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY	SINGLE FAMILY	MULTI FAMILY	TOTAL UNITS
2011	0	0	0
2012	0	0	0
2013	3	0	3
2014	12	0	12
2015	9	0	9
2016	16	6	22
2017	6	0	6
2018	11	0	11
2019	12	23	35
2020	41	14	55
Total since 2011	110	43	153

Table 5-3. Housing Trends in Woonsocket, 2011-2020

Source: 2021, City of Woonsocket Building Office

OCCUPANCY

Nearly 2/3 of people in Woonsocket live in renter-occupied units (see **Table 5-4**), with the remainder in owner-occupied units.

OWNER OCCUPIED	PERCENT	RENTER OCCUPIED	PERCENT
6,058	36.4%	10,605	63.6%

Table 5-4. Population in Occupied Housing Units, 2019

Source: U.S. American Community Survey, 2019

AGE AND CONDITION OF HOUSING UNITS

Woonsocket has a very old housing stock compared with Rhode Island overall. Nearly half of all homes in Woonsocket were built prior to 1940 versus under 30% for Rhode Island. Less than 5% of the City's homes were built in the last 20 years. While this means that Woonsocket has a wealth of historic homes that add to the City's character, it also means that much of the housing stock is susceptible to disrepair, deferred maintenance, and healthy homes issues such as lead paint. In interviews, City staff from the Division of Building Inspection and Minimum Housing noted that there are constant minimum housing issues throughout the City. On top of dealing with issues such as impacts of fires, frozen pipes, and zoning violations, staff often has difficulty connecting with absentee landlords and their agents.

The State asks municipalities to note the median age of homes in the Comprehensive Plan. Unfortunately, the U.S. Census does not track this information for Woonsocket. However,

based on the data shown in **Table 5-5** below, it is a safe estimate that the median home was probably built in the early 1940s, making the median age approximately 80.

1939 OR EARLIER	%	1940- 1999	%	2000 OR LATER	%
8,821	47.2%	9,060	48.5%	816	4.5%

Table 5-5. Age of Housing Units, 2019

Source: American Community Survey, 2019

**Median Year
Built**

Not available

Median Age

Not available

HOUSING PROBLEMS AND NEEDS

A key component of the City's housing strategy is to clearly identify the housing needs of Woonsocket's local population.

While the cost of housing (for sale and for rent) is relatively affordable compared with the region and Rhode Island as a whole, it is still expensive compared to the incomes people make in Woonsocket. As a rule of thumb, no more than 30% of a household's income should be spent on housing. This is a good target, because it means people have income leftover for other necessities like food, health care, and transportation as well as disposable income for fun things like eating out, going to the movies, and shopping. In short, it's better for each household *and* for the City's economy overall. However, in Woonsocket today, many homeowners and renters spend more than this on housing (see Cost Burden below).

That said, it is important to have homes at a wide range of price points to maintain a healthy community and economy. New, higher-end homes and apartments allow people and families to move up without leaving the City and allow higher-income residents to move in, both of which help support the tax base.

HOUSING NEEDS STUDY

The City of Woonsocket hired RKG Associates to conduct a Housing Needs Study, published in June 2018, which is incorporated by reference into this baseline report. The study remains very relevant today and continues to be a great source of data for housing related issues. All housing strategies developed for this Comprehensive Plan should be informed by the data and analysis in this study.

The study succinctly describes the crux of housing needs in the City, and frankly addresses the mix of feelings about housing policy among City leaders. As discussed, many current residents cannot afford the modestly priced housing already existing in Woonsocket (for rent or for sale), let alone the premiums in cost typically associated with new construction. This puts a damper on new private development that doesn't have some sort of subsidy or other financial assistance. On the one hand, more investment into economic development and community amenities will be necessary to attract greater interest from more affluent households who can afford to live in new development and help increase local tax revenues. On the other hand, ensuring that lower and middle-income households, and

seniors, have adequate housing options helps free up more of their incomes to spend on other things in the economy, and also helps reduce costs of City social services (the more people have stable, affordable housing, the less likely they are to need special health or emergency services).

The five main housing needs identified by this study were:

- Increasing new housing production
- Modernizing the existing housing stock
- Developing affordable housing for all incomes
- Creating mixed-use development in downtown
- Addressing vacant and blighted properties in the neighborhoods

COST BURDEN

Cost Burden refers to any household paying more than 30% of its income on housing. Severe Cost Burden refers to any household paying more than 50% of its income on housing. **Table 5-6** below summarizes cost burdened households of various kinds within Woonsocket.

The fact that nearly 40% of all households in Woonsocket are cost burdened should be a concern for the City. Whether people choose to or are forced by circumstances to spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing, this means they have less disposable income to spend both on other necessities such as food and health care, and at local shops, restaurants, and service providers. In other words, the entire economy is impacted. What's more, nearly one in five households is severely cost burdened, which exacerbates these economic impacts even more.

It should come as no surprise that LMI households (making less than 80% of the Area Median Income) have much higher rates of cost burden than the average household. Just under 60% are cost burdened, and over 30% are severely cost burdened, significantly limiting the amount of income they have available for other expenses. It is also no surprise that while just under 2/3 of Woonsocket residents live in rental households, over 3/4 of cost burdened LMI households do.

	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	PERCENT
Number of Cost Burdened Households	6,690	39.2% of total households
Number of Severely Cost Burdened Households	3,230	18.9% of total households
Number of LMI Cost Burdened Households	6,140	58.7% of LMI households
Number of LMI Severely Cost Burdened Households	3,160	30.2% of LMI households
Number of LMI Cost Burdened Households that are renting	4,680	76.2%
Number of LMI Cost Burdened Households that own their home	1,460	23.8%

Table 5-6. Woonsocket Cost Burden, 2017

Source: American Community Survey, Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data, 2017

HOUSING PROBLEMS

One of the best sources of data on local housing needs and problems is the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) developed by U.S. HUD. While the last set of data, gathered for 2013-2017, is already somewhat out of date, it does give a snapshot of post-recession housing needs in Woonsocket. The CHAS data track four different housing problems, including: incomplete kitchen facilities, incomplete plumbing facilities, more than one person per room, and cost burden greater than 30%. **Table 5-7** captures households with at least one such problem, organized by renters versus owners and by household income. The acronym “HAMFI” stands for HUD Area Median Family Income. This is calculated by HUD for each jurisdiction and will not necessarily be the same as other calculations of median incomes (such as a simple Census number), due to a series of adjustments that are made by the agency. The numbers in the “Percent” column represent the percent of households in each category with at least one housing problem. For example, in the first row of statistics in **Table 5-7**, “2,540” represents 63.0% of all renter households earning less than 30% HAMFI.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	HOUSEHOLDS WITH AT LEAST 1 HOUSING PROBLEM	PERCENT
RENTERS		
≤ 30% HAMFI	2,540	63.0%
> 30% - ≤ 50% HAMFI	1,475	77.6%
> 50% - ≤ 80% HAMFI	810	36.7%
> 80% - ≤ 100% HAMFI	60	7.6%
> 100% HAMFI	15	0.8%
Total	4,905	45.5%
OWNERS		
≤ 30% HAMFI	370	83.1%
> 30% - ≤ 50% HAMFI	530	77.4%
> 50% - ≤ 80% HAMFI	550	46.4%
> 80% - ≤ 100% HAMFI	240	45.7%
> 100% HAMFI	335	9.7%
Total	2,030	32.4%

Table 5-7. Woonsocket CHAS Data, 2013-2017

Source: Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), 2017

It is no surprise that income generally correlates with housing problems. The lower a household's income, the more likely it is to have at least one housing problem. The one notable exception is that renter households making less than 30 percent of the HAMFI are less likely to experience housing problems than renter households making between 30 percent and less than 50 percent HAMFI. One possible explanation is that a greater portion of very low-income renters are receiving some sort of housing subsidy, giving them access to higher-quality homes. Also of interest is that homeowners are far more likely to experience housing problems than renters across almost all income categories (both owners and renters in the > 30% - ≤ 50% HAMFI range are similarly likely to have at least one housing problem).

In brief, LMI renters (those making 80% HAMFI or less), who make up almost 48% of all households in Woonsocket, represent the largest demographic likely to experience housing problems. And while they make up a smaller percentage of the overall population, LMI owners are even more likely to experience housing problems.

HOMELESSNESS

Shelter is a basic human need. Housing, like most economic commodities, responds to supply and demand. But the market alone cannot provide the housing types, affordability, and supportive services often needed to prevent or remedy homelessness.

Homelessness is more pervasive in Woonsocket than in many other communities in Rhode Island, and the City serves as a regional hub of sorts for homeless shelter beds in northern Rhode Island. The Woonsocket Shelter on Sayles Street, run by the Community Care Alliance (CCA), maintains 15 family rooms with 45 beds and eight rooms for individual women, all year round. As of early 2021, CCA started a COVID hotel room program to make sure people with housing insecurity have a safe place to stay when they or others in their household contract COVID. To date, about three dozen people have been served by this program. Harvest Community Church on North Main Street runs a shelter for men during the winter months only. With a normal capacity of 28 men, this past winter capacity was reduced to 21 due to the pandemic. Sojourner House and Haven of Grace Ministries also provide housing assistance to the homeless.

According to the HUD Continuum of Care Annual Progress Report, Woonsocket's total homeless population was 292 people as of 2018. Once adjusted for population, Woonsocket has a rate of 7.09 homeless residents per 1,000 residents; this is 84 percent higher than Rhode Island. The Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Annual Report from 2013 (the latest date for which local data is available) states that 195 people identified Woonsocket as their last place of residence, totaling 4.4% of the homeless population. Woonsocket makes up about 3.9% of the state's total population, suggesting that the homeless from Woonsocket are proportionally overrepresented. Providence was the last address for by far the most homeless individuals in the state, distantly followed by Pawtucket and Cranston. Woonsocket is more on par with communities such as Warwick and Newport.

Generally speaking, there are two major ways to effectively reduce homelessness in any community: preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place and having exit options for people experiencing homelessness. As of the writing of this report, the eviction moratoriums in place due to the pandemic have likely reduced the number of new people being evicted and becoming homeless. However, as the moratoriums end and Rhode Island Housing and other state entities roll out rental assistance and other support programs over the coming months, it will be important for the City to pay close attention to any rise in evictions and the impacts this will have on local emergency services.

It is increasingly difficult for people experiencing homelessness to find permanent housing and the pandemic has only made this worse. According to the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, while the overall number of homeless in Rhode Island has been on a downward trend for many years, those who do fall into homelessness are apt to stay there longer. Resources for permanent housing are very limited. Statistically speaking, almost none of the people in Woonsocket's shelters this year will get access to a permanent housing program or subsidy, so the availability of relatively low cost, low barrier market rate housing is critical. One new resource from HUD is the Homeless Emergency Solutions Grant for COVID-19 grantees (ESG-CV). If the City or the Housing Authority or other local entity could identify a building, these grant funds could be used to create permanent affordable homes for people transitioning out of homelessness.

HEALTHY HOMES ISSUES

While Woonsocket's historic housing stock adds to its character and charm, it can also lead to public health issues such as lead-based paint, asbestos, poor indoor air quality, and general disrepair. It is a great thing that Woonsocket has a diversity of housing types, but these homes must be in good repair and updated to be more energy efficient and meet modern needs if they are going to be attractive options for the next generation. Generally speaking, a healthy home needs to be dry, clean, safe, well-ventilated, pest-free, contaminant-free, well-maintained, and energy efficient.

Energy Efficiency and Weatherization - Thousands of homes in Woonsocket would benefit from full energy retrofits, including insulating the entire building, sealing off air leaks, and installing more sophisticated HVAC systems — ideally powered by solar panels. The City needs as many tools as possible to help owners reinvest in their properties, since this is very expensive. Fortunately, the federal government is seriously exploring options to dedicate funding that would help retrofit literally millions of homes across the country. Massachusetts is exploring similar programs, and there is a great need for Rhode Island to do the same. Massachusetts is also investing in design assistance to help property owners understand the most efficient ways to retrofit their buildings, and many of these ideas can be applied in Woonsocket. For example, early in 2021, the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center announced the winners of a competition to design cost-effective, all-electric energy retrofit approaches to existing three-family or “triple-decker” homes, a housing style common to a lot of Woonsocket neighborhoods.

Asthma - When poorly controlled, asthma can lead to emergency department visits, hospitalizations, school absenteeism, and, in some cases, death. Many triggers for asthma occur in the home, including mold, pests, poor ventilation, dust mites, and others. If these issues can't be addressed in homes, it is harder to successfully treat patients. According to the Rhode Island Asthma Control Program, Woonsocket has one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the state. Emergency department visit rates for a primary diagnosis of asthma is 6.2 per 1,000 children in Rhode Island versus 10.2 per 1,000 children in Woonsocket.³ Decreases in childhood asthma over time will be a decent indicator that homes are becoming healthier.

Lead-Based Paint - As noted above, the vast majority of Woonsocket's housing stock was built prior to 1979. This suggests an increased likelihood of homes containing lead-based paint, which was not banned for residential construction until 1978. Data provided by RI Kids Count shows a steady decrease in both the rate of new and pre-existing incidences. As of 2020, children in Woonsocket under six years old with high or very high blood lead levels (5-10 µg/dL+) has decreased to 4.3%. In 2019, there were only 23 new cases of children with very high blood lead levels. This is a great improvement from past years, but the goal is to get as close to 0% as possible. The City of Woonsocket was awarded a 2019 Lead Paint Hazard Reduction grant from HUD to continue addressing this challenge.

³ The 2019 Rhode Island Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and the 2015-2019 Rhode Island Emergency Department Visit and Hospital Discharge Data were analyzed by the Rhode Island Asthma Control Program epidemiologist for the Rhode Island State Strategic Plan.

HOUSING RESOURCES

Woonsocket's housing needs are significant, and support comes from a lot of different resources, including banks, private developers, Rhode Island Housing, various non-profits, and more. Below is a high-level look at some of the most prominent resources.

U.S. HUD RESOURCES

The U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD) requires communities like the City of Woonsocket to develop a Five-Year Consolidated Plan for the allocation of federal housing and community development funds. Woonsocket's 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan includes a wealth of data identifying housing and community development needs/priorities and strategies to address them. It is both a five-year plan of action and the City's application for funds from three formula block grant programs: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG). Together, these make up a large portion of the housing-related funds available to Woonsocket. The Consolidated Plan should inform Woonsocket's Comprehensive Plan, not only as it relates to housing, but to economic and community development and social services.

In the Consolidated Plan, Woonsocket identifies the following needs for housing and homelessness, consistent with the needs identified above:

- Improving existing substandard housing to provide safe, decent, sanitary, affordable units for people at all market levels.
- Promoting construction of market-rate homeownership and rental units in order to achieve both economic diversity and income parity.
- Increasing the number of affordable units for low-income and minority residents, reducing the incidence of housing cost burden and disproportionate needs.
- Maintaining and increasing support for permanent and supportive housing for homeless individuals and families, and people with special needs.

Major strategies for addressing these needs include:

- Investments in housing rehabilitation, with an emphasis on rental housing.
- Housing code enforcement and foreclosed property care, including reduction of exposure to lead hazards.
- Homeownership subsidies, including first-time homebuyer down-payment assistance and closing cost support.
- Homelessness prevention strategies, including increasing transitional housing capacity, homeless shelter capacity, and resources for homeless prevention.

WOONSOCKET HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Woonsocket Housing Authority (WHA) is fully independent from the City of Woonsocket, with all its funding and financing coming from the federal government. WHA manages over 1,200 homes across four senior buildings and two family communities (Morin Heights and Veterans Memorial). These properties are generally well maintained. Veterans Memorial, for example, recently received a score of 98 from HUD's Real Estate Assessment

Center (REAC). Interiors are kept clean and functional, with major spruce-ups between tenants. However, bathrooms and kitchens remain dated. Many tenants would prefer more modern bathrooms or kitchens, but this has been a lower priority than exterior and health/safety investments. Major priorities in recent years have included the installation of more energy efficient boilers for heat and hot water, new roofs, new siding, upgrades to community rooms, security, and safety measures in the senior buildings, and repair of stoops and sidewalks. Much of the boiler replacement that has occurred to date has been through grants from National Grid, and WHA is searching for additional funding and/or financing to finish this work at all properties.

WHA has no trouble renting out apartments at its family communities, but waitlists are low. Most people or households on waitlists are waiting for a particular size or location. For example, there are very few 5-bedroom units, so if a family needs that size, it may have to wait. This suggests that supply and demand are in healthy balance and there is no need to expand or reduce the number of WHA family units at this time.

WHA has been innovative in keeping its senior buildings full by providing unique services. For example, a non-profit assisted living facility approached WHA to see if they could lease space at one of the four senior buildings. This partnership provides a great service for the community. The assisted living facility now takes up three floors of the building and is looking to expand to a fourth. Not only is the building fully leased, people in independent living at WHA can transition, as needed, to assisted living without having to go elsewhere. And the fee for assisted living remains the same as the fee for independent living: 30% of the person or household's income. WHA has also kept its senior units full by expanding to younger residents with disabilities. While this provides an important service for people with disabilities, anecdotally some older residents are uncomfortable living with younger adults who keep different hours and have different social needs from their older neighbors.

Recently, WHA has played a significant role in public health, hosting many COVID vaccination and testing clinics over the past year. Testing has been used throughout the pandemic to keep residents safe and healthy. So far, 18 vaccination clinics have been held – three at each property. All public housing residents ages 18+ are eligible for the vaccine.

Overall, crime is relatively low compared with public housing in other urban communities, and WHA maintains strong relations with the Woonsocket Police and Fire Departments, as well as the Department of Public Works and Public Schools.

NEIGHBORWORKS BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (NWBRV), previously known as the Woonsocket Neighborhood Development Corporation, is a nonprofit community development corporation that works to enrich neighborhood life and make affordable housing opportunities available throughout Woonsocket and Northern Rhode Island. The organization builds and manages affordable rental homes, maintains a homeownership center that serves as a one-stop shop for education and financial planning for new

prospective homeowners, and links their residents and other community members with local and state services and other resources.

LOW-MODERATE INCOME (LMI) HOUSING DATA

The following data is required by the State to determine compliance with the Low to Moderate Income Housing Act (R.I.G.L. 45-53).

LMI THRESHOLD DATA

Woonsocket is one of ten municipalities considered “exempt” due to its percentage of rental housing and current LMI housing inventory. It meets the Act’s mandated LMI threshold by complying with the following:

In the case of an urban city or town which has at least 5,000 occupied year-round rental units and the units, as reported in the latest decennial census of the city or town, comprise twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the year-round housing units, is in excess of fifteen percent (15%) of the total occupied year-round rental units.

Table 5-8 demonstrates that Woonsocket remains in compliance with the Act.

Number of Housing Units (2010)	19,168
Number of Renter-Occupied Rental Housing Units	10,605 or 55.3% of all housing units
Number of LMI rental housing units	3,038 or 15.9% of all housing units

Table 5-8. Woonsocket LMI Housing Thresholds

Source: Rhode Island Housing, 2019

CURRENT LMI INVENTORY

Rhode Island Housing keeps the official inventory of LMI housing for every municipality in the state. **Table 5-9** below shows the latest inventory for Woonsocket, broken out by housing type (Elderly, Family and Special Needs).

LMI HOUSING TYPE	LMI UNIT NUMBER	% OF TOTAL LMI HOUSING
Elderly	1,276	42.0%
Family	1,611	53.0%
Special Needs	151	5.0%
Total	3,038	100.0%

Table 5-9. Woonsocket LMI Housing Inventory

Source: Rhode Island Housing, 2020

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR HOUSING

Housing will continue to be a major issue in Woonsocket's Comprehensive Plan. The Plan will need to:

- Explore ways to more thoroughly and comprehensively reinvest in the existing aging housing stock, making it safe and attractive for the next generation.*
- Increase housing production to meet the housing needs of all residents, but particularly low-moderate income residents for whom even Woonsocket's relatively affordable housing stock is increasingly out of reach.*
- Consider the financial benefits of having LMI housing in the City (more people spending less on housing and more in the local economy, and long term savings for social services) and whether they may outweigh the lower tax revenue (currently capped by the state at an 8% rate).*
- Work regionally and statewide to ensure that neighboring cities and towns are doing their fair share to provide affordable and LMI housing.*
- Draw clear connections between improving economic opportunities for Woonsocket residents (access to better jobs with higher wages) and alleviating housing cost burden. Likewise, continuing to make investments in a thriving economy and mixed-use downtown is critically intertwined with housing demand.*

6.CIRCULATION

How people get to and around Woonsocket.

WHY CIRCULATION MATTERS

A community can have a number of resources – jobs, open space, shopping, health facilities – but the full benefits of these are not realized if not all community members can access them. A circulation system that serves a community’s needs means workers are connected to jobs, patients to healthcare providers, and tourists to local destinations. It’s not just important that these are connected, but why, how, and for whom. An efficient circulation system ensures that all users, whether by foot, bus, bike, or personal vehicle can reach their destination comfortably and safely. This means drivers during commute hours using roadways, students reaching schools by sidewalks, the elderly making mid-day medical appointments on transit, and tourists visiting downtown Woonsocket via the Blackstone River Bikeway. Planning for all these users requires a comprehensive look at existing networks and how they operate.

KEY TRENDS

- Located close to three large employment and population centers, Providence, RI and Worcester and Boston, MA, improving regional transportation links to and within Woonsocket has the potential to connect more residents to the regional job market.
- With a compact, pedestrian-scale downtown, Woonsocket has a strong foundation for promoting walking as a mode of transportation for short, local trips for accessing community amenities like grocery stores, farmers markets, schools, and parks. It will be important for the City to prioritize locations for sidewalks and other pedestrian improvements.
- There is potential to expand regional public transit links to Woonsocket, a recommendation of the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority’s transit master plan, *Transit Forward RI 2040*.⁴ Currently the 57 bus to Providence is the only regional transit connection. A study completed in 2009 illustrated the benefits of a commuter rail connection between Woonsocket and Providence.⁵

⁴ Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA); *Transit Forward RI 2040*, December 2020, <https://transitforwardri.com/pdf/TFRI%20Recs%20Briefing%20Book-Final%20201230.pdf?v=1.2>.

⁵ Jacobs Engineering Group; “Rhode Island Intrastate Commuter Rail: Feasibility Report.” June 2009.

- Improving local transit connectivity is also important, as 18% of the population lives in a household without access to a private vehicle. Use of local transit can be encouraged by physical improvements to bus stops as well as working with RIPTA on routing, scheduling, and service hours to best meet the needs of transit dependent populations.
- The development of the Blackstone River Bikeway (BRB) has the potential to facilitate biking as a mode of transportation for both residents and visitors. While the bikeway provides a regional connection to downtown Woonsocket, making it a resource for tourism and recreation, local use of the bikeway can be encouraged by the addition of on-street bicycle infrastructure to connect local neighborhoods to the path, so that residents may use it for accessing shops, fresh food, jobs, or recreational areas within the City.
- With walkable streets, historic attractions, and a location adjacent to the Blackstone River, Downtown Woonsocket has many natural advantages as a commercial and tourist district. Targeted transportation improvements, such as wayfinding that can help people park once and then walk to multiple destinations, can build on these advantages to increase foot traffic and strengthen downtown Woonsocket's identity.
- A map of the City's transportation network can be found at the end of this chapter (**Map 6-1** Transportation Infrastructure).

ROADWAY NETWORK

Woonsocket's 117 miles of roadway are mainly local roadways, with highways accounting for less than one mile and principal arterials about 10 miles of the roadway network (see **Table 6-1** for definitions of roadway types). Connections to regional destinations such as Providence, Worcester, and Boston are made generally via highways outside of city limits, accessed by principal arterials from within Woonsocket. Some regional connections are well served – Providence and Worcester, for example, are reached from Woonsocket by State Route 146, which is located less than a mile west of the City. Boston, meanwhile, has less direct connections, as does Norfolk County, Massachusetts, where many Woonsocket residents work.⁶

⁶ City of Woonsocket; "Woonsocket 2012 Comprehensive Plan." April 2012.

ROADWAY TYPE	DEFINITION	LOCAL EXAMPLE
Highway	A major road, often grade-separated and accessed via ramps, used for making regional connections	Woonsocket Industrial Highway (Route 99)
Principle Arterial	A major road serving significant regional and local destinations, and may have direct driveway access and at-grade roadway intersections	Cumberland Hill Road
Minor Arterial	A roadway serving mid-length trips, often allowing for connectivity within a community	Cass Avenue
Collector	A roadway that gathers traffic from local roads and connects to arterials accessing more distant destinations	Bernon Street
Local	A roadway that facilitates local, short trips, provides direct access into the roadway system from residences and other local destinations	Collins Street

Table 6-1. Definitions of Roadway Types

CITY-WIDE CORRIDORS

City-wide corridors collect vehicle traffic from local neighborhoods and connect both to local employment destinations like the Highland Corporate Park and CVS headquarters, as well as to highways connecting to employment centers like Providence, Worcester, and Boston. This makes it important for them to serve a variety of users, including regional vehicular traffic as well as local walkers, bikers, and transit users closer to the downtown area. Several of these roadways are state-controlled,⁷ and run from Woonsocket into the surrounding municipalities. The City collects traffic count data throughout the City through the Department of Public Works to inform transportation planning and engineering decisions for roadway maintenance needs.⁸ Key corridors that provide city-wide access in Woonsocket include:

- **Mendon Road (Route 122):** Mendon Road serves as a north-south connection in the eastern half of Woonsocket between Cumberland Road to the south and Diamond Hill Road to the north. Traffic congestion on the portion of Mendon Road south of its intersection with Cumberland Hill Road was identified as an issue by the City, particularly during evening commute hours.⁹ This portion of Mendon Road feeds into both the Highland Corporate Park and the CVS headquarters, both important employment centers that serve as traffic generators in Woonsocket. Mendon Road also provides important regional access as it connects to Route 99, which further connects to State Route 146 leading to Providence to the south and Worcester to the north.
- **Diamond Hill Road (114):** Diamond Hill Road runs east-west in northeastern Woonsocket. It serves a major commercial retail corridor, housing strip malls and

⁷ Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT); State-Maintained Roads in Rhode Island, http://www.dot.ri.gov/about/maproom/State_Maintained_Roads.php, April 20, 2021.

⁸ City of Woonsocket; Woonsocket Utility Map, <https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=efcb5e2b18e344e2a31e253514ef11fc&extent=-71.5118,41.985,-71.4801,42.0013>, April 20, 2021.

⁹ D'Agostino, Steven. "Interview with Department of Public Works." March 19, 2021.

big box stores, and also provides regional access into Massachusetts via Route 126 to the north and Route 121 to the west. The City has expressed a desire to transform and energize this corridor using a “Road Diet” to narrow the vehicular right-of-way and create more space for other modes, such as walking, biking, and transit, as the corridor is currently served by RIPTA Route 87.¹⁰

- **Cumberland Hill Road (Route 122)/Cumberland Street (Route 126):** Cumberland Hill Road/Cumberland Street are key connections between the junction of Mendon Road (Route 122) and Route 99 to the south and downtown Woonsocket. At its southern end, Cumberland Hill Road is an auto-oriented corridor abutted by industrial uses on either side, with a sidewalk mainly on the west side, despite minimal pedestrian oriented-land uses. As it heads north, land uses along Cumberland Hill Road transition into a mix of residential and commercial. Cumberland Hill Road eventually transitions into Cumberland Street, between Hamlet Avenue and Social Street.

Cumberland Street is more pedestrian oriented and served by RIPTA Route 87. Cumberland Street as well as the northern part of Cumberland Hill Road have the potential to serve as local walking and biking connections between the residential neighborhoods to the east and downtown Woonsocket and the Blackstone River to the west.

- **Manville Road (Route 126):** Manville Road runs adjacent to the Blackstone River to the west between Route 99 to the south and Hamlet Avenue to the north. Similar to Cumberland Hill Road, it provides both regional connectivity and local connectivity. Although a state roadway, it mainly houses residential uses with sidewalks on both sides, particularly further north, with a wide shoulder. Due to its proximity to the Blackstone River, it also holds opportunity for integrating walking and biking

COMPLETE STREETS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Complete Streets support the idea that designing streets with accessible connections between land uses provides greater opportunity for people to access activities that support daily life, recreation and entertainment, and other activities. The more activity an area can generate, the greater the investment. Numerous Complete Streets projects have demonstrated economic benefits through higher property values and increased business revenues.



¹⁰ Proft, Kevin. “Interview with Woonsocket Planning Department.” March 11, 2021.

connections to the BRB and to downtown Woonsocket for the residential neighborhoods to the west.

- **Harris Avenue (Route 122) and River Street:** Harris Avenue and River Street connect neighborhoods in the northwest to downtown Woonsocket to the south and Massachusetts to the north. With a residential character, strong sidewalk network, and wide shoulders, there is opportunity to view Harris Avenue as a “Complete Street” and facilitate walking and biking connections between these residential neighborhoods and downtown. The City is currently completing a Visioning Report for the redevelopment of brownfields on River Street. It will also be important to integrate multimodal connectivity into redevelopment plans to support walking, biking, and transit use.
- **South Main Street/Providence Street (Route 104)/Park Avenue:** These three corridors run in a southwest to northeast direction towards downtown Woonsocket. They provide regional connectivity to Smithfield Road on the southwest border of Woonsocket that goes on to connect to the North Smithfield Expressway (Route 146), which eventually connects to Providence. With each roadway containing a mix of residential and commercial uses, and RIPTA bus service on Providence Street, they all have a solid foundation for multimodal improvements. Improvements through a “Complete Streets” framework would help connect residents to schools, shopping, and jobs without depending on a personal vehicle.

DOWNTOWN CORRIDORS

- **Main Street (Route 104):** At the heart of Woonsocket, Main Street serves as the spine of the City’s downtown. Along with its side streets, Main Street’s narrow curb-to-curb roadway and wide sidewalks give downtown a strong foundation for a multimodal network. Its main purpose is to collect visitors (both from Woonsocket and outside) to downtown and allow them to easily visit multiple destinations, including shops, restaurants, and historical attractions, by vehicle and on foot. While it does connect to destinations in other parts of the City (particularly North Main Street and South Main Street), future improvements should focus on further improving the multimodal experience – helping to bring more residents and visitors to downtown and keeping them there longer.
- **Truman Drive:** As the main bypass road downtown, Truman Drive runs in between Main Street to the north and the Blackstone River to the south. Although currently an auto-oriented roadway separated by a concrete median, the City has secured funding to convert it to a traditional two-lane road and use the extra space to develop a park-like greenway. This project will help create a more pedestrian-oriented downtown and bring in more foot traffic to support economic development, create additional recreational space, and assist with stormwater management.
- **Social Street and Clinton Street:** Another central corridor that connects residents and visitors to commercial destinations is made up of Social Street and Clinton Street, paired one-way streets each comprised of two travel lanes. Like Main Street, this twin corridor has a multimodal character with sidewalks on both sides and multiple RIPTA bus stops on both streets. Housing many of Woonsocket’s social and

municipal services, such as the Rhode Island Department of Health, Woonsocket Public Library, and Community Care Alliance, ensuring safe and accessible multimodal connectivity in this area is important for providing access for all to these services.

ROADWAY SAFETY

Safety is a crucial aspect of transportation – not just in preserving and protecting the lives of residents and visitors, but in expanding access and mobility. If people feel unsafe or uncomfortable while using a mode of transportation, they will be less likely to use it. Any efforts to improve transportation will not reach their full potential without a focus on safety.

Woonsocket has prioritized safety on its roadway network using several strategies. One method, called a Road Safety Assessment (RSA), is a state program that assesses roadway safety by completing a review of crash data, interviews with stakeholders, and field observations. The product of an RSA is a report that identifies safety improvements and recommendations. Three RSAs have been completed in Woonsocket in recent years, detailed in **Table 6-2**.

VISION ZERO

In order to raise awareness of safety and promote a culture of reduced vehicular speeds, some communities have developed a “Vision Zero” Plan. “Vision Zero” acknowledges that many factors contribute to safe mobility – including roadway design, speeds, behaviors, technology, and policies – and sets clear goals to achieve the shared goal of zero fatalities and severe injuries.

Safety is directly related to vehicle speed, which impacts crash severity.
<https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/>



LOCATION	YEAR	CHALLENGES	RECOMMENDATIONS
Diamond Hill Road	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of bicycle and pedestrian facilities • Inadequate signage • High speeds • Poor visibility at Walnut Hill Road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate use of Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) • Consider road diet
Cass Avenue	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-visibility pedestrian facilities • Nighttime crashes • Inadequate vehicle sight lines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider pedestrian curb extensions/bump-outs • Review corridor-wide lighting
Downtown (Main Street, Social Street, Clinton Street, Hamlet Avenue, Truman Drive, Park Avenue, Worrall Street, Cummings Way)	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate bicycle and pedestrian facilities • Antiquated signal equipment • High speeds • Poor signage • Abundance of curb cuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate HAWKs, RRFBs, and raised crosswalks in school zones • Develop citywide bicycle plan • Study conversion of Main Street between Court Street and South Main Street to one-way traffic

Table 6-2. Road Safety Assessment Locations and Recommendations

Other strategies used by the City to promote safety are mobile trailers with speed feedback signs used by the Police Department and Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacons (RRFBs). The City currently has four RRFBs, concentrated in the downtown area, located on Main Street, Clinton Street, Social Street, and Monument Square. Additionally, the State installed an RRFB on Cumberland Hill Road. The City has mainly received positive feedback regarding the use of RRFBs, though damage by vehicles and their cost were identified as barriers to installing more.¹¹ Through the Police Department the City has also used mobile trailers with speed feedback signs to monitor speeding in the City.

Although safety city-wide is important for creating an accessible roadway network, the City has identified safety around schools as a primary concern, particularly around school drop-off/pick-up times. With increased congestion from personal vehicles, as well as buses, it is important to ensure

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

SRTS is a federally funded program, which aims to encourage and enable more Rhode Island children to safely walk and bike to school through infrastructure improvements and programs.

This is especially important for Woonsocket, as it houses a higher percentage of school-age children than the state average.

¹¹ Debrousse, Michael. "Interview with Engineering Department." April 1 2021.

there is clear signage, markings, and appropriate dedicated space for pedestrians, particularly children, to reduce conflict between modes.

Woonsocket has been an active partner in the State's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program, which has been used to fund pedestrian infrastructure around schools as well as programs to make it easier for children to walk to school. In 2014 the program funded the crosswalk and traffic signal at Cumberland Street and Kendrick Avenue, and physical improvements are currently being completed in prioritized areas around Citizen's Memorial Elementary School and Pothier Elementary School. It is important for the City to keep pursuing funding that can be used to improve walking and biking connections and safety for all of Woonsocket's schools.

KEY ROADWAY INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

There are several areas that could benefit from more robust maintenance systems to ensure necessary improvements to infrastructure and roadway operations are in place. Several key infrastructure needs have been identified through this baseline review:

- **Pavement Management Program:** While Woonsocket currently collects roadway condition data manually on an as-needed basis, the City does not currently have an automated pavement management program. Creating a program to help aid in this process, as well as in the collection and retention of sidewalk condition data, could make the identification of infrastructure needs easier. Roadway improvements programmed for funding in the state's 2018–2027 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) include Park Avenue (Route 146A) and Mendon Road and Cumberland Hill Road (Route 122), and Social Street (Main Street and Massachusetts state line). Funding includes resurfacing, limited sidewalk replacement, and ramp installation.¹²
- **Traffic Signal Upgrades:** Upgrading traffic signals has been identified as a priority by the City, as many signals are outdated or in need of evaluation.¹³ So far signals have been evaluated at four locations between 2020 and 2021. Recommendations generally include installation of loop detectors, repairs to or installation of new pedestrian signals, and signal timing adjustments to improve intersection operations and safety. These adjustments ensure that intersections are operated clearly, allow pedestrians enough time to make crossings, and move traffic efficiently.
- **Freight Access Management:** Certain freight-heavy areas, including River Street, have issues related to low-clearance bridges, as trucks must redirect around these. Diamond Hill Road (Route 114) and Mendon Road (Route 122) are the only designated freight routes that cut across Woonsocket. A robust freight access management program could help identify more and better freight routes.

¹² Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program; Transportation Improvement Program FFY 2018–2027, http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/tip/2021/STIP_02-25-2021.pdf, Revised February 25, 2021.

¹³ D'Agostino, Steven. "Interview with Department of Public Works." March 19, 2021.

- **Bridge Repair:** With the Blackstone River cutting through the center of the City, Woonsocket's seven bridges serving vehicle traffic are key transportation links. While all the bridges are structurally sound, the City has identified that they are in need of repairs and refurbishment to bring them up to date. Additionally, due to environmental concerns, the bridges would need to be encapsulated to be refurbished, escalating costs for these efforts.¹⁴

The FFY 2018-2027 STIP includes almost \$20 million in funding from 2023-2026 to preserve and extend the useful life of 12 bridges (Bridge Group 26B) in Woonsocket. An additional four bridges in Woonsocket are programmed for major rehabilitation work, which may involve total bridge replacement, with funding from 2023-2017 (Bridge Group 48).

Woonsocket can take advantage of the state's Municipal Road and Bridge Revolving Fund (MRBRF), which provides long-term financing at a below market interest rate for transportation infrastructure projects, including capital improvements to roads or bridges and associated infrastructure such as sidewalks. To be eligible, projects must be placed on RIDOT's Project Priority List (PPL).

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Public transit is an asset that has potential to improve access in and around Woonsocket, as well as to other employment centers in the region. The *Transit Forward RI 2040* plan identifies Woonsocket as an urban center that would benefit from improved transit.¹⁵ The plan proposes a new bus route through the City, connecting to Bellingham, MA, a new regional bus route offering better service to Providence, and a new mobility hub downtown. Such a mobility hub would not only benefit these proposed new services, but the City's existing transit. With a significant proportion of carless residents compared to the proportion of people who use transit to commute to work, Woonsocket has an opportunity to increase transit use by improving and expanding existing transit services.

LOCAL BUS SERVICE

Woonsocket's existing fixed route bus service, shown in **Figure 6-1** is comprised of two RIPTA bus routes – the 54 and the 87. The 54 travels from downtown Woonsocket to the south along Main Street and Providence Street, traveling through Lincoln before eventually terminating in Providence. The 87 is a more local route, connecting the Walnut Hill neighborhood in the east of the City, through downtown, to the Fairmount neighborhood in west Woonsocket. Together, the two routes travel just over 10 miles in the City. The 54 stops 25 times in Woonsocket, while the 87 makes all 86 of its stops within City limits. Both routes serve all the main downtown destinations along Main Street, Social

¹⁴ D'Agostino, Steven. "Interview with Department of Public Works." March 19, 2021.

¹⁵ Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA); *Transit Forward RI 2040*, December 2020, <https://transitforwardri.com/pdf/TFRI%20Recs%20Briefing%20Book-Final%20201230.pdf?v=1.2>.

Street, and Clinton Street. The 87 also serves the St. Ann Arts and Cultural Center on Cumberland Street and the Landmark Medical Center on Cass Avenue, on its way to the major shopping centers on Diamond Hill Road. West of downtown, the 87 also serves Dunn Park in the Fairmount neighborhood. On its way from downtown to the south, the 54 serves commercial areas along South Main Street and Providence Street, plus major shopping centers at the junction of Park Avenue and Smithfield Road and at Dowling Village just south of the City line. Before reaching downtown Providence, the 54 also stops at the Lincoln Mall, the Community College of Rhode Island Flanagan Campus, and the Twin River Casino.



Figure 6-1. Woonsocket's Existing Fixed Route Bus Service

Service frequencies for both routes, shown in **Table 6-3**, vary between every 20 and every 40 minutes. Service on weekdays extends from roughly 5:00 AM to midnight on Route 54, and from shortly before 6:00 AM to 7:45 PM on the 87. Though exact ridership numbers were not obtained, the Cummings Way stop between Clinton Street and Social Street was identified by the City as a particularly high-ridership location, likely due to its proximity to social services like the Community Care Alliance.¹⁶ Making improvements here to increase bus stop accessibility presents a good opportunity to serve existing transit users and incentivize additional transit use.

¹⁶ Debroisse, Michael. "Interview with Engineering Department." April 1, 2021.


RIPTA ROUTE	SERVICE AREA	SERVICE DAYS/HOURS	WEEKDAY FREQUENCY
54	Downtown Woonsocket - Lincoln	Weekday: 5:00 AM – 12:00 AM Saturday: 6:00 AM – 9:30 PM Sunday: 7:00 AM – 8:30 PM	30 minutes early morning through evening 40 minutes night and late night
87	Fairmount – Walnut Hill	Weekday: 5:50 AM – 7:45 PM Saturday: 7:00 AM – 6:35 PM Sunday: 9:00 AM – 5:55 PM	20-40 minutes throughout the day

Table 6-3. Services Hours and Frequencies for Routes 54 & 87

DOWNTOWN MOBILITY HUB

A new mobility hub in downtown Woonsocket is supported by the City to improve access to transit. The City supported preliminary plans around 2019 for a mobility hub/bus pull-out stop on Clinton Street, though this plan did not move forward at the time. Continuing to examine opportunities for a mobility hub downtown by working with RIPTA to implement the vision of *Moving Forward RI* will be important for supporting Woonsocket's carless population, younger residents who are not able to drive, and also for attracting young professionals who may prefer to make all or most of their trips without a car. Also ensuring safe pedestrian access to bus stops City-wide, and considering multimodal connections to transit, such as bike parking at stops, are important elements to encouraging local transit use.

WHAT IS A MOBILITY HUB?



Mobility hubs are places where people can access services or amenities as they transfer between modes of transportation, such as transit, walking, bicycling, or driving. Mobility hubs are typically located where different bus routes converge, or a connection to another mode, offering a safe, secure waiting area, and serve areas with high average daily riders. The major features of a mobility hub are connectivity, safety and security, multimodal connections, and design and amenities. Likely locations for mobility hubs are downtowns or neighborhood centers, hospitals or medical buildings, shopping centers or malls, college campuses, and large business parks.

REGIONAL TRANSIT SERVICE

Of the major cities in the region, Providence, Worcester and Boston, Woonsocket currently has direct transit links only to Providence, via bus. Though there is currently no commuter rail service to Woonsocket, there is a former train station, Woonsocket Depot, owned by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, as well two segments of railroad right-of-

way that cross the City from southeast to northwest and from southwest to northeast.¹⁷ The STIP has funds programmed to protect the Woonsocket Depot historic station to ensure the facility remains viable for a variety of multimodal uses, including opportunities to attract commuter rail service to Woonsocket in the future.

Several studies in the past have examined the potential to expand commuter rail service from Boston, Providence or Worcester to Woonsocket. These reports have found that while connecting Woonsocket directly to Worcester or to the MBTA system via the Forge Park line would be difficult, an intrastate connection to Providence via Pawtucket could reap large benefits connecting the state and providing access via transfer to Amtrak and the MBTA Providence line.¹⁸

SENIOR/PARATRANSIT SERVICES

Paratransit services in Woonsocket are provided by RIPTA through the agency's RIDE Program. These services are available to individuals with a disability within a service area that extends $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile in either direction from a RIPTA fixed-route service. This catchment covers most of Woonsocket, with the exception of the neighborhoods along the southernmost stretches of Manville Road (roughly south of St. Marcel Street) and Mendon Road/Cumberland Hill Road (roughly south of Newbury Avenue). Paratransit rides must be scheduled at least one day in advance, by calling between 8:30 AM and 4:30 PM on weekdays, or between 8:00AM and 4:00 PM on weekends. Rides are available at the same times as the span of service on the corresponding fixed bus route.

The Woonsocket Department of Human Services has indicated a need for additional paratransit services catering specifically to the senior population. Seniors would benefit from a direct door-to-door service for trips such as medical appointments and grocery shopping. Expanding paratransit services, particularly for seniors, is important for enabling Woonsocket residents to age in place and have mobility options beyond driving a personal vehicle.

WALKING & BIKING

Walking and biking are critical in linking transportation networks throughout Woonsocket – connecting people between the City's neighborhoods and commercial centers and ensuring access to resources like open space, schools, and transit.

SIDEWALK NETWORK

Woonsocket's downtown street network provides a good base for pedestrian activity, with narrow streets and wide sidewalks. Leveraging these existing conditions to further develop the City's pedestrian infrastructure – adding facilities like RRFBs and curb extensions, updating crosswalks to ladder striping and installing ADA-compliant curb ramps – could yield benefits both to economic development and safety. Improving the walkability of

¹⁷ Jacobs Engineering Group. "Rhode Island Intrastate Commuter Rail: Feasibility Report." June 2009.

¹⁸ City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island. "Commuter Rail Feasibility Study." 2007.

Woonsocket's downtown area can also promote economic development, as pedestrians are more likely than other modes to make multiple stops into local businesses and restaurants.

Outside of the downtown area, streets tend to be wider and not all streets have sidewalks. While not every street necessitates a sidewalk, especially on both sides, there is opportunity for Woonsocket to implement a sidewalk prioritization program to start to identify where targeted sidewalk improvements and additions can be made to improve pedestrian connectivity and accessibility. For example, the City has identified areas around schools as a priority for improving sidewalk connectivity, while low-volume, low-speed residential streets are less of a priority as pedestrians are likely to feel comfortable walking in the street. Providing access to fresh food is also a priority for the City. A sidewalk prioritization program could provide a methodology for prioritizing pedestrian improvements on streets that provide access to grocery stores, farmers markets, and other similar food providers.

Funding for Sidewalks

As a designated entitlement community, the City of Woonsocket is eligible for funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program. The City can use this program to fund identified local public infrastructure needs.

BIKING NETWORK

Woonsocket's existing bike network is mainly comprised of the Blackstone River Bikeway (BRB), which runs north to the south through downtown Woonsocket. The ultimate vision is for the bikeway to connect from downtown Worcester to India Point Park in Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁹ The BRB through downtown Woonsocket will be comprised of both off-street paths and on-street facilities where there are constraints to continuing the off-street network. The BRB is currently partially constructed, as seen in **Figure 6-2**, with the final two stages under design.²⁰ The STIP has programmed \$4 million for the portion of the path between Division Street and Truman Drive.

Though it may seem less desirable to move the facility on-street, such as is proposed for Cumberland Street and Clinton Street, this presents an opportunity to further build upon. Identifying key on-street links between the BRB and surrounding neighborhoods would provide biking connections enabling residents to access shopping, social services, and transit via bike. Providing on-street bicycle facilities would further connect the BRB to downtown cafes, restaurants, and shops, promoting the tourism and hospitality industries,

¹⁹ National Park Service; Blackstone River Greenway and Bikeway Access, 2020, <https://blackstoneheritagecorridor.org/exploring-the-blackstone-river-valley/maps-tours-guides/blackstone-river-bikeway/>, April 20, 2021.

²⁰ Rhode Island Department of Transportation; Blackstone River Bikeway, 2021, <http://www.dot.ri.gov/travel/bikeri/>, April 20, 2021.

while also providing an attractive alternative mode of transportation for young professionals. Multiple recent studies, including the 2019 Downtown Road Safety Assessment, have recommended the development of a citywide bicycle plan to promote biking as a mode of transportation within Woonsocket.

The BRB is also part of the larger East Coast Greenway, a north-south route from Key West in Florida to the Canadian border. The East Coast Greenway identifies several on-road bike routes in Woonsocket, though they do not currently have dedicated bicycle facilities.²¹

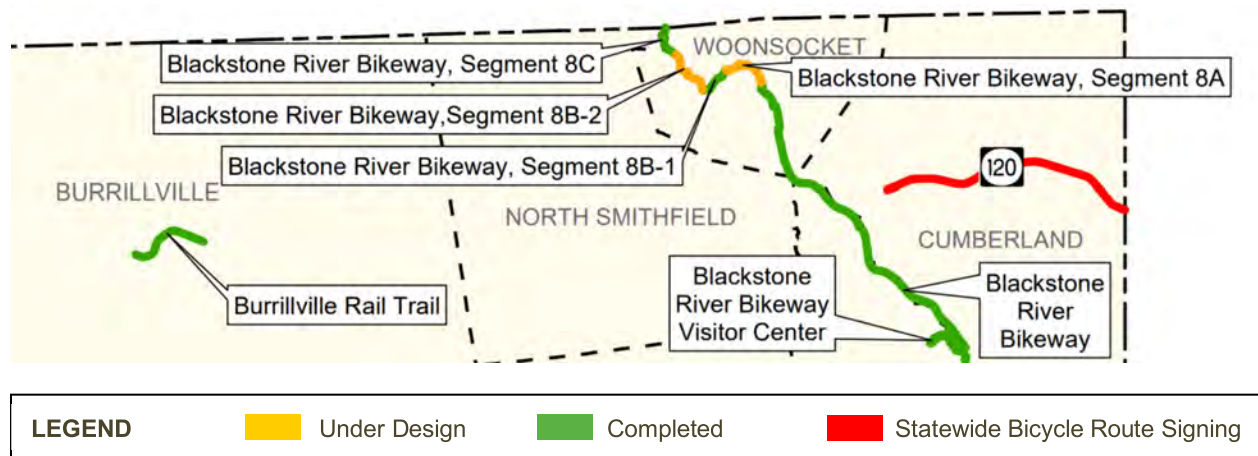


Figure 6-2: The Blackstone River Bikeway (BRB)

DOWNTOWN CIRCULATION

Downtown Woonsocket is an essential element in the City's transportation network, hosting many of Woonsocket's main commercial destinations and historic resources. Residents and visitors alike come to downtown to exit their cars and spend time on foot – differentiating it from other corridors that mainly connect between destinations. As mentioned previously, Main Street has a good framework for such multimodal use, but targeted improvements could go further, helping to bring more people to the district and spend more time in its shops, restaurants, and other destinations.²²

WAYFINDING

Developing a wayfinding program is an opportunity to improve access to and within downtown. Both the 2010 Wayfinding Report and the 2019 Downtown RSA advocated for improved and increased signage in the downtown area. As downtown's historic street network is already well suited to walkability, adding branded directional signage could both further improve this pedestrian experience and reinforce the district's identity. Wayfinding can also assist in locating parking lots.²³ While downtown is generally thought to have an adequate parking supply, parking areas can be difficult to find. Adding wayfinding signage

²¹ East Coast Greenway Map; <https://map.greenway.org/?loc=14,42.00173,-71.53597>, April 20, 2021.

²² The Cecil Group, et al. "Woonsocket Main Street Livability Plan." April 2013.

²³ The Cecil Group, et al. "Woonsocket Main Street Livability Plan." April 2013.

to off-street parking lots may be able to alleviate this issue without the need to add more parking. With many historic resources and a walkable street network, downtown could benefit from a comprehensive parking and wayfinding system to encourage residents and visitors to park and walk, helping make downtown less car-centric and supporting the local economy by increasing foot traffic.

PARKING

Parking downtown is available through a mix of City-owned surface lots and on-street parking. The City owns ten municipal parking lots, and has a general sense that the existing parking supply adequately accommodates demand, and perhaps oversupplies parking in the downtown area.²⁴ In 2020, the City completed upgrades to the Main Street municipal parking lot to improve the physical condition and traffic design, and increase the number of spaces in the lot from 23 to 108.²⁵ In 2015, the City implemented the Downtown Overlay District in an effort to encourage economic development, growth, and pedestrian activity by reducing minimum parking requirements. The goal of the district is to allow uses that “encourage further growth and concentration of art, cultural and entertainment attractions; promote the use of vacant and underutilized properties; and encourage a walkable vibrant environment.”²⁶ The overlay implements a parking exemption for nonresidential uses. Within this overlay,²⁷ one off-street privately owned space is required for each residential unit, but can be provided off-site.²⁸ Reducing parking requirements is a first step in reallocating space from cars to people, and incentivizing a street network that is safe and accessible for all people, while promoting local businesses and economic development.

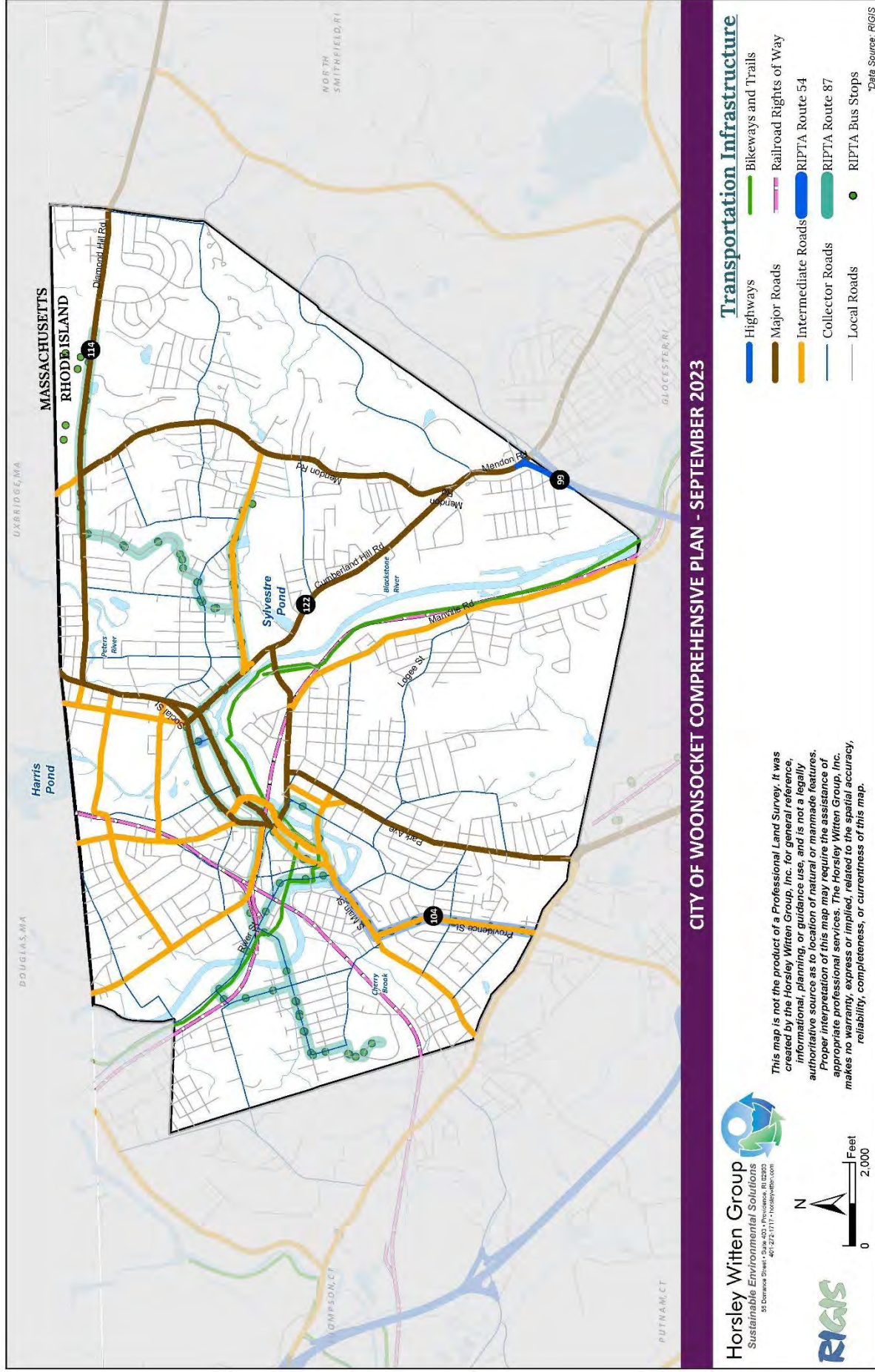
²⁴ Proft, Kevin. “Interview with Woonsocket Planning Department.” March 11, 2021.

²⁵ “Mayor Baldelli-Hunt Sets Out to Upgrade Main Street Municipal Parking Lot.” WoonsocketRI.org, 31 Jan. 2020, www.woonsocketri.org/press-releases/news/mayor-baldelli-hunt-sets-out-upgrade%C2%A0main-street-municipal-parking-lot%C2%A0.

²⁶ City of Woonsocket; Woonsocket Zoning Ordinance, Section 2.1-6.5 November 2019

²⁷ City of Woonsocket; Web GIS Map and Online Property Information, <https://www.mainstreetmaps.com/ri/woonsocket/public.asp>, April 20, 2021.

²⁸ City of Woonsocket; Woonsocket Zoning Ordinance, Section 5.1-4, November 2019



KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR CIRCULATION

Providing a safe and comfortable circulation system for all people in Woonsocket is the foundation for other elements in Woonsocket's Comprehensive Plan. The Plan will need to:

- Explore how to build on existing assets, including the walkable downtown and the Blackstone River Bikeway to support economic development and recreation.*
- Think regionally to connect more Woonsocket residents to job centers, especially those without access to a personal vehicle to support Woonsocket's workforce.*
- Build strategies to keep circulation improvements organized and efficient, such as pavement management, sidewalk prioritization, and a freight access management program to support public infrastructure and services.*
- Expand choice for Woonsocket residents by promoting connectivity between modes so that people can choose the method of travel that fits best for each type of trip.*
- Embrace Woonsocket's identity and incorporate it into the branding and feel of the City's downtown, through wayfinding and parking management, to support walking, biking, and transit use to support a lively and vibrant City center.*

7. SERVICES & FACILITIES

How Woonsocket serves its residents and runs its government.

WHY SERVICES & FACILITIES MATTER

The City of Woonsocket provides a broad range of services to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the community. The level at which these services are delivered is influenced by changes in population, development, environmental factors, and economic conditions. Evaluating service capacity in conjunction with anticipated changes in community needs can help the City determine strategic infrastructure and program investments in the near- and long-term.

WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT

The Woonsocket sanitary sewer system and Woonsocket Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) are owned by the City and operated by the Woonsocket Regional Wastewater Commission.

SANITARY SEWER SYSTEM

Woonsocket is serviced primarily by a separate sanitary sewer system, with only isolated properties relying on septic systems. The City has no plans to connect those properties to sewer. Septic systems are regulated under City Ordinance Chapter 18, Section 18-24 Private Sewage Disposal, which specifies:

Where a public sanitary sewer is not accessible..., the building sewer shall be connected to a private wastewater disposal system complying with the requirements of the City of Woonsocket and the Rhode Island Department of Health.

Woonsocket's sanitary sewer system consists of 111 miles of gravity sewers, 13 inverted siphons, and 18 pump stations, 7 of which are City-owned. Much of the sewer system was originally constructed in 1897 out of vitrified clay pipe. Cracks and leaky joints, common for vitrified clay pipes, allow rainwater to seep into the pipes and significantly increase wet-

weather flow to the WWTF. Vented sewer manhole covers, which have holes that allow rainwater in, are also a major cause of inflow. This influx of rainwater into sewers, also known as infiltration and inflow (I/I), increases the volume of sewage that must be pumped and treated at the WWTF and thereby increases costs to the City.

Veolia, a resource management company, manages the sewer system under contract to the City. As part of its contract, Veolia cleans and camera-inspects the entire sewer system in 5-year cycles. The City has completed significant repairs to sewers in the past eight years, including slip-lining, dig and replace, and short sections of cured-in-place lining. The City also replaces vented manhole covers in conjunction with road projects.

A flow study completed during the wet months of 2020 evaluated 11 sewer zones that were previously identified as most problematic in a 2007 I/I study. The 2020 study showed improvement to I/I in all but one zone and estimated that the City had removed almost 3 million gallons a day (MGD) of I/I since 2007. The City has also made progress on reducing sanitary sewer overflows, of which there are currently an average of two per year.

The City has an ongoing program targeting inspections and repairs to problem areas. The City does not have any long-term plans for significant sewer improvements, other than continuing its program of sewer and manhole repair and replacement as needed.

WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITY

The Woonsocket Regional WWTF, located at 11 Cumberland Road, treats wastewater from Woonsocket and North Smithfield, RI and Bellingham and Blackstone, MA, and discharges treated wastewater to the Blackstone River. It treats an average of 9.3 MGD and has a design capacity to treat an average flow of 16 MGD. The WWTF is operated by Jacobs, Inc., under a design-build-operate contract with the City.

The City recently upgraded the WWTF to provide nitrogen and phosphorus removal. The upgraded WWTF consistently meets permit limits for these effluent nutrient concentrations. The City, with its contractor Jacobs, is currently exploring options to reduce phosphorus concentrations in the waste stream generated by sludge dewatering, which threatens to cause permit exceedances for phosphorus.

The City also maintains programs for industrial wastewater pretreatment and fog-oil-grease control to manage pollutants at their source and prevent clogging of the sewer system.

SOLIDS HANDLING

Sludge from the WWTF is dewatered and incinerated at the Woonsocket Thermal Conversion Facility, located adjacent to the WWTF. The facility is owned by the City and operated by Synagro under contract with the City. Through financial agreements that generate revenue for the City, the sludge facility receives, processes, and incinerates sludge from other wastewater treatment plants.

ODORS

The Woonsocket WWTF has a long history of odor problems, due in part to its proximity to residential and commercial areas. An odor study in 2019 reported that, despite odor control measures implemented over the past 30 years, the City receives an average of 46 odor complaints per year²⁹. The study recommended several improvements to the WWTF and sludge facility, such as installing and sealing covers, adjusting airflow systems, and upgrading air scrubbers. It also recommended further study and improvements to procedures for trucks delivering sludge to the sludge facility from other wastewater treatment plants. The City, Jacobs, and Synagro have implemented most of the recommendations in the 2019 report and significantly reduced odor emissions from the facilities. Odor from trucks transporting dewatered sludge to the sludge facility remains an ongoing issue. The City has a hotline for residents to report odor issues and meets weekly to discuss odor management.

FLOOD RISK MITIGATION

In 2018, the City completed a study of flood risks facing the Woonsocket Regional WWTF and four pump stations³⁰. The study found that portions of the WWTF would be inundated during a future 100-year flood event (current base flood elevation plus three feet) and that operation of the four pump stations would be impacted. The consultants recommended several flood-mitigation actions, including installing flood barriers and watertight doors, raising walls, installing and/or elevating backup generators and fuel sources, and upgrading pumps.

WATER SUPPLY

The Woonsocket water system is owned by the City and managed by the Woonsocket Water Division (WWD), part of the Department of Public Works. The City has contracted with SUEZ Water Technologies to operate the Woonsocket water supply system.

SERVICE AREA AND POPULATION

The WWD service area includes all of Woonsocket, sections of North Smithfield and Cumberland, RI, and small areas of Blackstone and Bellingham, MA. The WWD sells wholesale water to the Cumberland Water District and North Smithfield Water District in addition to retail customers in both communities. The Woonsocket Water Supply System Management Plan³¹ estimated a total service population (based on the 2010 census) for WWD of approximately 43,569, including 41,603 people residing in Woonsocket. The updated service population based on the 2020 census is not yet available.

²⁹ Bowker & Associates, Inc. 2019. Evaluation of Odor Emissions and their Control at the Woonsocket Wastewater Treatment Facility.

³⁰ Jacobs/CH2M. 2018. Woonsocket Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility Climate Resiliency Plan.

³¹ Pare Corporation. 2020. City of Woonsocket Water Supply System Management Plan 5-Year Update. Submitted August 2019, Revised May 2020.

WATER SUPPLY SOURCE

Woonsocket's water supply system consists of three reservoirs, Reservoir No. 1, Reservoir No. 3, and Harris Pond. Reservoir No. 1 is located just south of the city limits, about 2.5 miles downstream of Reservoir No. 3 along Crookfall Brook in North Smithfield and Lincoln, RI. Reservoir No. 3, the largest of the three reservoirs, lies along the southern end of Crookfall Brook in between Smithfield and North Smithfield, RI. Harris Pond, Woonsocket's auxiliary water supply reservoir, is just over the state line in Blackstone, Massachusetts.

Reservoir No. 1's watershed is hilly with steep slopes near Mill Brook and Crookfall Brook. This watershed is traversed by the major highways of Routes 146, 116, and 99. The City of Woonsocket owns about 124 acres, or 4 percent, of this watershed. The watershed area for Reservoir No. 3 is hilly with large areas of wetlands. This watershed is primarily undeveloped but does include some residential and agricultural land uses. The City of Woonsocket owns 636 acres, or 31 percent, of this watershed. The Harris Pond watershed is located within the Massachusetts communities of Blackstone, Mendon, Hopedale, Upton, Bellingham, and Milford. The Woonsocket Water Division owns Harris Pond and about 10 acres of the watershed along the shoreline near the intake. The Water Division plans to purchase additional lands under the Rhode Island Water Resources Board Watershed Protection Bond Program³².

WATER TREATMENT AND DISTRIBUTION

In 2021, the City completed construction of the new Woonsocket Water Treatment Plant (WTP) in the Bernon Heights area of Woonsocket, along with transmission main upgrades and a new raw water pump to convey water from the former Charles Hamman WTP to the new treatment plant. The WTP is designed to treat 7.5 MGD, with the potential for future expansion to 10.5 MGD.

The Woonsocket water system includes nine water storage tanks, four booster pump stations, and four major transmission mains, including the new raw water and finished water transmission mains constructed as part of the new WTP project. Overall, the distribution system includes about 130 miles of pipe and 1,570 hydrants.

The WWD has interconnections with water systems in the Towns of Lincoln, Cumberland, and North Smithfield. All the interconnections have the capability to provide water in emergency situations.

As reported in the WWD 2020 Water Supply System Management Plan, the average daily demand in 2018 was 3.97 MGD and maximum daily demand was 5.25 MGD. The average daily demand is projected to increase to 4.60 MGD in 2040. The safe yield of the water supply system based on the drought of record is 6.9 MGD; yield based on a critical dry period with a one percent chance of occurrence is 7.5 MGD; and yield based on a critical dry period with a five percent chance of occurrence is 8.0 MGD. Given the safe yield and

³² CDM Smith (2018) City of Woonsocket Infrastructure Rehabilitation Plan. Final Report, July 2018.

WTP capacity, the WWD will be able to meet current and projected future demands with the existing sources of supply.

WATER CONSERVATION

WWD has an ongoing program for detecting and fixing water leaks. It also has policies to monitor drought and impose a series of restrictions and actions to control demand as drought conditions warrant.

PLANNED PROJECTS

The WWD is planning several projects to further improve drinking water distribution:

- **Comprehensive water meter replacement program:** Most existing water meters were installed in 2004 and are nearing the end of their useful life. WWD plans to replace residential and commercial water meters with new meters with radio encoders, and to implement a system for remote meter-reading and monthly billing.
- **Park Avenue transmission main:** A new transmission main, augmenting an existing main on Park Avenue, is intended to boost water pressure in the service area.
- **Ongoing infrastructure inspections, maintenance, and rehabilitation:** Projects include:
 - Flushing of hydrants and tanks,
 - Replacement of hydrants and distribution pipes,
 - Cleaning and lining of transmission mains, and
 - Upgrades to storage tanks and pump stations.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

The City's municipal stormwater sewer is owned by the City and managed by the Public Works Engineering Department.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Discharges from the City's stormwater management system are regulated under the Rhode Island Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System General Permit (MS4 Permit). The MS4 Permit requires municipalities to implement best management practices to reduce and prevent stormwater pollution and to maintain the municipal stormwater system in good condition. To comply with the MS4 Permit, the City has an ongoing stormwater management program that includes the following Minimum Control Measures:

1) Public education and outreach

The City maintains a stormwater management website and cooperates with the University of Rhode Island Stormwater Education and Outreach Program.

2) Public involvement and participation

The City sponsors Earth Day cleanup events, hazardous waste collection days, and a rain barrel program to encourage watershed stewardship. The City also collaborates

with groups that are active in promoting clean water, including the schools and the Blackstone River Coalition.

3) Illicit discharge detection and elimination (IDDE)

The City's IDDE program seeks to prevent and eliminate non-stormwater flows, such as sewage or illegal dumping, from entering or discharging from the municipal stormwater system. The program has included GIS mapping, stormwater system inspections, and adoption and enforcement of the *Illicit Discharge Detention and Elimination Ordinance* (Ordinance Chapter 7192). The City's contractor, Fuss and O'Neill, inspected outfalls in 2007 and identified several outfalls in Woonsocket with dry weather flows with high bacteria concentrations, which may indicate sewage entering the drainage system.

4) Construction site stormwater runoff control

To ensure stormwater management on construction sites, the Engineering Department completes site-plan reviews, construction-site inspections, and enforcement actions in accordance with the City's *Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance* (Ordinance Chapter 5803).

5) Post-construction stormwater management in new development and redevelopment

The City's *Post Construction – Storm Water Control Ordinance* (Ordinance Chapter 7193) requires development or redevelopment projects disturbing over 1 acre of land to submit a Stormwater Management Plan consistent with the 2015 Rhode Island Stormwater Design and installation Standards Manual. The City also encourages projects to incorporate low impact development (LID) site design practices. The Engineering Department reviews plans for stormwater management, coordinates with the State on stormwater approvals, and inspects stormwater treatment systems to ensure long-term operation and maintenance.

6) Pollution prevention/good housekeeping for municipal operations

The City owns approximately 2,865 catch basins, 280 outfalls, and nine stormwater treatment facilities. To maintain the stormwater infrastructure and reduce stormwater pollution from municipal property, the DPW sweeps public roads and parking lots, inspects and cleans catch basins and drainage pipes, and inspects and maintains public stormwater facilities. DPW recently improved its snow and ice management practices to use less sand and thereby reduce the amount of sediment washing into catch basins and waterbodies. DPW inspects the Highway Garage regularly and maintains stormwater pollution controls in accordance with the Highway Garage site-specific Stormwater Management Plan.

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) has stated that it is preparing a revised MS4 Permit and anticipates issuing a draft in 2021. If the revised Rhode Island MS4 Permit mirrors permits recently issued in other New England states, the City can expect to have more stringent requirements to investigate and eliminate illicit discharges, to regulate stormwater management on development sites, and to plan and implement structural stormwater treatment systems to reduce stormwater pollution.

CHRONIC DRAINAGE FLOODING

DPW noted two areas of concern for chronic drainage flooding in Woonsocket. At Iron Rock Brook off Mendon Road, undersized culverts are causing localized flooding. With grant funding, DPW is in the process of upgrading that stream crossing to alleviate flooding. Behind City Hall, Truman Drive occasionally floods when the water level in Blackstone River is high and causes a drainage system backup.

STORMWATER TREATMENT

The City partners with the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone, and Blackstone River Coalition on the Thundermist Task Force to advance stormwater improvements in Woonsocket. The City pays annually into a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) fund to support the Task Force, in compliance with a 2008 consent order for past violations by the Woonsocket WWTF. With those funds, the Thundermist Task Force awards grants for small stormwater projects within Woonsocket on public and private properties. Projects funded in the past have included rain gardens, streambank plantings, tree-fox filters, and youth education.

In a 2019 report³³, the Thundermist Task force identified and prioritized potential future sites for larger scale stormwater improvements. The four high-priority sites are as follows:

- **River's Edge Complex:** Proposed vegetated swales and rain gardens along the Blackstone Valley Bike Path.
- **Bernon Memorial Park:** Proposed large areas of vegetated swales and rain gardens to alleviate flooding of athletic fields.
- **Main Street Parking Lot 101:** Proposed permeable pavement, stormwater planters, gravel and sand filter, and underground water storage to reduce stormwater runoff and pollutants from a large parking lot in the main business district of Woonsocket.
- **River Island Art Park:** Proposed rain garden and overflow drain to mitigate flooding due to poor drainage.

SOLID WASTE

The City provides curbside trash and recycling pick-up for residents with city-issued bins through a private contractor. This service is paid for through the City's General Fund. The City also manages a Recycling Facility and Drop Off Center where residents can bring recyclable materials, particularly those that are not picked up curbside. These include:

³³ Woonsocket Thundermist Taskforce. Woonsocket Blackstone River Vision Report. July 1, 2019.

- Paper and cardboard (newspapers, catalogs)
- Shredded paper in clear plastic bags
- Commingle materials (1, 2, 3, 5 and 7 plastics, bottles, cans)
- Metals (steel, aluminum, cast iron, copper)
- Mattresses and box springs
- Appliances
- Books
- Propane tanks
- Vegetable oil
- Automotive antifreeze (Ethylene Glycol based)
- Clothes and shoes
- Rigid plastic (plastic toys, plastic outdoor furniture, old trash cans)
- Electronics (TVs, microwaves, air conditioners, computers, monitors, cell phones, items with power cords)

There is also a swap shed at the facility for gently used items.

All waste and recycled materials collected by the private contractor and at the City's Recycling Facility are brought to the Rhode Island Resource Recovery (RICCC) facility in Johnston. The City coordinates several Eco-Depots with RICCC throughout the year to help residents properly dispose of hazardous wastes commonly sold in stores like lawn chemicals and fertilizers, batteries, gasoline, fluorescent light bulbs, and motor oil and filters.

Leaves and yard waste (grass clippings, small branches, weeds, etc.) are collected curbside over two 10-week periods, one in the spring and one in the fall. All other times, residents can bring these materials to a drop-off site in Blackstone, Massachusetts. A sticker is required and available at City Hall for residents with a Woonsocket vehicle registration (commercial vehicles are not eligible).

Beginning July 1, 2012, every city or town that has a contract with RICCC to dispose of solid waste is required by state law to recycle a minimum of 35% of its solid waste (Mandatory Recycling Rate) and to divert a minimum of 50% of its solid waste (Overall Material Diversion Rate). RICCC publishes these data annually to help municipalities measure their progress in meeting these required goals. The following data are available:

- **Tons of Trash Sent to Landfill per Household:** This figure expresses how much trash was generated and landfilled by each household the municipality serves.
- **Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) Recycling Rate:** This figure measures recycling, which divides the total tons of mixed recyclables (materials placed in the bin/cart at home) sent to RICCC's Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) by the total of these tons plus the tons of trash delivered to RICCC for landfilling.
- **Mandatory Recycling Rate:** This measure builds on the one above, by adding the materials on the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's (RIDEM) Mandatory Recyclables List. These materials are leaf and yard waste composted at

RICCC or elsewhere as well as clothing/textiles and scrap metal reused or recycled elsewhere.

- **Rate of Overall Material Diversion from Landfill:** This measure expands on the previous one even more, by adding in all other materials that are diverted from the landfill for reuse or recycling such as books, bulky rigid plastics, cooking oil, electronic waste, food scraps, (recyclable) mattresses, motor oil and filters, paint, paper shredded at special events, and tires.

Table 7-1 compares Woonsocket's recycling and diversion rates for 2015 and 2020 with those on average for communities serving 10,000 or more households. In both years, the City is close to meeting the mandatory recycling rate of 35%. More work needs to be done in meeting the overall diversion rate.

YEAR	TONS OF TRASH LANDFILLED PER HH	MRF RECYCLING RATE	MANDATORY RECYCLING RATE (35% STATE GOAL)	OVERALL DIVERSION RATE (50% STATE GOAL)
2015	0.87	24.2%	33.2%	35.2%
2015 Average*	0.87	22.2%	34.2%	34.7%
2020	0.94	22.2%	31.2%	32.3%
2020 Average*	0.98	18.7%	21.7%	32.1%

*Average for municipalities serving 10,000 households or more through a curbside collection program

Table 7-1. Woonsocket Recycling and Diversion Rates, 2010 and 2020

Source: RI Resource Recovery Corporation

A new metric for 2020 measured by RICCC is pounds of rejected recycling per household. Rejected recycling is contaminated mixed recycling loads that do not meet minimum quality standards, are not processed in the MRF and are then landfilled. If a load is rejected, a municipality is charged a fee per ton plus a processing fee. In Woonsocket, 11 pounds of recycling per household was rejected in 2020, compared to 70 pounds on average for municipalities serving 10,000 or more households.

WOONSOCKET EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES

The Woonsocket Education Department provide public education to the City's children from pre-K through grade 12. Its administrative offices are located at 108 High Street. The Woonsocket Education Department has seven elementary schools, five house grades K-5, one houses grades 2-5, and one houses grades K-2. There are two middle schools for grades 6-8, one high school for grades 9-12, and one career and technical school for grades 9-12. **Table 7-2** lists the Department's schools.

SCHOOL	YEAR BUILT	GRADES
Woonsocket High School	1971	9-12
Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center	1971	9-12
Hamlet Middle School	2010	6-8
Villa Nova Middle School	2010	6-8
Harris Elementary School	2002	K-5
Kevin K. Coleman Elementary School	1963	K-5
Globe Park Elementary School	1960	K-5
Bernon Heights Elementary School	1960	K-5
Leo A. Savoie Elementary School	1962	K-5
Governor Aram J. Pothier Elementary School	1936	Pre-K-3
Citizens' Memorial Elementary School	1958	3-5

Table 7-2. Woonsocket Schools

Source: Woonsocket Education Department

The former Woonsocket Middle School in Park Place is still vacant and owned by the City.

The Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center (WACTC) offers programs that prepare students for the workforce as well as post-secondary educational institutions. These programs include:

- Automotive Technology and Transportation
- Biotechnology and Biomedical
- Child Studies/Human Services
- Computer Science, Game Design, and P-TECH
- Construction Technology, Home Building, and Pre-Engineering
- Culinary Arts
- Digital Media
- Graphic Design Multimedia and Visual Arts
- Health Careers
- Hospitality and Tourism

Students get hands-on learning opportunities and work-based experience. After graduation, students enter the workforce, attend two- year and four-year colleges, or enter the military. WACTC is open to all Rhode Island resident students entering or in high school. Transportation is provided for students living in Woonsocket, Cumberland, Burrillville, and North Smithfield for free.

FACILITIES CONDITIONS

In 2017, the State of Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) School Building Authority (SBA) engaged Jacobs and Cooperative Strategies (Jacobs) to conduct a statewide facility condition assessment and master plan.³⁴ These types of facility assessments are required by statute to be conducted once every five years for pre-K through 12 public

³⁴ <https://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolBuildingAuthority/FacilityDataInformation.aspx#37541409-master-plan>

schools. A report was prepared for each local school district, including the Woonsocket Education Department, detailing the condition assessment for each school building. A site's deficiencies are listed by building system (roofing, structural, exterior, etc.) and priority to address. Cost estimates are included. Local departments can use this information to plan for capital improvements and other needs at their schools. The schools with the greatest five-year need, according to the 2017 assessment, were Woonsocket High School, Globe Park School, and Bernon Heights School.

The data collected during the facility condition assessment also informs the statewide Recommended Action Plan. Jacobs recommendations focus on long-range planning. Relevant to Woonsocket, Jacobs included recommendations that focus on RIDE supporting local school districts, specifically the planning concept “newer and fewer,” which it notes is applicable to districts with multiple, exceptionally small schools with significant condition needs. It is typically not in a district's long-term interest to continue investment in such facilities, but rather should invest in building newer, fewer schools to provide modern learning environments for as many students, and as sustainably, as possible. Jacobs recommended that RIDE help these districts transition away from maintaining and operating multiple, exceptionally small schools in need of significant repairs, and toward newer and fewer schools that can provide enhanced learning opportunities and long-term operational efficiencies. This strategy highlighted Woonsocket, specifically Kevin K. Coleman and Leo A Savoie Elementary Schools. The Woonsocket Education Department also supports this approach.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND PROJECTIONS

Student enrollment has fluctuated over the last ten years and in 2020 was 10% lower than it was in 2010 (**Figure 7-1**).

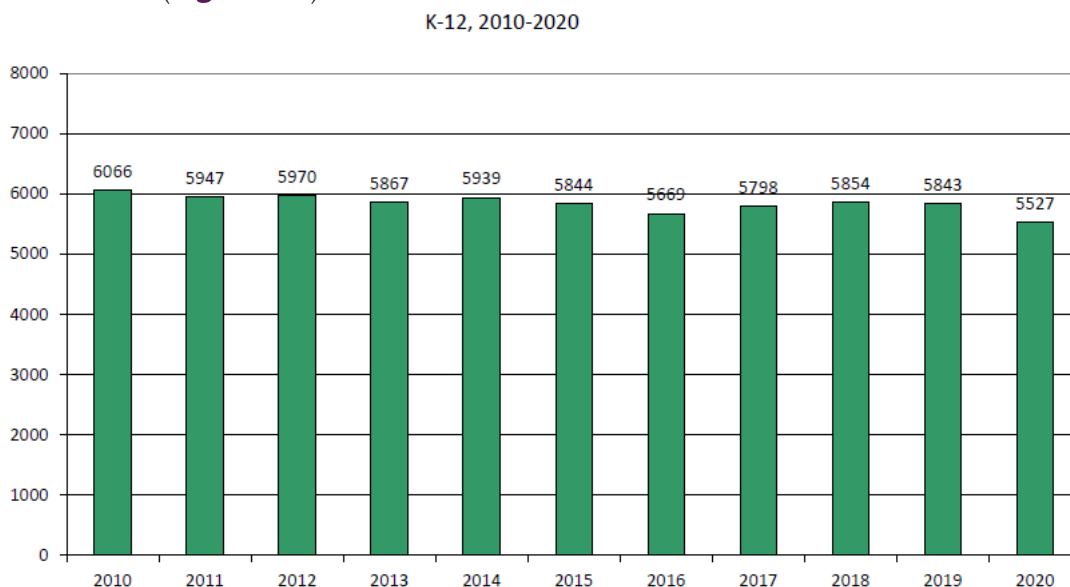


Figure 7-1. Historic Student Enrollment, Grades K-12, 2010-2020

Source: New England School Development Council, *Woonsocket School Department 2020-21 Enrollment Projection Report*, 2021

Future projections anticipate a continued decrease by 6.3% in student enrollment by 2031, a loss of nearly 350 students across all grades (**Table 7-3**). According to the Jacobs assessment, Woonsocket schools overall have a capacity of 7,950 students and were only utilizing 72.8% of that capacity in 2017.

GRADE	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2021-2031
PK	30	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	21
K	381	502	480	419	459	431	458	449	443	448	446	65
1	484	384	506	483	422	462	434	461	452	446	451	-33
2	438	465	369	486	464	405	444	417	443	434	428	-10
3	434	427	453	360	474	452	395	433	407	432	423	-11
4	419	430	423	448	356	469	447	391	429	403	428	9
5	458	419	430	423	448	356	469	447	391	429	403	-55
6	433	431	394	404	398	421	335	441	420	368	403	-30
7	424	419	417	381	391	385	408	324	427	407	356	-68
8	471	417	412	410	375	385	379	401	319	420	400	-71
9	454	505	447	442	439	402	413	406	430	342	450	-4
10	401	413	460	407	402	400	366	376	370	391	311	-90
11	381	362	373	416	368	363	362	331	340	334	353	-28
12	349	373	355	366	408	361	356	355	324	333	327	-22
PK-12	5557	5589	5562	5489	5449	5338	5313	5280	5244	5237	5230	-327
K-12	5527	5547	5519	5445	5404	5292	5266	5232	5195	5187	5179	-348
Difference	-	20	-28	-74	-41	-112	-26	-34	-37	-8	-8	-
% Change		0.4%	-0.5%	-1.3%	-0.8%	-2.1%	-0.5%	-0.6%	-0.7%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-6.3%

Table 7-3. Projected Student Enrollment by Grade, 2021-2031

Source: New England School Development Council, *Woonsocket School Department 2020-21 Enrollment Projection Report*, 2021

PUBLIC SAFETY

POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Woonsocket Police Department is organized into three divisions, as outlined in **Table 7-4**.

DIVISION	RESPONSIBILITIES	SUBDIVISIONS
Uniform Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Largest and most visible division - Community patrols - Responding to calls for services 	Uniform Patrol Traffic Unit Public Safety Telecommunications Clerks Animal Control
Detective Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support and assistance to the Uniform Division during preliminary investigations - Follow up on complaints and incidents that demand more detailed investigation - Ensure arrest reports are accurate and complete 	Detective Division Juvenile Detective Division Bureau of Criminal Identification Vice Investigators Prosecution Division
Operations Division	Professional Standards Training Recruiting Fleet Services Building Maintenance and Security Communications Grant Management Evidence	None

Table 7-4. Woonsocket Police Department Divisions

Source: Woonsocket Police Department website

The Police Department is part of the local community. It is committed to community policing, which promotes community, government, and law enforcement partnerships, proactive problem solving, and community engagement to address the causes of crime, the fear of crime, and other community issues. The Department has built partnerships with several organizations within and outside the City to meet the goal of community policing and improve the quality of life for City residents. It participates in many community events with local places of worship and National Night Out, among others. The Juvenile Detective Division works closely with the Woonsocket Education Department through a School Resource Officer (SRO). Woonsocket High School and Hamlet and Villa Nova Middle Schools are each assigned an SRO, which provides education to children through school-based activities and programs to reduce arrests and incidences at local schools.

The Police Department is headquartered on Clinton Street, where it also operates the joint dispatch for the Police and Fire Departments. It also has a substation on Hamlet Avenue and the Animal Control building on Cumberland Hill Road, however it is anticipated that the latter will be moving to a new location. The Department has reached capacity at its

headquarters facility with limited space to expand personnel offices, training rooms, and locker rooms. The building was built in 1975 and is in need of significant renovations to the roof, windows, holding areas and cells, and HVAC system, among other issues. The site also lacks enough space for vehicle storage, including the Department's day-to-day vehicles plus employees' vehicles. The substation on Hamlet Avenue provides space for officers, but the building itself is not open to the public because it is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Department has four divisions, as outlined in **Table 7-5**.

DIVISION	RESPONSIBILITIES
Education Division	Offers educational opportunities for residents, including CPR classes
Fire Alarm Division	Enforces fire alarm requirements
Fire Marshall Division	Conducts fire investigations, reviews building plans, and inspects buildings under their jurisdiction for code compliance
Hazardous Materials Division	Responds to incidents that involve hazardous materials

Table 7-5. Woonsocket Fire Department Divisions

Source: Woonsocket Fire Department website

The Emergency Management Agency is within the Fire Department. Its primary role is to coordinate with other City departments and regional and state agencies in the event of a natural disaster or crisis situation.

The Fire Department is also home to the regional team that responds to natural disasters and other incidences and becomes the command center during events. Equipment is stored at the Department's headquarters facility.

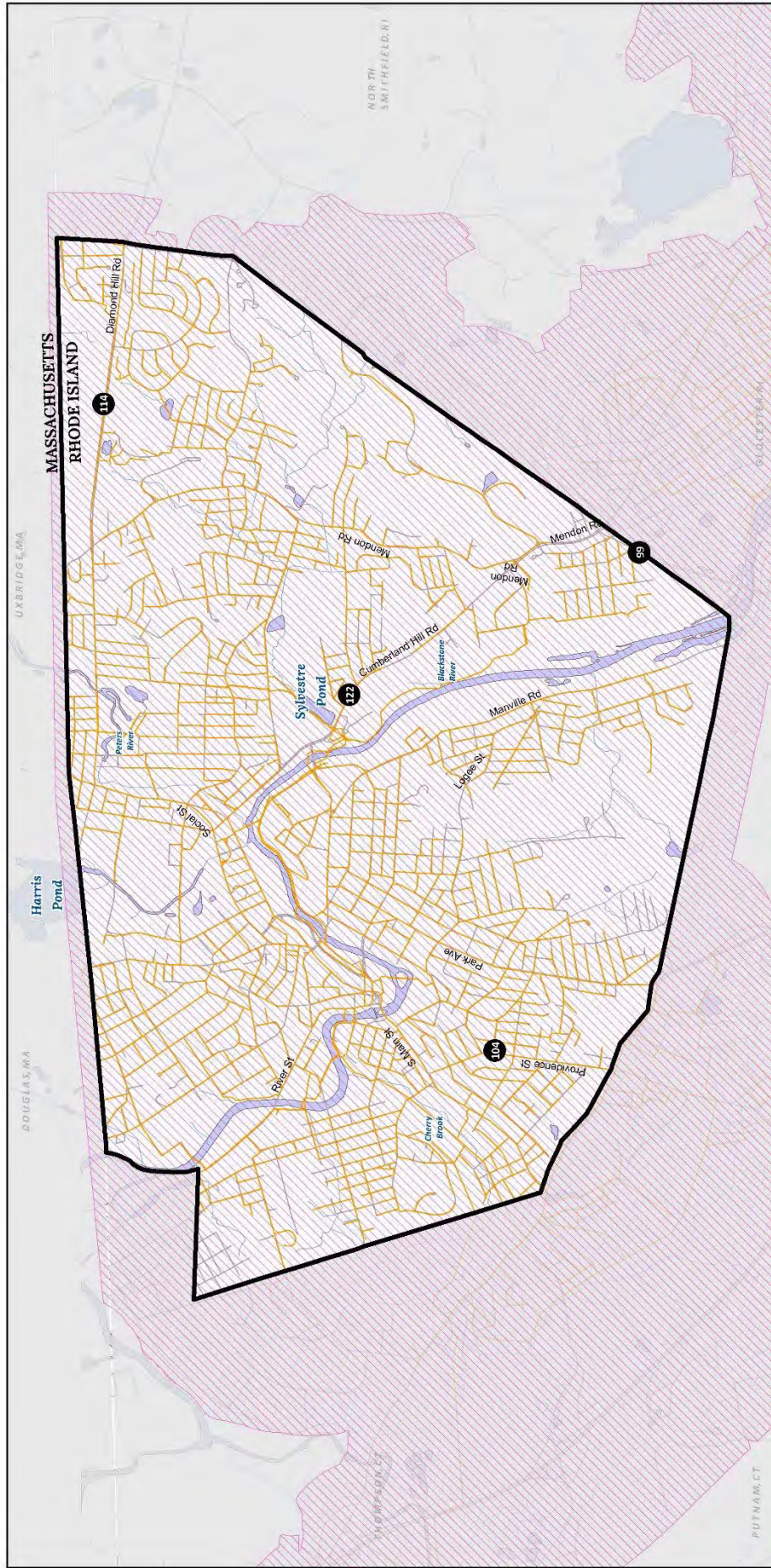
The Woonsocket Fire Department operates out of five stations:

- Station #1: 169 Providence Street
- Station #2 (Headquarters): 5 Cumberland Hill Road
- Station #3: 241 North Main Street
- Station #4: 804 Mendon Road
- Station #6: 504 Fountain Street

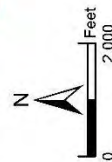
Many of these facilities are at capacity and do not have space for growth. Layout and space cannot accommodate more modern delivery of services, including space for personnel offices, mandatory training needs, and vehicle and equipment storage. All buildings are in need of repairs and/or renovations.

A NEW PUBLIC SAFETY COMPLEX

Prior to the temporary shutdown associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions had started around the development of a new public safety complex that would house both the Police and Fire Departments. These discussions were preliminary, and the City considered bringing in a consultant to determine a building footprint. No location for a new complex was identified. A public safety complex would be an efficient way to meet the demands and needs of both entities, potentially providing an integrated space for training, health, and wellness of officers and firefighters. A new complex may also allow the closure of some Fire Department substations.



CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



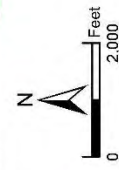
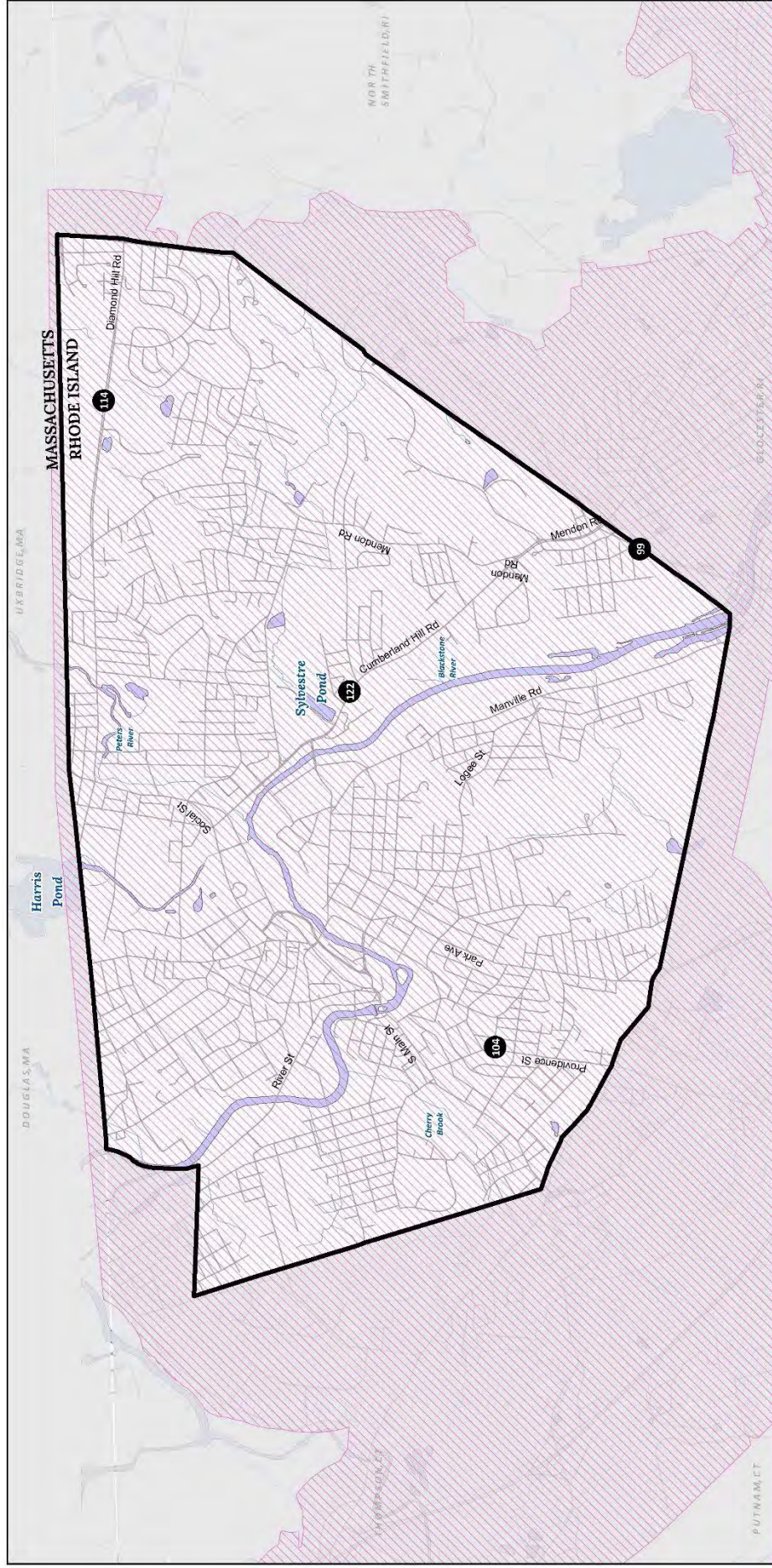
Sewer Service Areas

- Urban Services Boundary
- Sewer Lines

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*Data Source: BIGS, City of Woonsocket

Map 7-1: Sewer Service Area



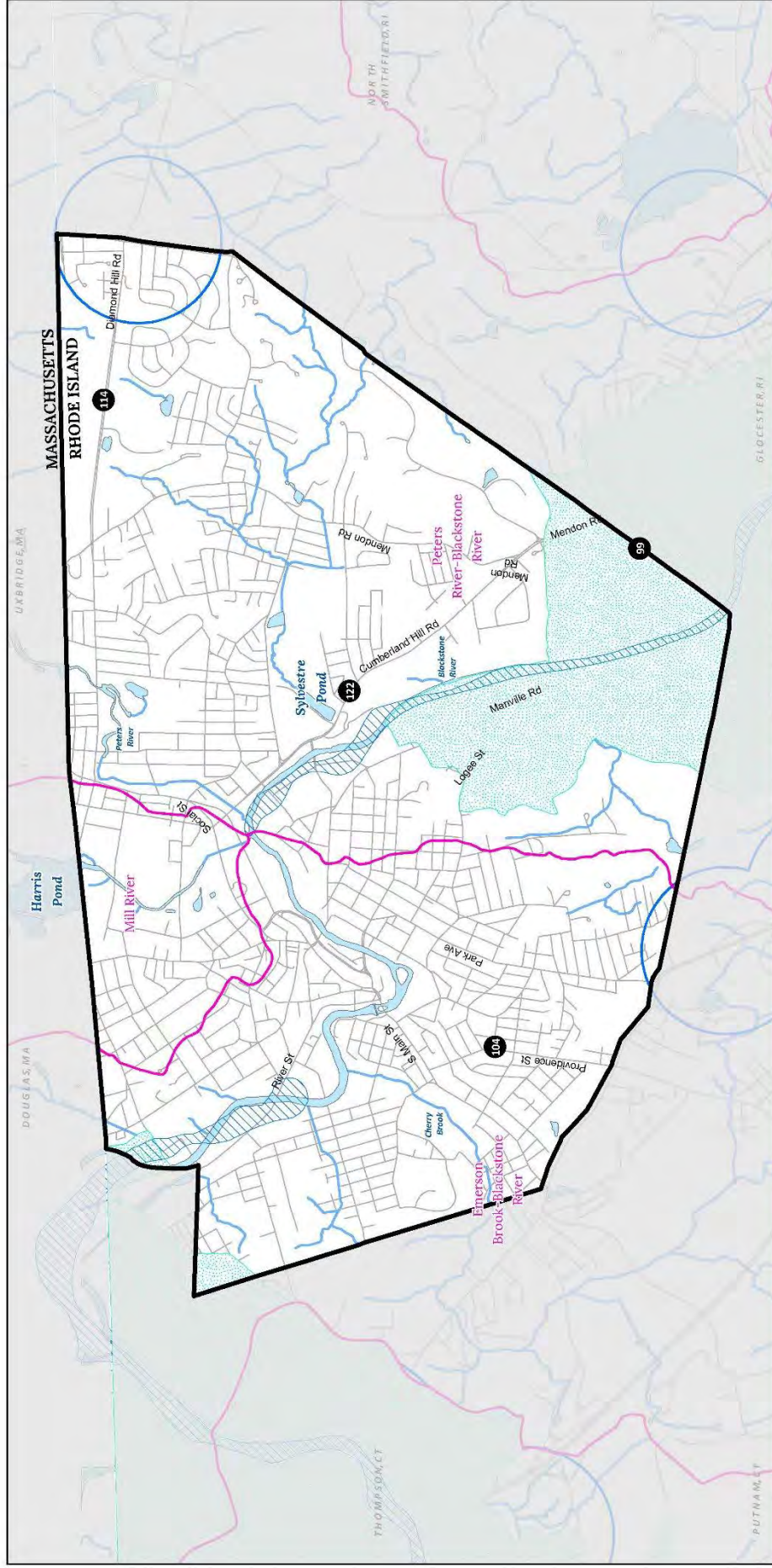
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Water Service Areas

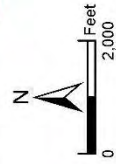
Urban Services Boundary

*Data Source: RGIS

Map 7-2: Water Service Areas



CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



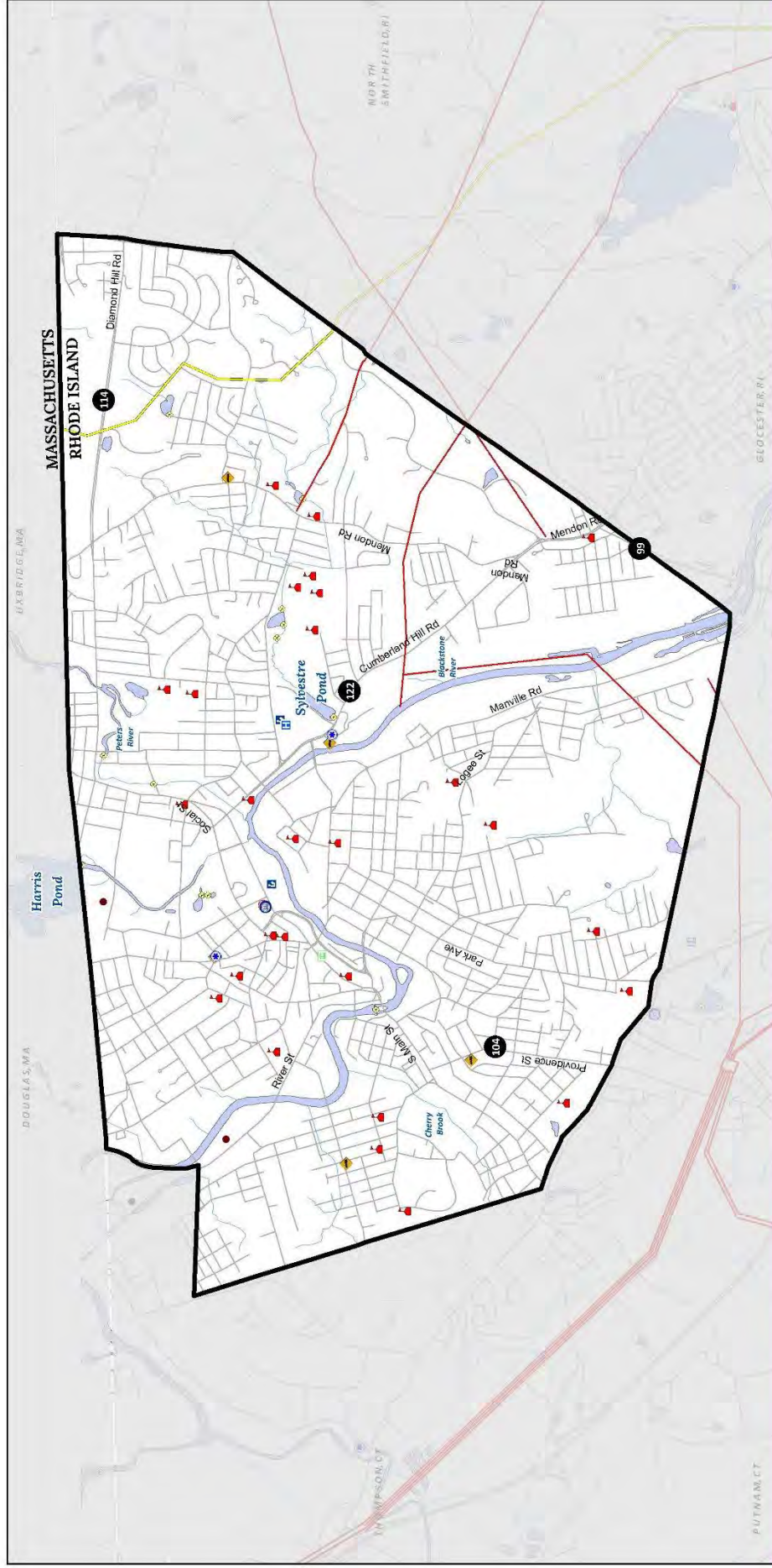
Water Supply

- Watershed Boundary HUC 12
- Groundwater Reservoirs
- Groundwater Recharge Areas
- Wellhead Protection Area Non Community
- Lakes and Ponds
- Freshwater Rivers and Streams

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*Data Source: RIGIS

Map 7-3: Water Supply



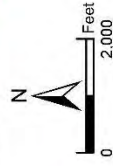
CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023

Public Infrastructure & Facilities

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- Electrical Transmission Lines
- Natural Gas Transmission Lines
- Correctional Institutions
- Dams
- Emergency Medical Services

- Fire Stations
- Hospitals
- Law Enforcement
- Libraries
- Active Solid Waste Sites
- Schools
- City Hall

*Data Source: RIGIS, City of Woonsocket

Map 7-4: Public Infrastructure & Facilities

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR SERVICES & FACILITIES

To deliver a broad range of services efficiently and effectively to residents of Woonsocket, the Plan will need to:

- Recognize state and federal mandates and the resources needed to meet these obligations.*
- Think about how to be proactive in maintaining and updating the City's infrastructure and facilities.*
- Recognize the need for planned and strategic budgeting for investments in equipment of all departments to ensure functionality, modernization, and efficiency.*
- Identify investments that make infrastructure and facilities more energy efficient, resilient, and sustainable in their operations.*
- Consider new learning environments when assessing investments in existing school facilities and how they can or cannot be accommodated in older buildings.*
- Recognize the facility needs of public safety and consider the development of a public safety complex, what it would look like, and where it could be built.*

8. SOCIAL SERVICES & PUBLIC HEALTH

The social and physical well-being of Woonsocket residents.

WHY SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC HEALTH MATTER

It is important for everyone in Woonsocket to be healthy and stable. When people are distressed, it places a burden on the whole community and is a drag on the economy. On the other hand, when people can take care of their basic needs and are well, they are better able to contribute to the economy and the well-being of the whole community. Investments in social services and public health are investments in the City's economic future.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The City government manages social services through two departments: The Department of Human Services and the division of Housing & Community Development within the Department of Planning & Development.

HUMAN SERVICES

The Human Services Department maintains an "open door" policy for all residents seeking assistance. Staff are trained to assist residents in both emergency and non-emergency situations, connecting them with resources from local agencies that provide relevant services, including but not limited to, other City departments, Fire and EMA officials, private non-profits dedicated to social services, and State of Rhode Island and Federal Agencies. The Department also assists residents with a Displaced Resident Program for emergency, fire, and non-fire related displacements working in collaboration with EMA.

In an interview with Human Services staff, the following were noted as the most important service issues over the past year:

- **COVID 19 Pandemic:** Obviously, community health issues around the pandemic have been the number one priority for the department this past year and one of the most common reasons for resident calls. Getting as many people as possible tested and then vaccinated against the virus has consumed much of the Department's time.

- **Housing Insecurity:** Issues related to housing insecurity are also pervasive. The Department receives many calls from people looking for housing they can afford. Rents are too high and the housing stock is limited. People are struggling to pay rent, let alone have enough money on hand for emergencies. The City has been referring many people to Rhode Island Housing's rent relief program. This year, there were also many complaints about tenants being asked to leave their homes so that landlords can house members of their families instead. *See the Housing chapter of this report for further information on housing insecurity.*

HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Housing & Community Development division is in charge of managing several federal funding sources that help the City achieve its social services goals: Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Investments Partnership Program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grant Program (ESG). Together, these make up a large portion of the social service-related funds available to Woonsocket. The U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD) requires communities like the City of Woonsocket to develop a Five-Year Consolidated Plan for the allocation of federal housing and community development funds and identify partnerships in the community with social service providers. Woonsocket's 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan includes a wealth of data identifying social services needs/priorities and strategies to address them. The Consolidated Plan should inform Woonsocket's Comprehensive Plan, not only as it relates to social services, but to economic and community development and housing. *For more information on the housing related aspects of these programs, please see the Housing chapter of this report.*

In the Consolidated Plan, Woonsocket identifies the following needs for public services:

- Substance abuse prevention
- Domestic violence prevention
- Community policing
- Code enforcement
- Children's mental and trauma health services
- Health and social services to seniors
- Health services to people with substance abuse issues and the disabled
- Literacy training
- Supportive services for special needs and homeless populations

Major strategies for addressing these needs include:

- Funding to support youth education and job skills
- Funding to support families in need of social services
- Funding to support victims of domestic violence

As with the Human Services Department, response to the COVID 19 pandemic has been the division's highest priority this year, processing federal relief funding for everyone in the community who needs it. The pandemic has also opened questions related to longer term impacts of the pandemic, such as lingering health problems and unemployment, and the ability of local service providers to respond to public health crises in the future.

In general, the division sees a greater need for services and support than resources can cover. Because resources are limited, staff would also like to find ways to better evaluate the performance of their investments so they can ensure that they are making the best use of their limited funds. Specifically, interviews with division staff revealed the following issues related to community development and services:

- **Comprehensive Support Services:** Currently, there is a disconnect between social service providers, City services, and state services (and coordination of federal resources). There are fewer social service providers working in Woonsocket than in other urban communities in the state, and sometimes they focus on issues narrowly. The City needs a more holistic and integrated approach. People need a centralized place to go to learn about all the various services available to them, whether related to health, housing, job training, etc. The Human Services Department's capacity could be expanded in this regard.
- **Gap in Supportive Services:** Many people and households in Woonsocket have significant, immediate needs for food, shelter, and medical care. A lot of service providers are focused on addressing these very important, short-term needs. However, there are not many services that help people in Woonsocket take the next step. For example, once you have a safe roof over your head and enough to eat, how do you build the skills you need to find a better paying job to support yourself and/or your family in the long term? One promising tool on the horizon is the Northern Rhode Island Higher Education Center, slated to open downtown on Main Street hopefully in 2021. This facility, modeled after the Westerly Education Center, will be a state-sponsored job training center initially focused on high-demand industries including IT, cybersecurity, healthcare, and finance. This will be a huge help for local residents, who are often isolated from better paying careers and jobs elsewhere in the state due to transportation barriers.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Much of community planning, like zoning regulations, were a direct response to public health concerns. More than ever, there is an increased emphasis on public health to improve our personal and community health and overall quality of life. Health can mean many things to different people. It is the social, economic, behavioral, and physical factors that determine one's overall health. Recognizing these factors as 'determinants of health', and understanding the policies, institutions and systems that drive them has led to municipalities expanding their health and social services offerings to support residents.










Figure 8-1. Social Determinants of Health

Source: [U.S. Centers for Disease Control](https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/)

WOONSOCKET'S LIVABILITY

According to AARP's Livability Index, Woonsocket scores a **53 out of 100** for overall livability. The score is based off the average score of seven livability categories: housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity. Each livability category score can be seen below.

 HOUSING: 66	 ENVIRONMENT: 51	 OPPORTUNITY: 32
 NEIGHBORHOOD: 61	 HEALTH: 43	
 TRANSPORTATION: 66	 ENGAGEMENT: 57	OVERALL: 53

HEALTH DISAPARITIES IN WOONSOCKET

Large health disparities exist in Woonsocket, especially compared with surrounding Rhode Island towns and the state overall. As of 2019, 38.5% of children in Woonsocket live below the poverty line and 28% of households have food stamp/SNAP benefits; both of these percentages exceed state and national averages. Woonsocket also has the highest rate of child abuse and neglect among Rhode Island cities and towns, as of 2019, and the highest rates of opioid-related deaths for 2014-2018.³⁵ In more recent years, some good news has emerged, and opioid-related deaths have fallen.

PANDEMICS/COVID-19

In 2020, Woonsocket, along with the rest of the world, grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftereffects. COVID-19 exposed the need to prepare for future pandemics going forward. COVID-19 also exposed the existing disparities in Woonsocket and how they became worse as the pandemic progressed. As of 2021, working with Rhode Island's Department of Health, the City is committed to getting all Woonsocket residents vaccinated.

WOONSOCKET HEALTH EQUITY ZONE

Health Equity Zones (HEZ) are geographical areas designed to “...achieve health equity by eliminating health disparities using place-based strategies to promote healthy communities.” Woonsocket HEZ kicked off in 2015 and has an overall mission to “utilize collective impact and leverage community resources to address health and wellness disparities in Woonsocket by focusing on the social determinants of health.”³⁶ Woonsocket HEZ has been engaging with more than 30 local cross-sector organizations and resident leaders to focus on addressing the opioid epidemic, teen health, access to food, and child maltreatment. These areas were chosen as priorities through a focused engagement with Woonsocket residents and stakeholders to identity local public health needs.



Figure 8-2. Woonsocket HEZ blood pressure check station at the 2017 Autumn Fest.
Source: Woonsocket HEZ Facebook

³⁵ Woonsocket HEZ Opioid Needs Assessment 2019

³⁶ Woonsocket HEZ Fact Sheet 2016

OPIOID USE/DISORDER

To address the high levels of substance use and overdose deaths within the City, the Woonsocket HEZ formed the Overdose Prevention and Recovery workgroup. In 2019, the workgroup conducted a needs assessment to determine opioid epidemic trends and disparities in Woonsocket. The workgroup found that the City has been hit hard by the epidemic but that there seems to be a turn for the better with preventing deaths from overdoses. Woonsocket HEZ has also:

- Pushed to create a community-space in Woonsocket that is open 16 hours per week with peer recovery service.
- Trained 1,289 people on using Naloxone, a drug that reverses opiate overdoses.
- Has provided 69 unduplicated individuals with peer recovery services.³⁷

TEEN HEALTH

Woonsocket HEZ and the City have made it a priority to address teen health to ensure that all teens, including young parents, will have high quality healthcare and accurate and complete sex education to make informed decisions and choices about their lives.

Woonsocket has a significantly higher rate of repeat pregnancies for those under 19 (23.6%) compared with the state of Rhode Island (16.4%). To address these teen health concerns, Woonsocket HEZ has created a Teen Health workgroup with a family planning educator, various organizations, and teens.

The Teen Health workgroup has worked to create more opportunities for youth leadership by having teens create media campaigns to educate each other on long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC). The workgroup has also increased health education by hiring a health and sexuality educator to support the school department and the greater Woonsocket community. Additionally, the workgroup has increased access to LARCs for teens in Woonsocket. Woonsocket HEZ has measured success for this priority area as there has been a 31.7% decrease in births to teens.³⁸

ACCESS TO HEALTHLY FOOD

Access to healthy food is not only an area of concern for Woonsocket HEZ, but for the City administration and many local non-profits and residents. The City has made it a priority to ensure healthy food is easy to find and affordable in every Woonsocket neighborhood. To address food access concerns, Woonsocket HEZ has created a Food Access workgroup that consists of a resident advisor and local organizations. The workgroup has been advocating for new grocery stores to come into the city, helping maintain current farmers markets, and hosting roundtables and supporting local food businesses. Attracting more full-service grocery stores to locate within the City is also a very high priority for Woonsocket City government.

HEZ Woonsocket has seen success in improving food access and has been working with the City to implement a three-year action plan for increasing food security in Woonsocket

³⁷ Woonsocket HEZ Opioid Impact Needs Assessment, 2019.

³⁸ Woonsocket HEZ Presentation to Woonsocket City Council, 2019.

prepared for the Food Access Working Group in 2016. As of December 2019, the Food Access workgroup has helped sustain and support year-round farmers markets that accept WIC and SNAP. The workgroup has also engaged and facilitated community conversations around food systems. Additionally, the Food Access workgroup has supported 22 food businesses at Millrace Kitchen and have supported 12,283 SNAP participants.³⁹ Woonsocket recently received technical assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Local Foods, Local Places program, an initiative aimed at expanding economic opportunities for local businesses, providing better access to healthy, local food (especially among disadvantaged groups), and revitalizing downtowns, main streets, and neighborhoods. The final report from this effort, released in October 2020, includes an action plan that builds on the City's work to date to encourage more food-related businesses to locate in renovated buildings downtown.

Investing in food access has multiple benefits for the City – most importantly better health for local residents, but also business opportunities, downtown revitalization, and generally making Woonsocket a more attractive place to live, work, and visit.



Figure 8-3. General Wellness Food Box from Thundermist in Woonsocket
Source: Thundermist

CHILD MALTREATMENT

Woonsocket HEZ and the City are taking strides to address child well-being to ensure all children are safe from harm and live with families and in neighborhoods that help them thrive. In Woonsocket, 38.5% of children live below the poverty line and 71.5% of babies are born into low-income families. Data shows that 33 out of 1,000 children in Woonsocket are victims of indicated child abuse or neglect. But there have been some improvements over the past decade. In 2016, 4% of Woonsocket babies were born at a high risk of child maltreatment. This has gone down significantly year over year since 2010, when the rate was at 10%.⁴⁰

³⁹ Woonsocket HEZ Presentation to Woonsocket City Council, 2019.

⁴⁰ Woonsocket HEZ Presentation to Woonsocket City Council, 2019.

Woonsocket HEZ created the Child Maltreatment workgroup that consists of local organizations, Resident Advisors, and families involved or those who have had lived experiences with child maltreatment. Currently, the workgroup is forming to align with Rhode Island Children Cabinet's strategies. Partners of the workgroup execute programs such as social emotional learning and circles of security.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Robust community development and comprehensive public health resources are key in creating a vibrant, healthy Woonsocket. The Comprehensive Plan should address community development and public health by considering the following:

- Continuing to invest in social services so that more people have the stability to live healthy and productive lives.*
- Supporting and increasing resources for Woonsocket HEZ to continue to see improvements in preventing opioid related deaths, teen health, food access, and child maltreatment in Woonsocket.*
- The multiple benefits of expanding access to healthy foods, not only for public health, but for economic revitalization.*
- Preparing and planning for future epidemics or pandemics based off lessons learned from COVID-19.*
- Improving Woonsocket's overall Livability Score and each individual livability category to increase quality of life for all Woonsocket residents.*

9. NATURAL RESOURCES

Woonsocket's environment, natural hazards, and climate trends.

WHY NATURAL RESOURCES MATTER

The natural environment and its resources provide a variety of environmental, health, and public safety benefits. They support wildlife and fish habitat, improve air and water quality, provide spaces for people to recreate or simply interact with nature, and minimize flood damage. Ensuring the maintenance and protection of these resources and spaces is beneficial to both the community and the local ecosystem.

A general natural resources map can be found at the end of this chapter (**Map 9-1** Natural Resources).

SURFACE WATER

The major water resources in Woonsocket include the Blackstone, Mill, and Peters Rivers. Woonsocket also has the following waterbodies: Theresa Brook, Iron Rock Brook, Cass Pond, Sylvester Pond, Booth Pond, Cherry Brook, Social Pond, Global Park Pond, Highland Park Holding Pond, and Patton Road Holding Pond.

BLACKSTONE RIVER

Woonsocket and neighboring communities developed around its primary water body, the Blackstone River. Other water bodies, such as the Peters and Mill Rivers, drain into the Blackstone. The Blackstone River is approximately 46 miles long, stretching from Worcester, Massachusetts to the Seekonk River in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The Blackstone River is the second largest freshwater tributary to Narragansett Bay. The Blackstone River's average flow is about 862 cubic feet per second.

MILL RIVER

One of the major tributaries into the Blackstone River is the Mill River. The Mill River watershed consists of approximately 35 square miles and extends from Hopkinton,

Massachusetts to northern Woonsocket. The river itself spans 11 miles. The watershed is an area which has experienced a large amount of growth over past decades because of the convenient access to Routes 90 and 495. A small area of deciduous wetlands and shrub swamp is associated with the Mill River south of Privilege Street in Woonsocket.

PETERS RIVER

The Peters River is another tributary to the Blackstone River in Woonsocket. The River originates in Bellingham, Massachusetts, and outlets into a 1,200-foot-long culvert in Woonsocket, where it empties into the Blackstone River. The Peters River watershed is approximately 12 square miles, of which less than 10% is in Rhode Island. The Wood Estate is a 23-acre conservation area comprised mainly of deciduous wetlands, and emergent marsh, or wet meadow, which abuts the Peters River.

THERESEA BROOK

Theresa Brook flows in a southwesterly direction from Cumberland and joins an unnamed stream at Newton Street. It passes under Cass Avenue into the culvert system which drains into Cass Pond. The Theresa Brook area has a history of flooding at Mendon Road during significant storm events because of the insufficient capacity of the underground pipes as the brook flows under Mendon Road and alongside Aylsworth Avenue.

IRON ROCK BROOK

Iron Rock Brook originates in Cumberland's Diamond Hill State Park and flows west where it joins Theresa Brook at Cass Avenue. The Brook's watershed consists of 1,027 acres (1.6 sq. miles) of land, including the Highland Corporate Park expansion area, and extends as far north as the intersection of Diamond Hill Road and Bound Road. The Iron Rock Brook has a history of flooding at Mendon Road during significant storm events because of the insufficient capacity of underground pipes as the brook flows under Mendon Road.

CASS POND

Cass Pond is a 2-acre, man-made pond into which the culverted Theresa Brook empties. Cass Pond's drainage area includes the Theresa and Iron Rock Brook drainage areas. Cass Pond is in Cass Park, a public park of approximately 40 acres adjacent to Woonsocket High School. The pond is stocked with trout annually for the benefit of local fishermen. The pond drains through a small brook and wetland to Sylvester Pond and then on to the Blackstone River.

SYLVESTER POND

Sylvester Pond lies adjacent to Cumberland Hill Road and Dionne Track. Water drains into Sylvester Pond from Iron Rock Brook/Cass Pond after filtering through the adjacent wetland area in Cass Park. Water drains from Sylvester Pond under Cumberland Hill Road to the Blackstone River.

BOOTH POND

Booth Pond lies in the southern part of the City at the North Smithfield border. The northern portion of the pond is in Woonsocket, surrounded by the 37-acre Booth Pond Conservation Area. The southern part of the pond lies within the Town of North Smithfield. A stream flows from Booth Pond east for nearly one mile into the Blackstone River. The stream flows through approximately 21.4 acres of deciduous wetlands in the area between Jillson and Lydia Avenues.

CHERRY BROOK

Cherry Brook originates at Cedar Swamp, a 325-acre area of mainly deciduous wetlands, shrub swamp, and emergent marsh/wet meadow in North Smithfield. The brook flows northeasterly 2.8 miles to the Blackstone River near Sayles Street.

SOCIAL POND

Social Pond is the most popular recreational body of water for the people of Woonsocket. Located in the state-owned WWII Memorial Park, this man-made pond has been used for swimming for decades and is operated and maintained by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. Water for swimming is taken from the Mill River and chlorinated at City property on East School Street.

GLOBE PARK POND

Globe Park Pond is a small pond within Globe Park, approximately less than 1-acre. The pond receives surface runoff from the adjacent embankment from Smithfield Road/Route 146A.

HIGHLAND PARK HOLDING POND

This 1-acre holding pond fronts onto CVS Drive and Park East Drive in the Highland Corporate Park. This retention pond is part of the area's stormwater system.

PATTON ROAD HOLDING POND

This oval-shaped holding pond was constructed as part of the stormwater system for the Walnut Hills plat. It was developed in the 1960's and 1970's. It retains storm flow during peak rainfall events.

WETLANDS

Freshwater wetlands are valuable natural resources which serve an important role in a region's ecosystem. Wetlands hold waters from rain and melting snow and aid in flood protection. Wetlands also aid in recharging groundwater supplies leading to cleaner surface water or public water supplies. Wetlands also provide habitat for many kinds of wildlife and may also serve as valuable open space for recreation and conservation. Before government regulation, many acres of wetlands in the region had been filled to make room for development.

Poorly planned development can impair the functions of wetlands leading to flooding problems, pollution of water bodies, and destruction of wildlife habitat. Wetlands are scattered throughout various sections of the City. As with other natural resources, a regional approach to wetland protection is necessary in the greater Woonsocket area. Functioning wetlands in neighboring communities offer the benefits of cleaner surface water and groundwater throughout the region.

GROUNDWATER

Groundwater is rainwater that has filtered into (or recharged) the ground and then stays beneath the surface. Virtually none of the City's residents or businesses relies on groundwater for their drinking water supply. However, groundwater remains a prime concern due to its interrelationship with surface water quality. Groundwater flows to and discharges into surface water bodies and wetlands, thus affecting the quality of these surface waters.

The City of Woonsocket has a long and proud heritage as a center of industry. Woonsocket's history as home to many of New England's prominent textile mills is one of its greatest resources. However, as was the case in many of the State's urban areas, the City's economic success during the period from the mid-eighteen hundreds to the mid-nineteen hundreds, often came at the expense of the natural environment.

Roughly one-half of the groundwater in the City is classified as GB, groundwater which is known or presumed to be unsuitable for drinking water use without treatment. This area of groundwater exists mostly beneath the older, more densely developed city center. It is in this area where virtually all of Woonsocket's manufacturing took place during the City's peak industrial period.

In the southern portion of the City, along both sides of the Blackstone River, groundwater is classified as GAA, known or presumed to be suitable for drinking without treatment. This groundwater is a portion of the recharge area to the major stratified drift aquifer known as the Blackstone Groundwater Reservoir. This aquifer has the potential to be developed into a major source of water supply. The second most common groundwater classification in the City behind GB is GA, defined as groundwater resources known or presumed to be of drinking water quality but that are not assigned GAA.

The City of Woonsocket does contain a small number of private wells within its borders. Wellhead protection areas are areas around public wells considered critical for the protection of their source water supplies.

The northern portion of the Blackstone Groundwater Reservoir is located in the southern portion of the City. This aquifer has the potential for development as a source of water supply for potable or non-potable uses. Groundwater recharge areas are areas where permeable soil or rock allows water to readily seep into the ground and into a groundwater aquifer. Surface runoff from these areas also influences groundwater quality. Groundwater quality is an area requiring a regional approach. The critical portions of the Blackstone

Groundwater Reservoir recharge area are approximately 10 square miles in area beneath five Blackstone Valley Communities (Woonsocket, North Smithfield, Lincoln, Cumberland, and Central Falls).

TREES

The value of trees often goes unnoticed. Trees contribute to their environment in various ways. During the process of photosynthesis, trees take in carbon dioxide and produce the oxygen we breathe. Trees stabilize soil, while also replenishing soil nutrients. Trees offer erosion and flood control. They are also a shelter for wildlife, increasing biodiversity. Trees offer aesthetic value and reduce noise.

According to the Resource Structure Analysis for the City of Woonsocket, RI, there are over 27 species of trees in Woonsocket, on both private and public lands, each providing value, energy, and capital to the City. The Norway maple, Northern red oak, and Red maple are the top three contributing tree species in Woonsocket.

SOILS

Understanding the nature and properties of soils is critical to managing and conserving our natural resources. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) studies and inventories soil resources across the country. NRCS soil surveys help communities determine what soils are present, where they are located, and the best and most appropriate use of land, based on soil conditions. NRCS predicts soil behavior for selected land uses and highlights limitations and hazards inherent in the soil and the impact of selected land uses on the environment.

NRCS identified Merrimac-Urban Land Complex as the most abundant soil association in Woonsocket, which is well suited for home sites, shopping centers, industrial parks, and other urban purposes. The undeveloped area west of the Blackstone River in southern Woonsocket largely contains bedrock and slope constraints and the area containing the Rhodes Avenue Conservation area also contains bedrock and slope constraints. Much of the land shown as having bedrock or slope constraints has already been developed.

A map of agricultural soils can be found at the end of this chapter (**Map 9-2** Valuable Agricultural Soils).

GEOLOGICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The geological features of the Blackstone Valley region were modified by the movement of glaciers approximately 2.5 to 3 million years ago. Surface geology in the City of Woonsocket is mostly comprised of till in much of the upland areas. Till is material which was deposited with little or no sorting and has been compacted to form dense deposits not suited to groundwater storage. Outwash is found in much of the lower-lying developed areas of the City. Outwash is material which was deposited by the glacial meltwater with

much sorting and stratification by grain size. Outwash is often well suited for groundwater storage.

Bedrock geology in the City consists of Crystalline Rocks found mainly in the southern and eastern sections of the City, and Sedimentary Rocks in the western and northern sections of the City, including the downtown area. The topography of the City varies from flat to hilly. The Downtown and Social Flatlands areas sit at the lowest elevation in the City. Hills rise up from these areas offering significant views of the City and the region. The City's steepest sloping areas exist mostly in the southern part of the City west of the Blackstone. Significant areas of sloping terrain include the Globe Park Overlook, the Mount Saint Charles area, and the Highland Industrial Park area.

CONSERVATION

Conservation lands are important resources for a variety of reasons, including open space, recreation, agriculture, or simply because of their scenic qualities. Such space may provide opportunities for active or passive recreation and may contain forests, farmland, old fields, floodplains, wetlands, scenic vistas, or historical sites. These areas are invaluable and irreplaceable resources that bring environmental, social, and economic benefits to a community. As a largely built out community, it is particularly critical for Woonsocket to protect and sustainably manage what conservation land remains for current and future generations.

A map of conservation areas can be found at the end of this chapter (**Map 9-3** Conservation Areas).

INVENTORY OF CONSERVATION LANDS

The City of Woonsocket has approximately 174.27 acres of conservation lands within the City's limits. These spaces include Booth Pond, Iron Rock Brook, Rhodes Avenue Conservation Area, and Wood Estate.

CONSERVATION LAND	ACRES
Booth Pond	70.10 acres
Iron Rock Brook	29.32 acres
Rhodes Avenue Conservation Area	45.90 acres
Wood Estate	19.05 acres

Table 9.1: Conservation Land in Woonsocket

RARE OR ENDANGERED SPECIES

The City of Woonsocket does not contain any known rare or endangered species. Great blue herons have been spotted by residents in various locations. The City also does not contain any rare or endangered flora or fauna. Notable flora in the City includes Lousewirt at the Rhodes Avenue Conservation Area.

RESILIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

As Woonsocket continues to develop and progress, it is critical to do so with a focus on resilience, sustainability, and livability.

A map of flooding and floodplains can be found at the end of this chapter (**Map 9-4 Exposure to Flooding**).

NATURAL HAZARD MITIGATION AND RESILIENCY

Woonsocket is exposed to several natural hazards that vary in potential intensity and impact. The City updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2018 through the Woonsocket Hazard Mitigation Plan Working Group. In 2020, the City also participated in a Municipal Resilience Program workshop to further identify key issues. The City's top hazards and vulnerable areas for the community are major storms like hurricanes, Nor'easters, and winter storms, flooding along rivers and streams, and epidemics. These hazards and vulnerabilities have direct impact on residents, critical infrastructure, and community assets. To address the highest risks, through the 2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Municipal Resilience Program Workshop, the City put forth several goals and specific mitigation actions. The goals include protecting the lives and property of the City of Woonsocket's residents, protecting the City's critical facilities and infrastructure, and protecting the City's cultural, historical, natural, and economic resources.

BROWNFIELDS

In 2012, the City conducted a brownfield inventory assessment and the following findings were stated. The City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, due to its industrial heritage, is plagued with over 264 brown fields which amounts to over 440 acres of contaminated land area that affects its residents' health, welfare, and environment. Out of the ten distinct neighborhoods in Woonsocket, the Fairmount neighborhood has been disproportionately impacted by the amount and severity of its brownfields. The tainted land creates blight, loss of nearby economic employment opportunities, and proximity to hazardous substances. The tainted land associated with brownfields blocks public access to the Blackstone River and inhibits the development of additional green space.

The City's Brownfield program is committed to remediating contaminated brownfield properties. Cleaning up brownfields requires sustained effort to identify potential brownfield sites, assess contamination, develop remediation strategies, and, finally, clean them up for future development. The Woonsocket Brownfield Program has had notable successes including:

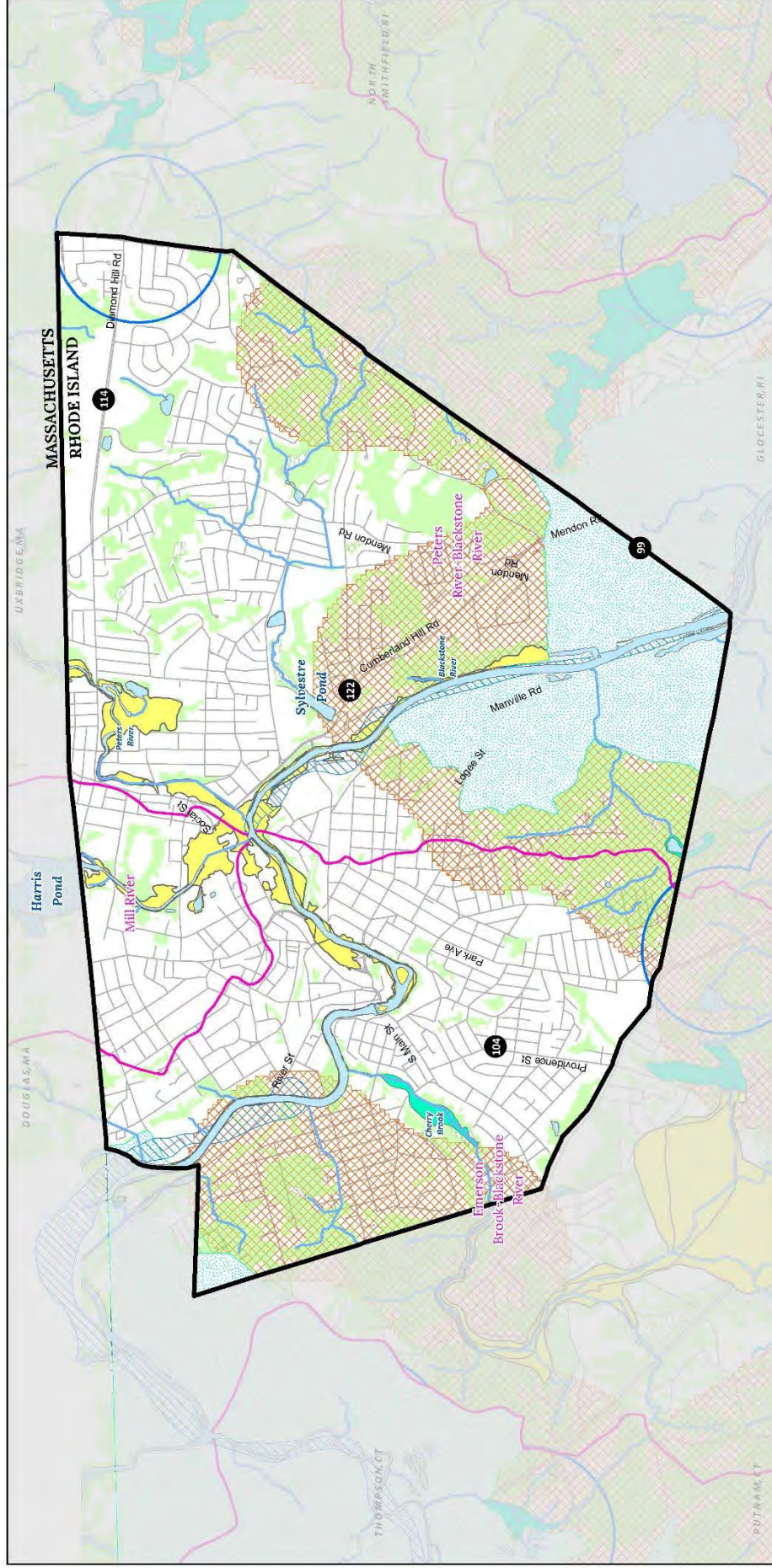
1. Developed the city-wide prioritized brownfield inventory.
2. Assessed and remediated the mill properties along Hamlet Avenue and Florence Drive after a fire. The site is now where the City's middle school resides.
3. Assessed and remediated the former landfill along the Blackstone River so it could be converted to River's Edge Park.

The City regularly applies for brownfields grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the RI Department of Environmental Management. In 2019, the City was awarded a \$300,000 EPA grant to assess potentially contaminated properties. With this funding the Woonsocket Brownfields Program is targeting the former mill properties at 719 River Street and 20 Privilege Street, among others. At the end of the grant term, these properties will have the environmental assessments and remedial strategy private developers need to make informed decisions when considering redevelopment of property.

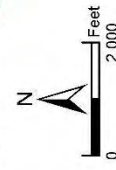
AIR QUALITY

Air quality is often a regional issue that can be difficult to quantify on a local level. RIDEM and EPA data are usually at a Statewide level. In many cases, ozone and other forms of air pollution can be carried hundreds of miles upwind from their sources. Nonetheless, air quality is an issue that affects every local resident. Pollutants which compromise air quality include sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen dioxide, lead, and other particulate matters.

In Rhode Island, there are several factors lead to the quality of air resources and greenhouse gas emissions. These factors include transportation, electricity consumption, residential heating, commercial heating, industrial heating and processes, agriculture, water, and natural gas distribution.



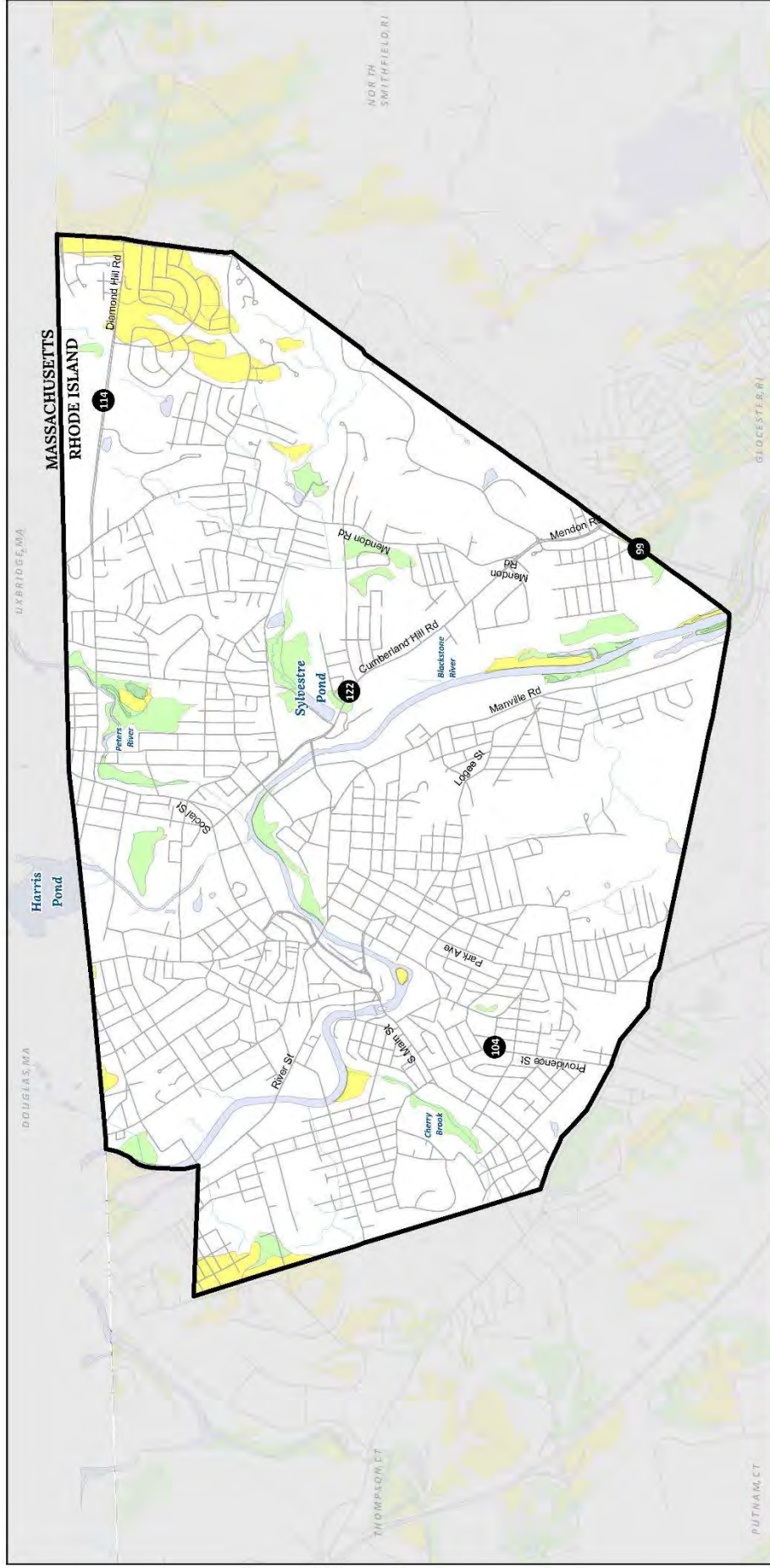
CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



Natural Resources	
Natural Heritage Areas	Ecological Community Classification
Flood Zone	Forest
0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard	Wetlands
A	Freshwater Rivers and Streams
AE	

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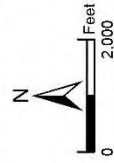
Map 9-1. Natural Resources
Source: RIGIS



CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



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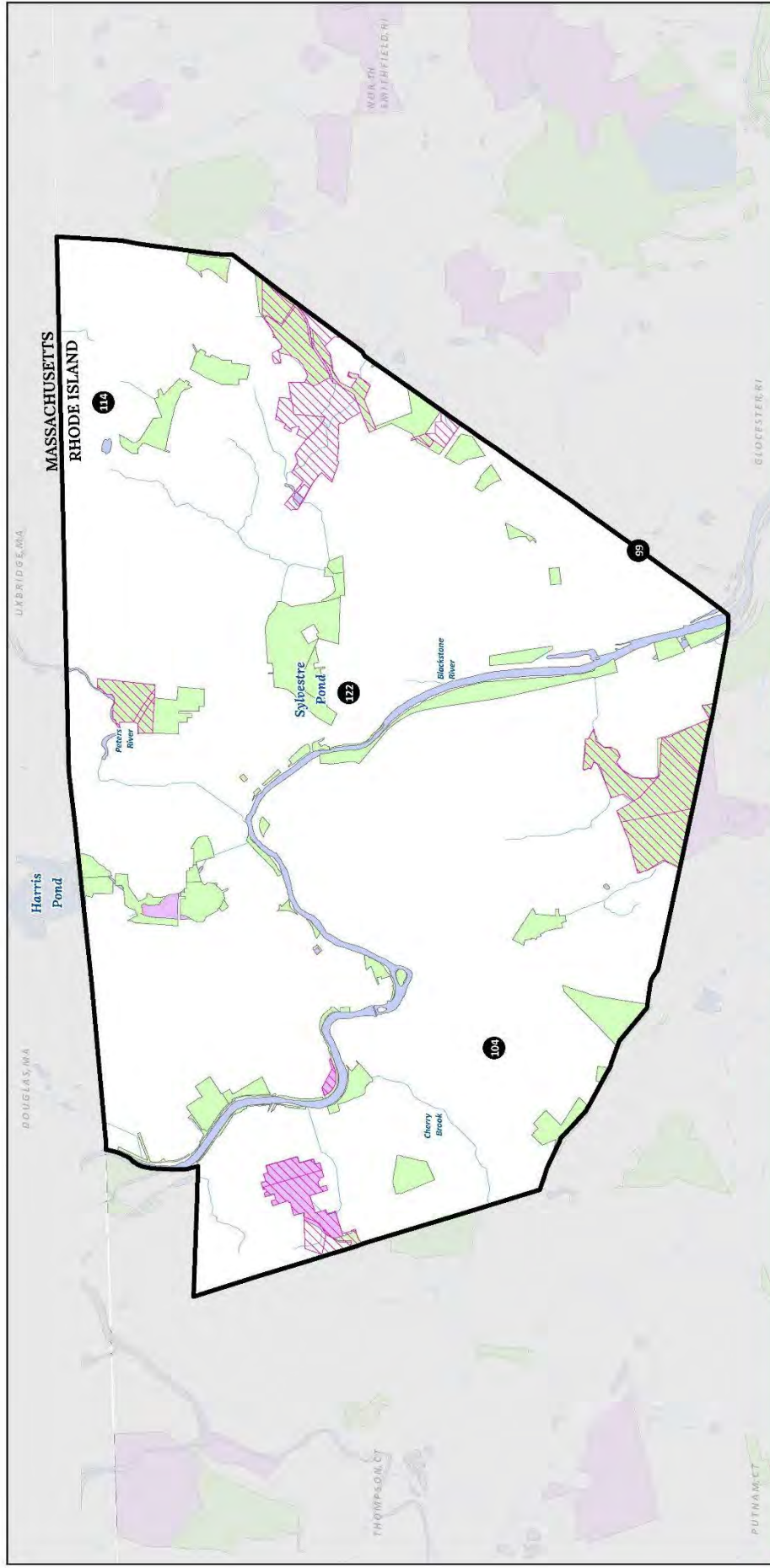
Valuable Agricultural Soils

- Not prime farmland
- Prime farmland
- Statewide Important

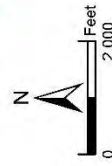
*Data Source: RIGIS

Map 9-2. Valuable Agricultural Soils

Source: RIGIS



CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



Conservation Areas

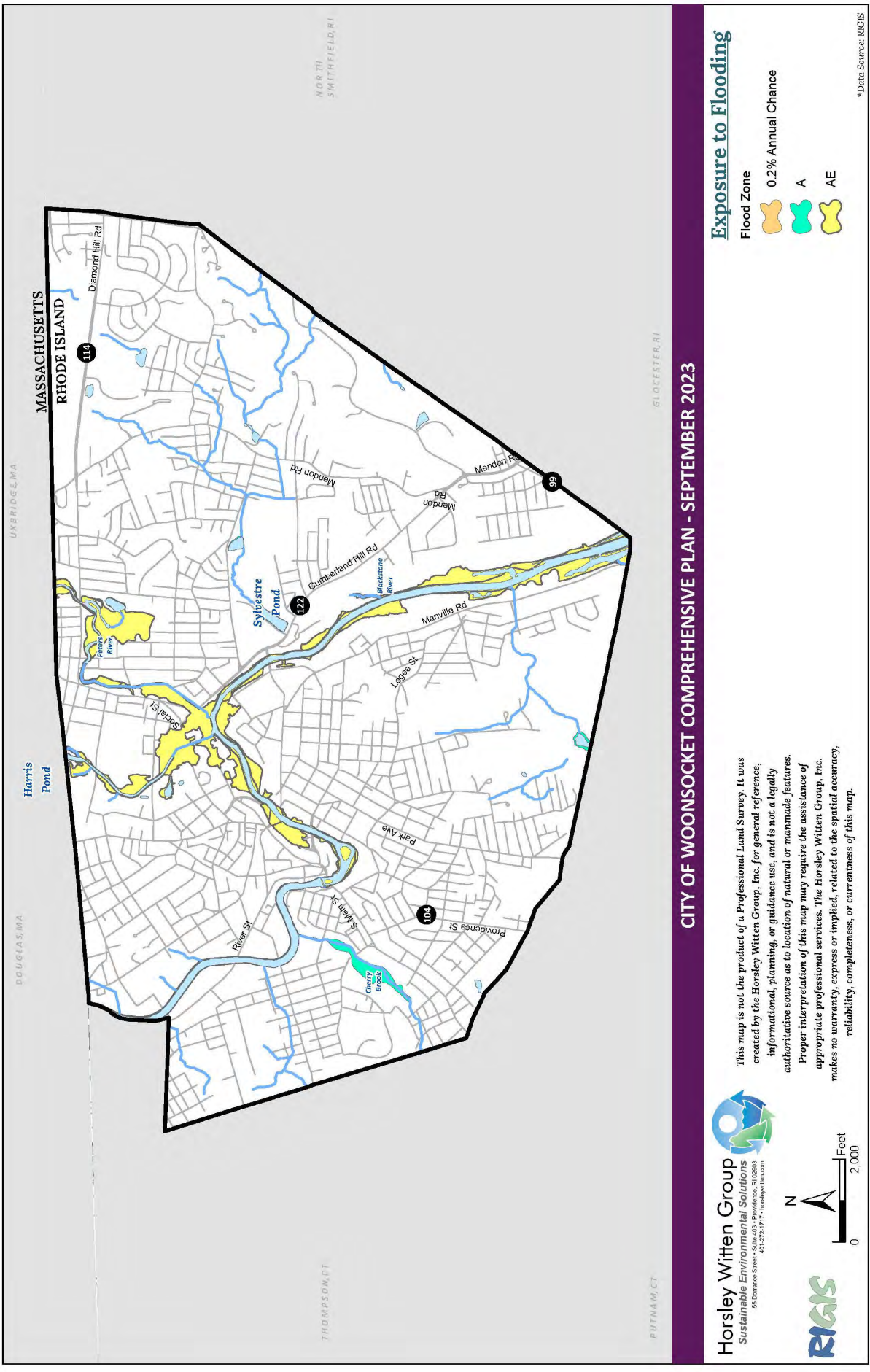
- Data from City
- State Conservation Area
- Local Conservation Area

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*Data Source: RIGIS, City of Woonsocket

Map 9-3. Conservation Areas

Source: RIGIS



KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR NATURAL RESOURCES

Ensuring the protection and maintenance of Woonsocket's natural resources is vital for a health community and habitat. The Comprehensive Plan should address natural resources by considering the following:

- Protecting and improving the quality of Woonsocket's natural resources and environment.*
- Encouraging community stewardship in conservation spaces.*
- Continuing the City's Brownfield Program to investigate, clean up, and redevelop contaminated sites.*
- Planning for potential natural hazards through mitigation goals and policies listed in the City's Hazard Mitigation Plan.*

10. HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Woonsocket's unique architecture and institutions, including the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

WHY HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES MATTER

Historic and cultural resources are arguably among the most crucial aspects of any healthy community and an important quality of life factor. Woonsocket's historic and cultural resources are an integral part of its character. Preserving the City's many historic buildings, landscapes, places, and objects and opening them to the public enhances connections among residents, allowing them to recognize they have a collective past. Cultural resources can also be connected to the City's history, as well as the social and environmental aspects of living in Woonsocket today. These include the arts, educational institutions, and community traditions and events. All these resources provide a sense of place in Woonsocket and make it a unique and interesting place to be.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

The listings of historic resources in the City are well documented and impressive, rivaling that of Providence and Newport in many regards. **Table 10-1** lists the City's National Register of Historic Places Historic Districts and Historic Properties. **Map 10-1**, at the end of this chapter, locates these cultural resources within the City. These historic properties should be considered for future listing on the National Register, with particular attention placed on the City's mill complexes. Although many of the City's historic structures and sites remain, others have been lost over the years. While these losses have certainly left gaps in Woonsocket's historical environment, the City's overall character has been largely preserved. Unfortunately, that character is now more fragile than ever, and additional

losses could prove devastating. Every effort must be made to ensure that future losses of the City's significant cultural resources do not occur.

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

NAME	LOCATION	DATE ADDED
1761 Milestone	640 South Main St.	11/24/1982
Arnold (John) House	99 Providence St.	9/13/1990
Bernon Worsted Mill	828 Park Ave.	6/10/2005
Darling (Henry) House	786 Harris Ave.	11/26/1982
Gaulin, Jr. (Alphonse) House	311 Elm St.	11/24/1982
Glenark Mills	64 East St.	5/15/1989
Grove Street Elementary School	312 Grove St.	11/24/1982
Hanora Mills	1 Main St.	11/24/1982
Harris Warehouse	61 Railroad St.	7/1/1976
Honan's Block and 112-114 Main St.	110-114 Main St.	8/3/1989
Hope Street School	40 Hope St.	4/14/2000
Jenckes Mansion	837-839 Social St.	11/24/1982
Jules Desurmont Worsted Company Mill	84 Fairmount St.	1/12/2007
L'Eglise du Precieux Sang	94 Carrington Ave. & 61 Park Ave.	7/26/1982
Linton Block	3-5 Monument Sq.	11/24/1982
Logee House	225 Logee St.	11/24/1982
Philmont Worsted Company Mill	685 Social St.	4/19/2006
Pothier House	172 Pond St.	11/24/1982
Smith-Ballou House	641 Harris Ave.	6/6/2003
Smithfield Friends Meeting House, Parsonage & Cemetery	126 Smithfield Rd.	11/24/1982
St. Andrew's Episcopal Chapel	576 Fairmount St.	11/24/1982
St. Ann's Church Complex	Cumberland St. & Elm St. and Gaulin Ave.	11/24/1982
St. Charles Borromeo Church Complex	North Main St., Daniels St. & Earle St.	2/24/1983
Stadium Building	329 Main St.	6/30/1976
U.S. Post Office	295 Main St.	5/30/1979
Wilbur (Frank) House	1273 Park Ave.	11/24/1982
Woonsocket City Hall	169 Main St.	5/1/1974
Woonsocket Civil War Monument	Monument Sq.	11/24/1982

Woonsocket Company Mill Complex	100-115 Front St.	5/7/1973
Woonsocket District Courthouse	24 Front St.	11/24/1982
Woonsocket Rubber Company Mill	60-82 South Main St.	5/1/1989

HISTORIC DISTRICTS	LOCATION OR BOUNDARIES	DATE ADDED
Allen Street	Allen St.	9/13/1990
Cato Hill	RI 44	8/10/1976
Cato Hill (Boundary Increase)	Roughly: Arnold, Blackstone, Cherry and Railroad Streets	11/24/1982
French Worsted Company Mill	153 Hamlet Ave.	5/21/2008
Island Place	Island Place and South Main St. at Market Sq.	9/13/1990
Main Street	Roughly: Main St. east of Market Sq. to Depot Sq.	4/18/1991
North End	Roughly: Verry, Highland, Winter and Summer Streets	11/24/1982
South Main Street	Roughly: Mason, Coe, and Andrews Streets and Bernice Avenue	11/24/1982

Table 10-1. National Register Historic Districts and Properties in Woonsocket

Source: National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2021

OTHER HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT RESOURCES

The Woonsocket Historical Society keeps track of many properties beyond those officially listed on the National Register. At last count, there are at least 37 historic mill buildings, representing the City's industrial past and present; 24 historic residences of note, in a variety of architectural styles; 22 historic church structures, representing a variety of faiths and cultural heritage; 24 historic monuments and cemeteries; 20 historic municipal and school buildings; 24 historic commercial or transportation related buildings or sites; and 30 historic places, districts or views.

ISSUES RELATED TO HISTORIC RESOURCES

Over recent decades, Woonsocket has experienced an increase in the number of historic properties falling into disrepair and abandonment. There are several examples of historic properties that have been lost to demolition and even more examples of historic properties being renovated in ways that degrade the historic nature of the structures.

The City has a small but active Historical Society, which plays a large role in raising awareness of historic resources in Woonsocket. The Woonsocket Historical Society has offices and a collection of artifacts in a small space downtown and has been working to increase their advocacy and services. For example, they recently took the lead on finding sensitive ways to incorporate wireless communication infrastructure into historic districts and buildings. They also do educational outreach to local schools and try to make their

resources available to the public. They have successfully applied for grants and have added buildings to the historic register. The Society hopes to better promote themselves in the community and is seeking grants to help with marketing and public awareness as well as working on their first website.

While there are several historic districts in the City as well as buildings and sites on the historic register (as noted above), there is no City Historic Commission. There has been a general resistance to having a Historic Commission since the last one was disbanded in the 1990s, but Society members believe this would be a useful tool for protecting and improving historic buildings. For any future Historic Commission to be successful, it would need to be charged with balancing both a strong value of historic preservation and a realistic understanding of development and redevelopment challenges.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Culture (including the arts) and history are often intertwined, and all the historical resources listed above also have cultural value and significance. It would be impossible to list every cultural resource in Woonsocket, which range from major institutions and organizations to smaller arts and theater groups to cultural food traditions like the dynamite to social clubs and societies. The resources discussed below scratch the surface of what Woonsocket has to offer culturally. Combined, these resources not only make quality of life richer for Woonsocket residents, they serve as a draw for visitors and tourists and a boost to the local economy.

MUSEUM OF WORK AND CULTURE

At the southern terminus of Main Street sits the former Lincoln Textile mill, which has been redeveloped into the Museum of Work and Culture. A joint venture between the City, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, the museum chronicles life in the Blackstone Valley during the Industrial Revolution.

STADIUM THEATRE

The historic Stadium Theatre anchors Main Street's northern terminus. In the 1990's this historic 1920's theatre was renovated and re-opened after decades of neglect. The theatre was rehabilitated through the efforts of the non-profit Stadium Theatre Foundation and has become the center of arts and entertainment in the greater Woonsocket area.

ST. ANN ARTS AND CULTURAL CENTER

This historic former church boasts the largest collection of fresco paintings in North America and also serves as a performance venue and art gallery, hosting concerts and art shows, as well as community events.

RIVERZEDGE ARTS

Riverzedge Arts teaches art, design, and critical thinking to the youth of northern Rhode Island, providing participants and the broader Woonsocket community with a path to economic and cultural sustainability. Riverzedge also provides jobs by soliciting commissioned artwork, screen printing, graphic design, and more, and also serves as an exhibition space for local artists.

OTHER LOCAL ARTS & CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

There are many other organizations that support the arts and bring cultural experiences to Woonsocket. In fact, too many to be listed! Dozens of churches provide not only religious services, but enrich the community with music, art, and performances. Fraternal organizations provide activities for their members, families, and the public at large. And multiple organizations representing the wide array of cultural and ethnic communities in Woonsocket host festivals, parades, and other events throughout the year. These local organizations play a huge role in the community and culture of Woonsocket, grounding longtime residents and providing a welcome network for newcomers.

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

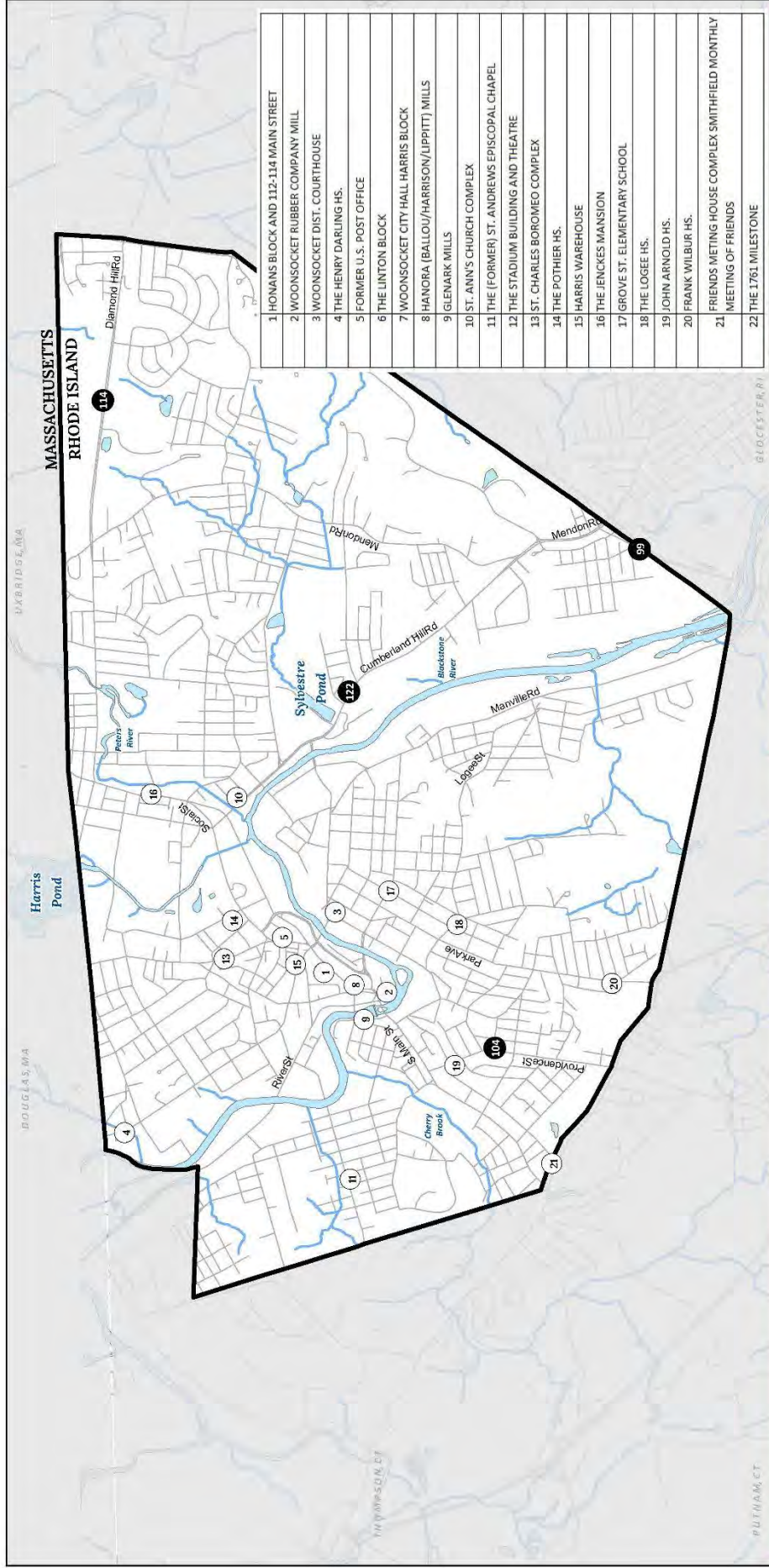
The Blackstone Valley was the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The waters of the Blackstone River powered this country's first textile mills. In recognition of the historical and cultural significance of this area, in 1986 the United States Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. Woonsocket is located at the heart of this Heritage Corridor, created to "preserve and interpret for future generations the unique and significant contribution to our national heritage of certain historic and cultural lands, waterways and structures" within this area. In 1996 and again in 2006, Congress reauthorized the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

In 2014, the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park was established. The same legislation also extended the authorization of the National Heritage Corridor for six years, through the end of Fiscal Year 2021. The National Historical Park, much like the National Heritage Corridor, was established to interpret the nationally significant sites and districts that convey the industrial history of the Blackstone River Valley, and works to support the network of partners, related resources, and facilities throughout the National Heritage Corridor. While the boundaries of the Park have not officially been set, all the resources in the Corridor, including the "Heritage Center" at the Museum of Work and Culture, are a part of the experience for visitors.

The Blackstone River Valley is historically significant for many reasons. It is the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution, influencing the rest of the country through the industrial use of waterpower and the development of the Rhode Island System of Manufacturing. It is an area characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. The Blackstone

River Valley's remarkable history is revealed in its concentrations of historic, cultural, and natural resources that have survived through the past two centuries. Today, the Blackstone River Valley's unique qualities remain as a result of ongoing preservation efforts that protect its special resources. The context of a "working valley" of mill villages, farms, cities and towns, transportation systems, river, and canal is what makes the individual elements of the Blackstone River Valley significant.

Support for the Corridor and the Park and cooperation with all the other municipalities in Rhode Island and Massachusetts that are part of the Blackstone River Valley should be a continued goal for Woonsocket. A thriving Corridor and Park will mean more visitors to Woonsocket, which will mean more spending at local businesses and restaurants and other boosts to the local economy. In order to take full advantage of these economic benefits, the Comprehensive Plan should promote maintaining a healthy environment in and around the Blackstone River, making investments in transportation – including the Blackstone River Bikeway – to ensure sites in Woonsocket are accessible, and ensuring land uses along the river and around important sites are compatible. To this latter point, a Blackstone River Overlay Zone has been enacted by the City to better regulate future land use in the most critical areas. The city also has a Design Review Overlay District, which regulates new commercial and mixed-use developments throughout the community. This regulatory tool can continue to ensure that new commercial and mixed-use developments are sensitive to the historical context of Woonsocket as a Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and Historical Park community.



CITY OF WOONSOCKET COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2023



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Historic and Cultural Resources

- ① Historic Site

*Data Source: RIGIS, City of Woonsocket

Map 10-1. Historic & Cultural Resources

Source: RIGIS

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Celebrating what makes Woonsocket special is one of the surest ways to attract and retain businesses, residents, and visitors. The Comprehensive Plan should address historic and cultural resources by considering the following:

- Preserving, investing in, and raising public awareness of historic buildings and sites.*
- Embracing the unique cultural heritage of the City and using it as a selling point.*
- Coordinating local historic, cultural, and arts organizations to more efficiently use limited resources and volunteer time.*
- Collaborating with other communities in the Blackstone River Valley.*

11. PARKS & RECREATION

Woonsocket's parks, playgrounds, and recreational resources.

WHY PARKS & RECREATION MATTER

City parks and recreational areas contribute to the health and wellness of our community. These spaces give residents of all ages and abilities opportunities to be active, interact with nature, and gather with neighbors. Being outdoors improves not only our physical health, but also our mental health. Spending time in parks reduces depression, stress, and anxiety. In urban areas like Woonsocket, where residents may have limited private yards around their homes, city parks become even more important. Safe and inclusive parks and recreational areas are a positive way to impact the health and quality of life of Woonsocket residents.

The City is proud of its many parks, playgrounds, and recreational areas, and it is a major priority for the City to make sure there are safe, fun, and convenient recreational opportunities available in every neighborhood. The Woonsocket Parks and Recreation Division, within the Public Works Department, oversees the maintenance, programming, scheduling, and permitting of the City's recreational areas. Staff include the Parks and Recreation Superintendent. The Division partners with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), regional organizations, and private entities to build a network of parks, greenways, and other attractions available to residents but also to attract visitors to the City.

INVENTORY

The inventory of parks and recreational areas in Woonsocket include City-owned and managed facilities as well as federal and state resources open to the public. While this chapter focuses on traditional parks and recreational facilities and amenities, the City's cultural and historic places (see Historic and Cultural Resources) expand opportunities for users as well. The Blackstone River is the focal point of the region's heritage and many of the City's parks lead people to this important resource and connect them to the sites and

places that add to the experience of living in Woonsocket. They also bring outside visitors to the City, which puts increasing demands on local resources but also creates opportunities to capture the revenue dollars these visitors will spend at local businesses. The City's recreational areas are highlighted in **Map 11-1** at the end of this chapter.

CITY FACILITIES

The parks and recreational areas owned and managed by the City offer diverse opportunities for all ages and interests. **Table 11-1** lists available amenities and facilities, which include parks with sitting areas and walking paths, athletic fields, sports courts, and playgrounds.

PARK	AMENITIES AND FACILITIES AVAILABLE
Alysworth Avenue	Tennis courts
Bernon Park	Clem Lebine Field (Baseball Field) Cahill Field (Little League Field) Tennis courts Basketball and volleyball courts Hockey rink and dry pond (flooded for winter) Playground
Bouley Field	Adult softball field Bocce and quoits courts
Cass Park	Upper playground Lower playground Dupree Field (Little League Field) Cross country running trails Fishing pond
Cold Spring Park	Walking paths Amphitheater and stage areas Playground Baldelli Field (Softball Field) Godin Field (Little League Field) Basketball and tennis courts Boat launch (including Blackstone River Boat Tours) Lower grounds area Unofficial sledding hill
Costa Park	Playground Gazebo Baseball field Basketball and street hockey courts Volleyball and horseshoe pits Walking paths
Dionne Track	Standalone ¼ mile track with other track and field sports Connected to Cass Park cross country running trails

PARK	AMENITIES AND FACILITIES AVAILABLE
Dunn Park	Playground Basketball and street hockey courts Dunn Field (Little League Field) Soccer/Football fields Walking paths
Globe Park	Playground Basketball and tennis court Walking paths Unofficial ski/sledding slope Open play areas
Harnett Field	Standalone youth baseball field High School tennis courts
Menard Field	Standalone youth softball field
Phyllis Thomas Park	Seating
Renaud Field	Standalone Major League baseball field
River Island Art Park	Sitting Areas Gazebo Main stage Walking paths Boat launch Fishing
River's Edge Complex	Bike/walking path (access to Blackstone River Bike Path) 3 Putt Golf Course Soccer fields (one full size and a variety of smaller sized fields) Playground Concession area Kayak/Canoe launch
Soucy Falls	Seating Fishing

Table 11-1. City Parks and Recreational Areas and Available Facilities and Amenities

Source: City of Woonsocket

The athletic fields are rented and used by local and regional youth, adult, and senior leagues and organizations for baseball, softball, football, and soccer. Park spaces can also be rented to host community and private events.

The Parks and Recreation Division leads more than 24 individual programs for all ages and interests. Because of limited staff, programs are coordinated with and supported by local volunteers and community organizations. Community events are also organized by the City throughout the year:

- Annual Fishing Derby for children 12 years and younger at Cass Park
- Egg Hunt at River's Edge Complex
- Pumpkin Patch at River's Edge Complex
- Movies in the Park during the summer at River Island Art Park

- Winter Wonderland and Santa's House at River Island Art Park

The Explorer River Tours, part of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, also operates sightseeing and educational tours along the Blackstone River out of Cold Spring Park.

FEDERAL AND STATE RESOURCES

Woonsocket is part of a regional network of open space and recreational resources.

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR AND PARK

As discussed in the Historic and Cultural Resources Element, the Blackstone River is recognized nationally for its contributions to our country's heritage. Congress passed an Act in 1986 to establish the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (the Corridor) in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. It extends 46 miles along the river, its tributaries, and the canal. Since 1986, the Act has been amended several times, including in 2014 when Congress created the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park. The Park is not owned by a federal entity, but is a collection of outdoor areas, bikeways, greenways, and nature trails within the Corridor that are managed by state, municipal, and nonprofit entities. Local cultural places, such as art galleries, museums, and historic sites, are also part of the diverse experiences throughout the Corridor and Park. Woonsocket's parks and recreational facilities, both on the Blackstone River and nearby, contribute to this rich collection of sites.

BLACKSTONE RIVER GREENWAY AND BIKEWAY

The Blackstone River Greenway and Bikeway are envisioned to extend 48 miles from Worcester, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island, along the Blackstone River and Canal. Over 24 miles of off-road bike paths have been constructed. In Woonsocket, the Bikeway can be accessed at the River's Edge Complex and it follows the river south into Lincoln.

WORLD WAR II VETERANS MEMORIAL STATE PARK

RIDEM owns and operates the World War II Veterans Memorial State Park. It is home to Autumn Fest, which is a three-day fair and community event featuring food, exhibits, and entertainment, topped off by a giant parade. It is one of several signature community events for Woonsocket and all northern Rhode Island. Park amenities include:

- Splash park
- Nap Lajoie Field (baseball)
- Basketball courts
- Playground
- Parking
- Picnic tables
- Restrooms
- Walking paths
- Performance stage
- Veterans Monument

Ocean State Outdoors, the 2019 Rhode Island State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, highlights the need to rebuild the park, including the water park and a major landscaping effort.

MAINTENANCE AND UPKEEP

Table 11-2 lists recent investments the City has made in its parks and recreational areas.

FACILITY	IMPROVEMENT/UPDATE	DATE
Aylsworth Avenue	Tennis courts	2019
Bernon Park	Playground	2020
Cass Park	Basketball courts and fencing	2018-2019
Cass Park	Playground (2)	2019
Cold Spring Park	Playground	2020
Dunn Park	Playground	2021
Globe Park	Playground	2018
World WW II Memorial State Park	Concession stand, press box, and restrooms	2018
World WW II Memorial State Park	Lajoie Field and dugouts	2015
World WW II Memorial State Park	Basketball courts and fencing	2015-2016
World WW II Memorial State Park	Playground and splash pad	2015-2016

Table 11-2. Recent Improvements at City Parks and Recreational Areas

Source: City of Woonsocket

Additional improvements and upgrades are needed at other City facilities, particularly ensuring that public restrooms are accessible for people with disabilities. Priorities are Menard Field, Cold Spring Park, Bernon Park, and Renaud Field.

The City's Parks and Recreation Division could benefit from a proactive preventative maintenance program to ensure that current and future investments are properly monitored, and facilities are meeting community needs. A basic preventative maintenance program⁴¹ focuses on four areas that give the City a leg up in extending the useful life of equipment and resources as well as promoting sustainable practices in operations and maintenance organization.

1. An annual facility audit/inventory/condition assessment process
2. Regular maintenance
3. Identifying and sustaining operating efficiencies
4. Data collection through maintenance management software

⁴¹ National Recreation and Park Association. *Simple Preventive Maintenance Leads to Sustainable Practices*. 2014. Parks and Recreation Magazine. Available at <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2014/february/simple-preventive-maintenance-leads-to-sustainable-practices/>.

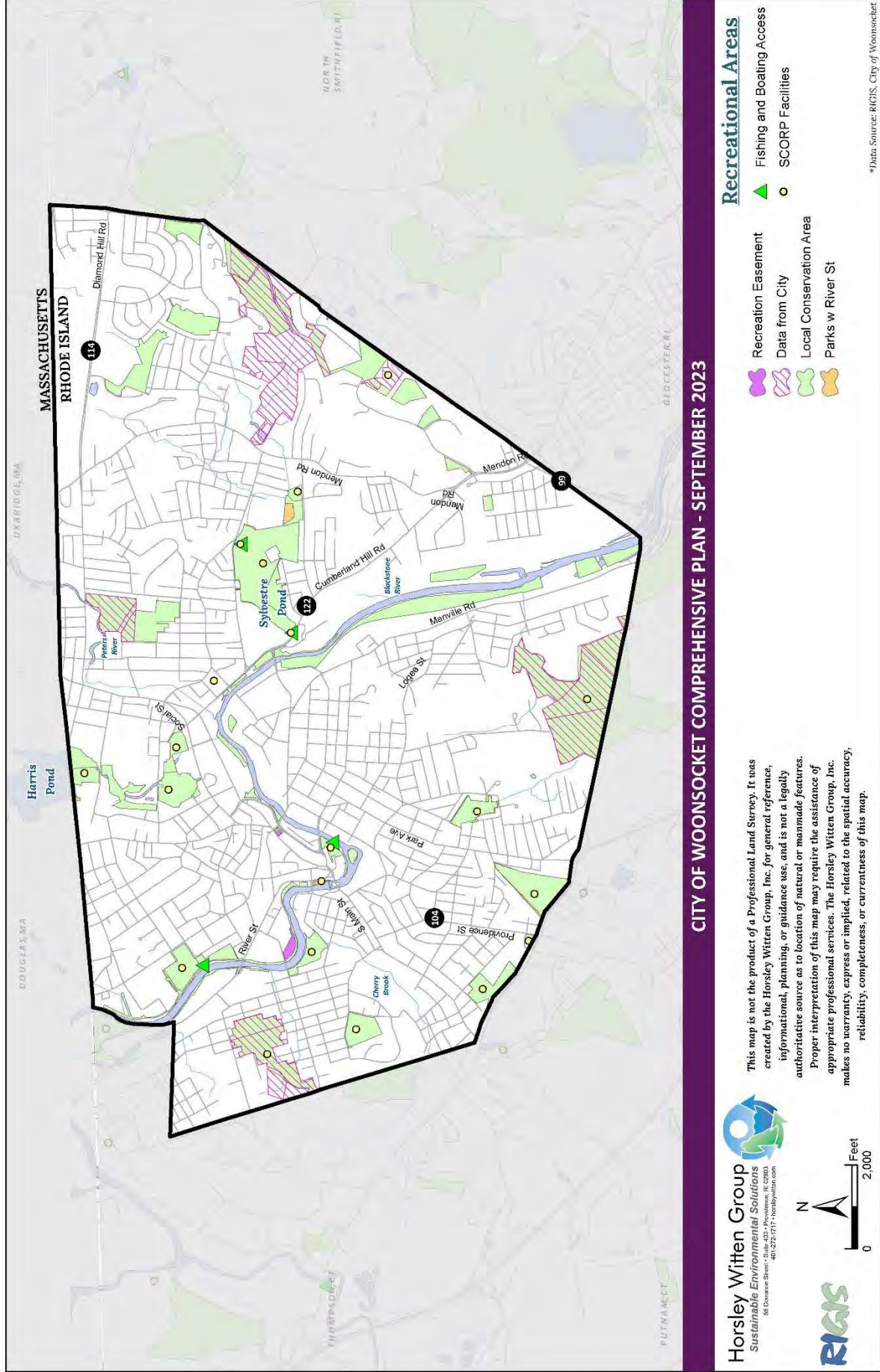
Through this process, facilities that require larger more complex upgrades and maintenance can be planned for over the long-term.

Sports fields are in constant use by local and regional leagues. Baseball and softball fields are very popular. An additional full-sized baseball field would help with demand and allow for field rotation to disperse field use and minimize wear and tear.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR PARKS & RECREATION

The City's diverse parks and recreational facilities offer residents and visitors a variety of ways to be active and socialize. The Comprehensive Plan should address parks and recreation by considering the following:

- As part of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and Park, continue and find new ways to work with regional, state, and private partners to create attractive recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.*
- Continue investments in playgrounds, fields, and courts, paying attention to accessibility.*
- Consider staffing capacity and financial resources to meet growing demands.*
- Explore more options for proactive preventative maintenance to ensure investment dollars are well spent and facilities continue to be operational and meet user needs.*
- Explore a facility to offer indoor activities and programming.*
- Explore ways to expand sports fields to allow the City to rotate and rest fields in high use extend their overall life and availability.*
- Explore ways to increase recreational opportunities for the City's youth to keep them physically active and healthy, and to build relationships and create a sense of belonging and community.*



12. ENERGY

Making energy more affordable, efficient, and renewable.

WHY ENERGY MATTERS

Energy impacts nearly all aspects of our daily lives. We depend on energy to travel; to heat and cool our buildings; and to power everything from streetlights, to smartphones, and medical equipment. Energy planning is relevant to the City's operations but also to residents and businesses living and working within Woonsocket. This plan will consider strategies to reduce energy consumption as well as the sources of energy, generation, and distribution within the City, security and reliability, efficiency, and the impact on the local and regional economy.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

ENERGY USE

Rhode Island spends more than 3.5 billion dollars on electricity and fuel annually. The majority of that energy comes from fossil fuel-based energy production facilities located outside of the state. Increasing energy efficiency and generating more of our power from renewable energy sources are two key ways to reduce the economic and environmental costs of energy consumption.

To begin reducing energy consumption it is essential that we understand how much energy we use currently. Since 2013 the Office of Energy Resources has partnered with the University of Rhode Island Extension to collect energy usage data for all publicly owned buildings in the state. This data is used to establish baseline energy consumption information for each municipality and is logged in a free online database developed by ENERGY STAR called Portfolio Manager. While Woonsocket did not participate in this pilot effort, Portfolio Manager remains a free tool that the City can use to develop baseline energy data and an energy profile for each municipal building in Woonsocket addressing both electricity use and heating fuel costs. The City will need to work with National Grid to take advantage of this resource. The City simply needs to enter data from past energy bills, as well as information on particular municipal facilities such as square footage, number of employees, hours of use, etc., and Portfolio Manager does the rest, calculating energy use per square foot so that facilities can be more accurately compared with one another.

The City can use this baseline energy data along with new energy expenses to track Woonsocket's energy consumption rates over time. By identifying the structures with the

highest energy consumption rates, the City can prioritize future conservation investments where they will have the greatest impact.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Energy efficiency reduces the amount of power that must be generated to meet our energy needs. The State of Rhode Island energy plan, *Energy 2035*, identified increased efficiency as the best tool available to ensure we are able to meet energy needs. By simply reducing the amount of energy it takes to power our systems we can ensure that the energy we produce goes further. Woonsocket can explore energy efficiency improvements to City facilities and encourage private property owners to pursue efficiency improvements of their own. Many steps can be taken to improve energy efficiency in City buildings, such as replacing older windows with newer energy efficient models that can reduce heating costs in the winter and cooling costs in the summer. Even efforts as simple as replacing conventional light bulbs with LED models and turning off lights when leaving a room significantly reduce energy consumption. Energy efficiency improvements come at a wide variety of costs, ranging from no- and low-cost solutions to more extensive upgrades. This means that many energy efficiency improvements are within the reach of all property owners and residents of Woonsocket. Promoting energy efficiency to residents and business owners would also help increase the City's efficiency.

ADI Energy prepared an Energy Efficiency Plan for the City in 2015. This plan focused on energy efficiency upgrades at City Hall, Harris Library, and the decorative street lighting throughout the City. ADI Energy identified five key Energy Conservation Measures (ECM's), which the City has been working to implement.

The City is in the process of taking ownership of its streetlights and converting them to LED. The City purchased its streetlights in spring 2021 and is now investing in converting them to LED. The conversion is expected to be complete within about a year. Energy usage is expected to be reduced by about 50%.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

SOLAR

Solar energy is collected from sunlight and converted to electricity through the use of solar photovoltaic panels. Solar energy systems can be incorporated on the roofs of existing structures or be placed on the ground. If adequate sun exposure is present on a property, solar energy systems can easily capture and generate enough power to meet the energy needs of a building or provide significant amounts of renewable energy production to be sold on the electric grid. In Woonsocket, solar energy systems are allowed at small and large scales in both residential and commercial/industrial contexts. Small scale residential solar is allowed in all zoning districts except for Public Recreation. Larger scale residential solar is also allowed in these zoning districts, but with a special use permit required in the Residential zoning districts (R-1, R-2, R-3, and R-4). Commercial/industrial solar is only allowed in the City's Industrial or Mixed-Use Commercial/Industrial zoning districts, and sometimes with a special use permit.

There has been increased interest from developers in ground mounted solar in Woonsocket. While the City has a Zoning Ordinance regulating solar already, it needs to be amended based on the experience gained in the approval process for recent Woonsocket solar projects.

WIND

Wind power is energy generated with the use of wind-to-energy conversion systems, most commonly in the form of wind turbines or windmills. Conversion systems convert the kinetic energy of the wind into electric energy for consumption. Wind power can be located on land or offshore. According to the Wind Siting Guidelines developed by the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources, a typical 1.5 MW onshore wind turbine in Rhode Island can power approximately 440 homes annually.

Woonsocket allows wind energy facilities by special use permit in its industrial, mixed-use industrial/commercial, and major commercial zoning districts.

Wind power generation in inland locations, such as Woonsocket, has less potential than in coastal parts of the state, and will likely not be a significant source of energy in Woonsocket (at least not with existing technologies). According to the U.S. Department of Energy⁴², average winds in Woonsocket are under the amount generally considered to have a resource suitable for wind development. Further, wind turbines now average roughly 280 feet in height. However, Woonsocket limits the height of wind turbines by the underlying zoning, which caps them at 50-60 feet. Low potential for adequate wind speed paired with these height limitations on wind turbines mean that wind power production is likely to remain very limited in Woonsocket.

HYDROPOWER

Hydropower systems convert the energy of water flowing downstream into electricity to generate power. In Rhode Island, limited hydropower resources exist due to the state's flat, coastal terrain and small number of large rivers. Because of this, the principal opportunity to develop hydropower generation in Rhode Island lies in co-locating new projects on existing dams or in smaller package systems.

Woonsocket is home to the Thundermist Hydroelectric Plant, located along the Blackstone River at 118 S Main Street. This facility, first opened in 1983, was not originally very profitable, and was closed by RI DEM in 2003 because of perceived harmful fluctuations in the river's water level. However, after being repaired, the City-owned facility (now leased to a private operator) was reopened and now generates 1.2 megawatts of power, or enough for about 600 homes. This plant represents the only major energy production facility within the City.

⁴² <https://windexchange.energy.gov/states/ri>

RESOURCES FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

There are many resources available to Rhode Island residents interested in generating renewable energy at their homes or businesses. Below are just a few examples. A fuller list may be found on the RI Office of Energy Resources website⁴³.

NATIONAL GRID HOME ENERGY ASSESSMENTS

Residents can find out how much energy their homes are wasting with a no-cost home energy assessment from National Grid, a first step toward lowering home energy bills. Households may qualify for up to \$15,000 off insulation and air sealing improvements (as of 2021). Such improvements may save households up to 20 percent on heating and cooling bills each year. [Click here for more information on the National Grid energy efficiency programs.](#)

EFFICIENT BUILDINGS FUND (EBF)

The Efficient Buildings Fund (EBF) provides low cost financing for state and municipal energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in Rhode Island. [Click here for more information on the EBF.](#)

RHODE ISLAND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY ASSESSED CLEAN ENERGY (C-PACE) PROGRAM

C-PACE enables owners of eligible commercial and industrial buildings to finance up to 100% of energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, and environmental health and safety eligible improvements. Financing is provided by private capital providers at competitive rates with repayment terms consistent with the useful life of the improvements, generally up to 25 years. [Click here for more information on C-PACE.](#)

ELECTRIC CHARGING STATIONS

The number of plug-in electric cars on American roads grows every year, and with them comes the need for more places to charge them.

TYPES OF CHARGING

In order to plan for electric vehicles, it is important to understand the difference between the three types of charging currently common in the United States.

Level 1 (120-volt): A conventional three-prong plug that goes into any properly grounded wall socket, with a connector for the car's charging port on the other end and a box of electronic circuitry between them. This is the slowest type of charging, although for plug-in hybrids with smaller battery packs, it may be enough to recharge in a few hours to overnight.

⁴³ <http://www.energy.ri.gov/policies-programs/programs-incentives/index.php>

Level 2 (240-volt): Most dedicated home and public charging stations operate at 240 Volts, with their cables again connecting to the standard charging port on a car. Generally, owners of battery-electric cars will require a Level 2 home charging station to provide overnight recharges.

DC Fast Charging: DC fast charging uses direct current (DC) and is very high-powered. It is only practical at dedicated public sites, given the higher cost for a utility to install dedicated high-power lines. There are three different kinds of DC quick charging:

- **CHAdemo:** Used by many Japanese and Korean car makers.
- **CCS (Combined Charging Standard):** All U.S. makers, except Tesla, and all German makers use this standard.
- **Tesla Supercharger:** Tesla has gone its own way and created a dedicated network of fast-charging stations that can only be used by Tesla owners.

WHERE TO CHARGE IN WOONSOCKET

For owners of electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles in Woonsocket, the following are the charging options available today.

Home: Across the country, most recharging is done at home and overnight. This is when electricity is usually cheapest. Many battery-electric car owners will install a charging station in their garage or carport. For plug-in hybrids, many owners just stick with the 120-volt charging cords described above.

Work: Charging at work is growing in popularity. It's a good way for corporations to cut their carbon footprint, it's not that expensive to install, and it's a nice employee perk-- whether or not the company or landlord charges a fee for it.

Public Sites: Finally, there are thousands of public charging stations throughout the U.S. and Canada, and the number grows each week. Virtually all public sites offer Level 2 charging, with a few providing DC fast-charging as well - increasingly with both CHAdemo and CCS cables. Some public charging is free, while other sites impose a fee, using several different networks that generally require membership up front.

According to the websites PlugShare and ChargePoint, there are currently four charging stations within the City that are open to the public. There may be others that are not currently tracked on these sites:

- **Landmark Medical Center** at 301 Cass Avenue – 6 6.6kW J-1772 plugs
- **Tasca Buick GMC** at 55 Fortin Drive – 1 240V/15A J-1772 plug
- **Tasca Chevrolet** at 114 Fortin Drive – 1 240V/40A J-1772 plug
- **Four Seasons Apartments** at 2467 Diamond Hill Road – 1 7.2kW J-1772 plug

Greater Woonsocket has a limited number of charging stations. The nearest station outside of Woonsocket is at the Blackstone, MA Police Department. There are, however, several options just off some of the major highways surrounding Woonsocket, including I-295, I-495, and I-95.

ELECTRIC CHARGING STATION RESOURCES

The Rhode Island Charge Up! Program offers incentives to state agencies and municipalities interested in installing electric vehicle supply equipment (EVSE or charging stations) at publicly-accessible facilities, and supports the purchase or lease of electric vehicles (EVs) for integration into public sector fleets.

[Click here for more information on Charge Up!](#)

BROADBAND

The term broadband refers to high-speed internet access. Broadband is different from dial-up internet service for several reasons, including the following:

- Broadband service provides a higher-speed of data transmission.
- Broadband provides access to the highest quality internet services, such as videoconferencing, that require large amounts of data transmission.
- Broadband access is constant. It does not block phone lines, and there is no need to reconnect each time you need to use the internet.

The City is well-served by commercial broadband (e.g., Verizon and Cox), but is also served in some locations by OSHEAN, a non-profit provider. OSHEAN offers better and cheaper wi-fi to customers with more responsive customer service (according to OSHEAN). There is an upfront cost to build out the OSHEAN network, but this is often heavily subsidized with public funding. A few years ago, the City's public schools and library were wired with OSHEAN fiber. This left the City with a robust network in place that can be further built on efficiently and affordably.

Moving forward:

- OSHEAN is currently studying expanding its fiber to the City's Housing Authority properties.
- Together, the City and OSHEAN are investigating expanding the network to Charter Schools, such as RISE Prep and Beacon, and to the State's Higher Education Center on Main Street.
 - Given the geography of the Charter Schools and Higher Education Center, fiber could be laid in such a way that all of Main Street and the Social District would be broadband-ready for interested businesses.
 - The City would wire the police station and City Hall as part of this expansion.
- The City is interested in exploring building wi-fi hotspots off the OSHEAN network to offer free wi-fi within downtown and low-income neighborhoods.
- The City is interested in facilitating OSHEAN expansion to institutions near the existing network where connection costs would be limited. Potential sites include Mt. St. Charles Academy and Landmark Medical Center.

Expanding access to broadband services is important for business expansion and retention, improved opportunities for home-based businesses and entrepreneurship, and access to educational and health resources. Anything the City can do to expand broadband access to

as many people and businesses as possible will be a boon to economic development and community wellbeing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR ENERGY

The Comprehensive Plan should address energy by considering the following:

- Energy is expensive and the costs associated with energy are likely to increase. Finding ways to invest in more energy efficiency and renewable energy for municipal buildings and fleets will save the City money in the long run.*
- Renewable energy is an underutilized resource in Woonsocket. How can more property and business owners be encouraged to use small scale solar? How can the City encourage more large scale solar in places where it makes sense? How can the Thundermist Hydroelectric Plant play a larger role in producing local renewable energy?*
- Electric vehicles can play a role in reducing fuel expenses and decreasing air pollution. What can the City do to facilitate more electric vehicle use?*
- Broadband access is a boon to the local economy, education, and public health and wellbeing. What investments can the City make to expand broadband access?*