

THE RHODE ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING STANDARDS  
GUIDANCE HANDBOOK SERIES

**GUIDANCE HANDBOOK #14:  
THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

Revised June 2018

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*Comprehensive planning and its implementation are needed to promote the appropriate use of land. The lack of comprehensive planning and its implementation could lead to the misuse, underuse, and overuse of our land and natural resources.*

*The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsection 45-22.2-3(a)(4)*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Guidance Handbook Series is the result of over twenty-four months of cooperation and coordination among state agencies, local planners, and other professionals interested in helping cities and towns craft better comprehensive plans. The guidance development process was overseen by the Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee, a dedicated group of planning, land use, legal, and community professionals who worked diligently to develop content on the comprehensive planning process and to review topical content as it was developed. Without this group the manual would not have become reality.

Additionally, the topical content for the guidance handbook series was developed in conversation with numerous experts. These knowledgeable individuals are the reason that the manual is helpful, user-friendly, and thorough.

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## INTRODUCTION

This handbook is meant to be an accompaniment to the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual (“the Standards Manual”), providing additional information on the standards for the Implementation Program contained within the manual. The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual and the other guidance handbooks in the series can be found online at <http://www.planning.ri.gov/publications/comprehensive-planning-materials.php>

This manual is split into two sections. [Section 1 - General Information on the Implementation Program](#) provides general information, including the purpose of including an implementation program and how to implement a development moratorium. [Section 2 - Fulfilling the Standards](#) provides information on satisfying the specific requirements presented in the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual.

## NOTES

In some cases, this guidebook presents “notes” that are relative to the content being discussed. Each note that occurs within the text will be tagged with a symbol to alert the reader to the note’s purpose, as shown below.



This symbol is used to identify references to the Rhode Island General Laws (RIGL). Blue text within this note provides a link to the actual RIGL citation.



This symbol alerts the reader to something that is required for State approval.



This symbol alerts the reader to potential data sources.



The text following this symbol provides additional suggestions to enhance comprehensive plans.



This symbol alerts the reader to sample goals, policies and actions that would fulfill the requirements.



This symbol indicates general information that is secondary to the main point of the text, but could be helpful to the municipality.



This symbol alerts the reader to a cross-reference within the guidebook series. If a concept is mentioned in the text area and more information on the concept is available elsewhere in the guidebook series, this note will point the reader to where to find it.

This handbook includes standards for complying with the requirements of the Comprehensive Planning Act. A standard may: 1) reiterate a requirement found in the Act; 2) provide specifics to clarify a requirement of the Act; 3) describe processes that if followed will help ensure State approval; or 4) identify information that while not specifically required by the Act, has been identified as vital to supporting the intents of the Act. Those standards that describe processes or information not *required* by the Act are listed as recommendations.

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**SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

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## WHAT IS THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM?

The Implementation Program is the work program for achieving the comprehensive plan's goals. The Implementation Program is a single section of the comprehensive plan, containing the public actions that will be undertaken to make progress towards achieving the goals, and the process by which the zoning ordinance and map will be amended to align, if necessary, with the comprehensive plan.

## WHY INCLUDE AN IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM?

When crafted well, the Implementation Program provides a step-by-step list of the public actions that are necessary to achieve the community's goals. Elected officials, municipal staff, residents, business owners and other stakeholders should be able to read the Implementation Program and understand specifically how the municipality anticipates achieving the goals it has set.

In 5-years, when the municipality is required to submit an Implementation Report to the Division of Planning, the Implementation Program will provide the basis for measuring the municipality's progress on achieving the goals. The municipality should be able to assess all of the public actions listed within the Implementation Program and determine whether or not they have been accomplished.



The required content for related to Implementation Program stems from the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsection [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(12\)](#).

## THE DEVELOPMENT MORATORIUM

The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act allows municipalities the option of implementing a one-time moratorium on development after the adoption of the comprehensive plan for the purpose of providing interim protection for a planned future use or uses. The moratorium is available only to those municipalities whose Implementation Program schedules an amendment to the zoning ordinance and map within the 12-months following adoption of the plan. The moratorium may regulate, restrict, or prohibit any use, development or subdivisions, and must comply with the following provisions:

- The moratorium must be enacted as an ordinance;
- The moratorium must only be applicable in areas identified on the map within the comprehensive plan in which the current zoning is inconsistent with the comprehensive plan; and
- The ordinance must specify the purpose of the moratorium, the date it shall take effect and the date it shall end, the area covered by the moratorium, and, the regulations, restrictions, or prohibitions established by the moratorium.



See the RI Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsections [45-22.2-13\(c\)](#) and [45-22.2-13\(e\)](#).



The moratorium is intended to allow municipalities to revise their zoning ordinances and maps to achieve the desired future land use, without parcels being developed into potential future non-conforming uses. If an implementation moratorium is to be sought by a municipality, it must be included and scheduled in the Implementation Program as a public action.

## THE 5-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION ASSESSMENT REPORT

Not more than five years after the adoption of a comprehensive plan, the municipality is required to prepare and submit to the Division of Planning a 5-Year Implementation Assessment Report. The Implementation Assessment Report is intended to assist the municipality and the State in determining which implementation activities have been successful and which require additional assistance and/or resources.

The 5-Year Implementation Assessment Report must include:

- A list of all of the public actions included within the Implementation Program of the comprehensive plan that were identified as being completed or underway within five years;
- For each public action, identification of the progress made over the course of the five-year period;
- For each public action, identification of any obstacles to progress; and
- An assessment as to whether any modifications of the implementation program are needed in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the comprehensive plan.



See the RI Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsection [45-22.2-12\(d\)](#).

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## SECTION 2. FULFILLING THE STANDARDS

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## STANDARD 14.1

INCLUDE A SEPARATE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM THAT MEETS ALL OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THIS SECTION AND INCLUDES SPECIFIC IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS AS REQUIRED BY SECTIONS 2 THROUGH 13 OF THESE STANDARDS.

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The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act requires that all comprehensive plans must include a separate Implementation Program. To receive State approval, the Implementation Program must meet all of the standards of this section and include specific implementation actions as required by sections 2 through 13 of the standards.

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## STANDARD 14.2

### INCLUDE THE SPECIFIC MUNICIPAL IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS TO BE UNDERTAKEN TO ACHIEVE EACH GOAL OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, BY:

- a. Including sufficient, specific implementation actions to which the municipality will commit in order to achieve each of the comprehensive plan's goals;
  - b. Providing a timeframe for each implementation action;
  - c. (*Recommendation*) Assigning a responsible party to each implementation action, including the City or Town Council for actions that will require the amendment of codes and ordinances by the municipal legislative body; and
  - d. Including an action to implement a development moratorium post-adoption of the comprehensive plan if one is so desired.
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As discussed in each of the topical handbooks, the comprehensive plan, and specifically the Implementation Program must include implementation actions that help to achieve the municipality's and the state's goals. More information on meeting the standard is included below.

### SUFFICIENT AND SPECIFIC PUBLIC IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

#### (Standard 14.1a)

The primary component of the Implementation Program is the list of actions that will be undertaken by the municipality to implement the comprehensive plan. The Implementation Program must include implementation actions that address each of the comprehensive plan's stated goals. The Implementation Program must also contain actions that satisfy Standards 2.8, 3.5, 4.4, 5.8, 6.4, 7.6, 8.6, 9.2, 10.7, 11.4, 12.5 and 13.11. See each of the topical handbooks for more information on these standards.

As the Implementation Program is the "work program" of the comprehensive plan, municipalities should be strategic in their thinking about which implementation actions to include. The Implementation Program should provide a list of the actions to which the municipality is willing to commit time and/or resources to undertake, which is not necessarily every implementation action given in the topical chapters of the plan. However, the Implementation Program should include a sufficient number of implementation actions to show that progress will be made toward achieving each goal. To receive State approval, the Division of Planning will review the list of implementation actions provided in the Implementation Program for sufficiency.

### IMPLEMENTATION ACTION TIMEFRAMES

#### (Standard 14.1b)

Each implementation action must be given a timeframe. The timeframe can be given in whatever terminology best suits the municipality – short-, medium- and long-term; one-year, five-years, ten-years; etc. – but the terminology used must be clearly defined within the Implementation Program. If short-, medium-, and long-term are used, there must be an explanation as to what length of time is being indicated by the terms.



Communities should be judicious in using the timeframe “ongoing” within their Implementation Programs. It may be that some actions are repetitive and therefore, “ongoing,” however many of the things that are “ongoing” may be better classified as policies, since they relate specifically to decision making. See Guidance Handbook #1 - The Comprehensive Plan 101 for more information on the differences between implementation actions and policies.

## IMPLEMENTATION ACTION RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

### (Standard 14.1c)

The list of actions given in the Implementation Program must, at a minimum, be those for which the municipality is responsible. To be meaningful at directing the actions of municipal entities, each implementation action must also be assigned to a responsible party within the municipality. For those actions requiring amendment of codes and ordinances, the City or Town Council must be assigned as a responsible party. Though not required, communities may also choose to indicate entities that will assist the responsible party in carrying out the action.

One of the benefits of having a state-approved comprehensive plan is that programs and projects of State agencies must conform to the plan once approved. In some instances, it may be appropriate to list State agencies as partnering with the municipality on projects or to provide direction to State agencies when implementing projects that the agency is already undertaking. The Implementation Program, however, cannot direct State agencies to undertake work on projects that are not already in their work plans, and cannot set the budgets or work priorities of State agencies. Municipalities should use the Implementation Program actions to relay their own goals and policies to State agencies, directing the purpose of existing work rather than calling for new work to be undertaken.

## ACTIONS RELATED TO DEVELOPMENT MORATORIUM

### (Standard 14.1d)

If a moratorium is to be enacted pursuant to RIGL subsection [45-22.2-13\(e\)](#), it must be included as one of the public actions of the Implementation Program.



## CRAFT A BETTER PLAN

To make the Implementation Program most effective, the labels used within the Implementation Program should be used appropriately. As described in Guidance Handbook #1 - The Comprehensive Plan 101, the terms “implementation action,” “goal” and “policy” have specific meanings that relate to how they will be used by the municipality. The “goals” of a comprehensive plan set the vision for the future of the municipality. The “policies” are intended to give direction to decision-makers and key community leaders, providing guidance on handling difficult issues, prioritizing the allocation of scarce resources, and working together to achieve goals. The policies set out the parameters for action; they are the procedures that must be followed for the goals to be achieved and they set the tone for community action. The “implementation actions” are the steps that can be taken, along and in line with the path that has been set out by the “policies,” to reach the goals.

While it is not necessary to include the plan’s goals and policies within the Implementation Program, it is strongly recommended that the goals and policies be listed along with the implementation actions that will be undertaken to achieve them. Organizing the Implementation Program in this way will help the community use the document for its intended purpose - achieving the goals.

Municipalities may always include more information than the minimum requirements presented in this manual, and may arrange the contents of their plans (except for land use) how they see fit, which leads to a range of options for satisfying the standards. The plan’s goals, policies, and implementation actions may be placed anywhere within the plan – in the topical chapters, in an introduction, and/or within the Implementation Program.

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## STANDARD 14.3

### IDENTIFY ANY IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS INVOLVING THE EXPANSION OR REPLACEMENT OF PUBLIC FACILITIES THAT ARE REFLECTED IN THE CURRENT CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM.

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If any of the implementation actions listed within the Implementation Program are already reflected in the municipality's Capital Improvement Program, those actions must be identified as such. Identifying actions that are already scheduled for funding in this way will help the municipality determine where funding is still necessary.



#### CRAFT A BETTER PLAN

Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act requires municipalities to assess their current and future needs for recreation and services and facilities (see Guidance Handbook #3 - Planning for Recreation and Guidance Handbook #8 - Planning for Services and Facilities). It is likely that some of the needs that are identified through this assessment will be capital needs, such as new recreational equipment, major building repairs or new fleet vehicles. To be most effective, the Implementation Program should identify whether any of the implementation actions provided in the Implementation Program will require placement on the municipal Capital Improvement Program. Also, while the exact revenue sources may not be known, the Implementation Program must provide potential programs and/or funds that could be used to finance the improvements. If a cost estimate is available for the improvement, it should be given. Municipalities may also find it helpful to indicate the magnitude of the potential cost, giving a single number (\$125,000), using a range (\$100,000 to \$150,000), or giving a general estimate, (approximately \$100,000).

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## STANDARD 14.4

SPECIFY THE SCHEDULE BY WHICH THE ZONING ORDINANCE AND ZONING MAP WILL BE AMENDED TO PROVIDE CONSISTENCY WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN BY:

- a. Specifying the amendments that will be undertaken within the first twelve (12) months after adoption of the comprehensive plan that are related to any desired development moratoriums;
  - b. Specifying, in 2-year increments, (*"2-year increments" are recommended*) the amendments that will be undertaken to bring consistency with the comprehensive plan; and
  - c. (*Recommendation*) Proposing all amendments to be completed within the 10-year period subsequent to the adoption of the comprehensive plan.
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The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act requires a municipality's zoning ordinance be consistent with its comprehensive plan. To this end, the Land Use section of a comprehensive plan must determine whether any inconsistencies exist between the current zoning districts and the Future Land Use Map (FLUM), include a map of such inconsistencies and propose resolutions for bringing consistency.

In addition to the map and discussions (see Guidance Handbook 13 - Planning for Land Use), the Act requires that the Implementation Program specify the schedule by which the zoning ordinance and map will be amended to conform to the comprehensive plan. This information is to be included in the Implementation Program as the Implementation Program is intended to set the municipality's priorities and course of action over the ten-year life-cycle of the comprehensive plan.

The standards for the Implementation Program build on the contents of the Land Use section. For some communities, multiple changes to the current development patterns may be envisioned, not all of which can be undertaken simultaneously. Therefore, it is important for communities to prioritize their actions for bringing consistency between the zoning ordinance and map and the comprehensive plan, and to specify a schedule by which amendments will be undertaken.

Depending on the extent of the inconsistencies identified, amending the zoning ordinance and map to bring consistency with the FLUM may take some time, especially if new zoning districts must be created. Therefore, the Implementation Program must provide a general phasing schedule for developing and adopting amendments, indicating which portions of the identified inconsistencies will be addressed during which timeframes. The general phasing of zoning ordinance and map amendments should be based on the community's priorities and the goals of the comprehensive plan. In developing the comprehensive plan, communities should consider which changes are most important for achieving the goals desired for the community. For example, if it is important to the community that a growth center be established, the amendments necessary to implement the growth center may take precedence over those changing a parcel zoned as residential and containing open space to a more appropriate open space zone.



Per the Act, failure to amend the zoning ordinance within the time laid out by the comprehensive plan, or by the expiration of the moratorium period, may result in the denial or recession of State approval. Therefore, it is critical that the schedule outlined in the Implementation Program present a realistic estimate of the timing of municipal actions.

The Implementation Program must also identify whether a moratorium on development will be sought for any areas of inconsistency, as described in [Section 1. General Information on the Implementation Program](#). If a moratorium will be sought, the Implementation Program must also identify which areas of inconsistency will be targeted for the moratorium, based on the priorities of the comprehensive plan. It is up to the municipality how much area will be subject to the moratorium, but the comprehensive plan should provide general direction to the municipal legislative body as to the wishes of the community.



See the RI Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsection [45-22.2-13\(g\)\(1\)](#).