

# CITY OF NEWPORT

## 2017 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 5 YEAR IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

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**October 2021,**  
**(Plan approved February 8, 2017)**

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### REVIEW COMMITTEE

Kim Salerno, *Planning Board Chair*  
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# PART I - 5 YEAR IMPLEMENTATION ASSESSMENT

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS; meeting our Goals

### THE NORTH END URBAN PLAN

*The North End Urban Plan serves to clarify the vision, goals, policies, and actions for the North End of Newport. Designed to address historic inequities, provide more economic opportunities, and create a safe, comfortable built environment that is compatible with Newport's outstanding architecture, the North End Urban Plan seeks to direct redevelopment in Newport's North End and serve as an example of the potential for improvement informed by the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. The Innovation District uses the Character-Based Code as a foundation for new zoning, benefiting the citizens that live there, while providing visual and design guidance to unify the North End and the rest of Newport.*

*This Plan was approved by the City Council in February of 2021, and incorporated into the City's 2017 Comprehensive Plan. This adds new Economic Development, Housing, Transportation, Energy and Climate Change Goals for consideration in review of development in the City's North End.*



**PELL BRIDGE RAMP REALIGNMENT, Construction to be completed by Summer of 2024**



*Construction on JT Connell  
September 19, 2021*



*The concerns about safety caused by the backup of eastbound traffic on the Pell Bridge have been longstanding, dating back more than 20 years. During that time, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (DOT) worked on over 20 plans, and it is rewarding to have reached this milestone.*

*This much anticipated project improves safety, reduces queuing on the Pell Bridge, and reconnects neighborhoods segmented by obsolete highway infrastructure. The proposed reconstruction also supports the City's economic development plans by maximizing the amount of surplus land area for future redevelopment.*

*Future multiuse path, September 19, 2021*

*The ramp realignment provides for pedestrians and bicyclists, and moves the Pell Bridge Approaches out of the FEMA floodplain, creating a safer evacuation route. This is a significant and vitally important improvement that better provides for the safety of Newport's residents and visitors.*

*This Project is consistent with the City's Land Use, Economic Development, Housing, Transportation, Historic and Cultural, Water and Climate Change Goals.*

## **CRANSTON CALVERT SCHOOL**

*During the approval process, both the Newport Planning Board and City Council members were unanimously in favor of this project and the concept behind it--affordable housing units, designed for the City's younger workforce and retired populations.*

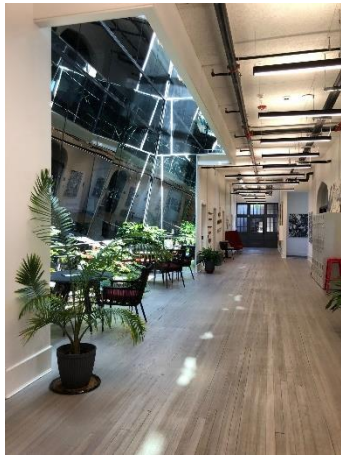


*The link between economic development and available, affordable housing has been well documented. The City envisions young professionals, living in the newly created housing units and filling technology jobs the City Council and Administration are working to create. The new technology center, Innovate Newport, and the Innovation Hub are both in close proximity and will allow residents multimodal transit options.*

*Repurposing the surplus Cranston-Calvert school to create 34 units of much needed workforce housing, is consistent with many of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan goals. This is an exemplary project that supports the City's Land Use, Transportation, Economic Development, Housing and Recycling Goals.*

**INNOVATE NEWPORT, (formerly the Sheffield School)**

*Conversion of the classic old brick school house into a modern high-tech business accelerator and incubator facility provides for business development and tech innovation in the blue economy and digital industries, as well as revitalization of a major civic building. This project supports the City’s Land Use, Economic Development, Historic and Cultural and Climate Change Goals.*



## EV CHARGING STATIONS, at the Gateway Center



*Electrify RI, RI Office of Energy Resources (OER) provided funding to support the deployment of light duty electric vehicle charging stations in the City of Newport. The funds were made available pursuant to the State's Beneficiary Mitigation Plan (BMP) which detailed how the VW Diesel Settlement Environmental Trust Fund would be invested.*

*In March of 2020 the City was approved for the installation of three (3), Level II Electric Charging Stations at the entrance to the Gateway Center parking lot.*



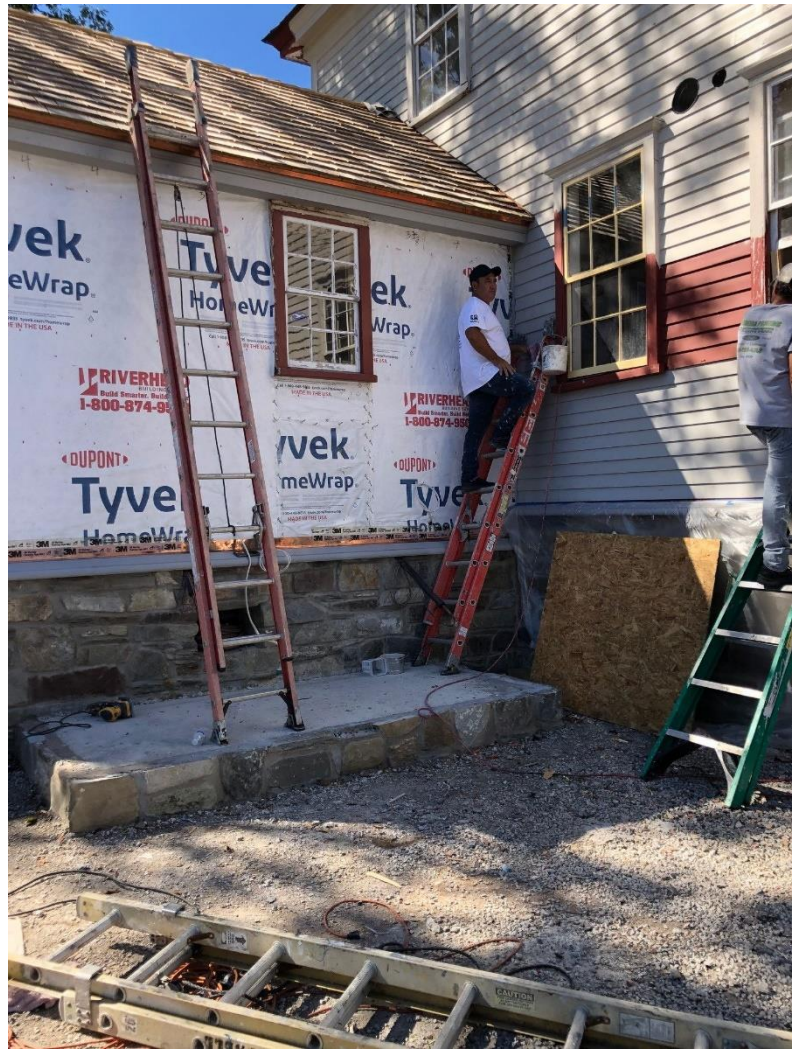
*The Charging Stations have been installed, inspected by the Office of Energy Resources and are now completely operational.*

*This project addresses the City's Transportation, Energy, Climate Change and Community Service Goals*

## DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR ELEVATING HISTORIC STRUCTURES

*Newport is one of the first of the country's coastal and historic communities to establish guidelines for elevating historic structures that are located in a designated flood zone.*

*Newport has historically been plagued by significant flooding issues in its low-lying areas, and in recent years there has been an intensification of flooding due to severe storms and high tides. The Historic District Commission has determined that the best policy for the long-term preservation of historic structures is to support elevating structures, when necessary.*



*The Design Guidelines give property owners, architects, builders and others involved in presenting elevation projects, general awareness of the Commission's expectations.*

*These Design Guidelines are consistent with the City's Housing, Historic and Cultural and Climate Change Goals.*

# **PART II – CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

*How well did we meet our goals to date?*

## **CHAPTER 3: LAND USE**

**Overall Grade: A-**

The adoption of the North End Urban Plan (as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan), the FEMA Flood Maps and Community Rating System, and the Coastal Resource Management Council’s Hazard Risk Assessment used in review of City development projects demonstrate the fulfillment of Chapter 3’s policies and goals.

The vision put forth by the North End Urban Plan serves as an example of the City expanding upon previous goals to become more resilient through land use.

## **CHAPTER 4: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Overall Grade: C**

The City should be more affirmative with economic development goals, and should strive to make progress on the goals in this chapter using the economic components of the North End Urban Plan as a foundation for expanding progress throughout the City. Within the NEUP there are recommendations for further workforce development and the progression of the Blue Economy within the North End.

Progress in this sector has been hindered by the COVID 19 pandemic.

## **CHAPTER 5: HOUSING**

**Overall Grade: C-**

Housing is a pressing issue for the community and requires further policy development, which should align with the Comprehensive Plan to better enhance the City. Tools such as Report It Newport serve the policies in this chapter, but the City should increase the promotion and accessibility of the app. While the City hired a Short-Term Rental Enforcement Officer to combat illegal short-term rentals, an increase in applications to convert long-term year-round rentals into short-term rentals is now being witnessed. Additionally, more houses are being used as secondary residences and are contributing to “dark house” syndrome and effecting the surrounding community. There is pertinent housing data that must be made available to decision makers and to the public so that the City can work towards a balance of opportunities for housing and economic sustainability for residents. Overall, the City needs a continued effort to develop strategies to expand affordable housing options that are supported by policies which directly benefit the community.



## **CHAPTER 6: COMMUNITY SERVICES & FACILITIES**

**Overall Grade: B+**

Newport maintains well managed community services and facilities such as the Fire and Police services, the Public Library and the Clean City program. The City presents physical barriers to differently-abled persons through uneven and narrow sidewalks, and this should continue to be addressed through design.

The City excelled in keeping public meetings accessible through web applications and tech support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and would benefit from an increase in broadband. The community must increase support, collaboration, and funding of the City's educational system in order to improve community services and facilities.

## **CHAPTER 7: TRANSPORTATION & CIRCULATION**

**Overall Grade: B+**

This Chapter has seen some notable progress, but there is much to accomplish in the realm of transportation. The Transportation Master Plan, being developed in collaboration with the State of Rhode Island, a Resident Advisory Committee and consultants Toole Design, is representative of the combined effort and desire to improve transportation and circulation for the residents of Newport. Additionally, the Pell Bridge Ramp Realignment and Green and Complete Streets ordinance are examples of successful endeavors to improve multimodal transportation within Newport. Bicycle infrastructure, such as the sharrows on Broadway, should be expanded upon to meet the goals of this chapter. The City should also pursue more sidewalk and crosswalk improvements to further pedestrian safety, access and navigation.

## **CHAPTER 8: OPEN SPACE & RECREATION**

**Overall Grade: B+**

The City's parks and open spaces are well maintained and will continue to provide connectivity through the oversight of the Tree and Open Space Commission (TOSC). The Commission promotes connectedness, equity and resilience, guided by the Newport Tree, Park, and Open Spaces Master Plan. The TOSC has supported the development of a new skate park, the construction of a basketball court in the North End and improvements to parks including Ballard Park, King Park, Miantonomi Park and Almy Pond. The TOSC is also active in annual tree and bulb planting, and any necessary tree removal and replacement. To meet the City's goals, the TOSC continues to advocate for expanded recreation activities in the City's North End, ecologically sound urban development practices, enhancements to the City's green infrastructure, and protection of public access to the water.

A new Waterfront Master Plan would support the goals of this Chapter. It would be helpful to gather information from residents to learn more about the usage and future desires for the neighborhood parks. The North End Urban Plan provides many modes and examples for the advancement of our open spaces and their network.

## **CHAPTER 9: NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Overall Grade: C**

Newport is abundant in natural resources and beauty, and it serves as a steward for the State's waterfront identity. Since Newport has always valued and respected nature, it is important for the City to empower and facilitate meaningful relationships with environmental leaders and groups such as the Energy and Environment Commission, the Tree and Open Space Commission, Clean Ocean Access, the Island Waters Program, Newport Tree Conservancy, Friends of the Waterfront, and others. It would benefit the City's goals in this chapter to gather and compile more data about the natural resources and how to preserve/restore them. As mentioned in the North End Urban Plan, focusing on the development of a Blue Economy will directly benefit the objectives in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 10: HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES**

**Overall Grade: B+**

Newport is rich in heritage, continually fostering a strong sense of architectural and cultural identity through the nationally recognized historic district and events such as music festivals, regattas, galas and additional special gatherings. Reinforcement and support of historic district zoning would benefit Newport. Organizations such as the Preservation Society of Newport, Newport Historical Society, the Newport Restoration Foundation, as well as the City's Historic District Commission are stewards for maintaining the City's historic character. Increasingly destructive flooding within the historic district should be considered a high priority in Newport's future hazard mitigation planning. Culturally, Newport has potential to expand its identity through modern zoning and policies that support and welcome culturally diverse development.

## **CHAPTER 11: ENERGY**

**Overall Grade: C**

Newport is a forward-thinking, mid-sized city that has the potential to be a self-sufficient, environmentally resilient energy hub. The City would benefit from the development of a Community Choice Aggregation partnership, and should support sustainability with new projects, such as microgrids, electric vehicle charging stations, and solar panels. The city should also use strategies such as electric vehicles for city owned vehicles, and LED lights in streetlights.

## **CHAPTER 12: WATER**

**Overall Grade: B-**

The Utilities Department has made steady progress in managing Newport's water, and can continue to improve its efficiency by limiting development around the City's reservoirs to protect the water supply, conducting reservoir assessments and increased involvement in surrounding reservoirs. City review and approval of additional impervious surface area is an urgent concern. Greater stormwater utility plans and upgrades such as billing system improvements, are needed to progress the City's utilities and address stormwater runoff. The City would benefit from a greater public

understanding of the needs for infrastructure upgrades within the North End and within the City overall.

**CHAPTER 13: NATURAL HAZARDS & CLIMATE CHANGE Overall Grade: B+**

Newport's Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan has greatly contributed to the preservation of the City's natural resources and in preparation for the impacts of climate change. Public communication such as Flood Safe Newport has aided in educating the public about the risks associating with natural hazards. The City would benefit from the organization of a task force to address the City's climate-related risks, in addition to a full-time staff member dedicated to pursuing long term climate solutions and seeking research and grant opportunities. Other municipalities are taking bold actions to prepare for climate change, and Newport should as well.