

### **3.0 PLANNING CONCEPT**

#### **3.1 The Nature of Tiverton: Issues and Opportunities**

Tiverton is in a time of change, more today than ever before in its history. Tiverton's residents are also changing from a population with deep roots in the community, whose livelihoods were based on fishing and farming, to a growing newly arrived population whose jobs take them outside the town. Residential and commercial development pressures the remaining undeveloped land and historic buildings.

Tiverton faces a number of development issues, many of which were identified in the comprehensive community plan workshops. Some of these concern the day-to-day operation of the town. Others have to do with the basic structure of land use and future physical development. The Comprehensive Community Plan focuses on those issues, as well as opportunities that relate to the present and future character, and the improvement of the community and its resources.

The special character of Tiverton is derived from the interrelationship among the basic functions and unique qualities of the community, consisting of a unique environment, a waterfront town, a residential community and a location for commercial and industrial opportunities. This special character forms the conceptual basis for the Comprehensive Community Plan. These are the aspects of the town that will continue into the future and should be reinforced through this planning effort.

#### **A Unique Environment**

The location of the town, its historical development, and the quality of its natural features are unique factors of Tiverton today and will affect the character of Tiverton tomorrow. The conservation of those natural and historic features is crucial if Tiverton is to maintain its integrity and avoid becoming a faceless suburb.

The following are the major issues and opportunities that constitute this unique environment:

- **Ground and Surface Water:** Since the lifeblood of the community, the drinking water supply, comes from resources within the town, the protection of those resources is of crucial importance. Stafford Pond, Tiverton's only public water resource, faces continuing contamination threat from failed septic systems, road runoff and recreational use. Both the quality of the current supply and the potential future water requirements should be protected. Both Stafford Pond and Nonquit Pond, serving the City of Newport, are now being monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program for nitrogen and phosphorus. The protection of Tiverton's groundwater, especially in areas served by drinking water wells, is also vitally important. The administrative structure of existing water districts, and the ownership and use of watershed land are also issues. The need to continue a public education program on environmental protection has been identified as crucial in dealing with these issues, as are specific steps such as a program for the inspection and maintenance of septic systems within the watersheds.

- **Wetlands:** Wetlands play an important role in the community for flood control, water storage, groundwater replenishment and wildlife habitat. They are among the predominant natural features of the town, and monitoring the enforcement of existing wetlands protection regulations is an important concern.



*Stafford Pond*

- **Solid Waste Management:** Although the town landfill solves the immediate problem of solid waste disposal, the town must consider future alternatives. A committee appointed by the Town Council has assisted in extending the life of the landfill by decreasing the volume of waste through implementation of a “pay as you throw” program and increased recycling through a “no bin, no barrel” program. Although the lifespan of the landfill has been extended, additional funding for closure will be required. Other abandoned waste disposal sites in Town, such as the Firestone Dump on Brayton Road, have been identified as possible Super Fund cleanup sites.
- **Visual Quality:** The visual quality of Tiverton is the heart of its character and charm. Each area of Tiverton possesses its own unique flavor, which should be echoed in both new development and redevelopment. The eclectic architecture of Tiverton should be celebrated and complemented through new development exhibiting unique, high quality design.
- **Open Space/Farmland:** Protected open space adds to the character of the town. Additional parks and other open areas are needed in developed portions of Town such as north Tiverton. Farmland is a special open space resource with both aesthetic and economic value to the town.



*Farms and fields contribute to Tiverton's unique environment*

- **Historic and Scenic Character:** Tiverton's historic buildings and waterfront areas contribute to the town's character and encourage tourism and the businesses that serve visitors. Old buildings are particularly vulnerable to loss, yet the town has neither a regulatory nor an advisory mechanism for their preservation. In the absence of historic district zoning, a Historical Preservation Advisory Board has been formed.

Many areas of Tiverton have a particular scenic quality derived from the rural landscape, such as mature trees, stone walls and rural roadways. The protection of these elements is a concern. These irreplaceable resources should be identified and protected. Views from heights of land to the waterfront are particularly attractive and should be protected and incorporated in future development.



*Main Road along Nannaquaket Pond/Sakonnet River views*

- **Recreational Resources:** While the town has several parks and recreation areas, many of these have the potential to be further developed and utilized. Small play areas should be located within areas of denser development. There should be walking paths to link these resources to the residential community. There are some extensive trails systems, including those in Fort Barton, Weetamoo Woods and Pardon Gray Preserve, and there have been some efforts to develop safe bikeways in town. Those efforts are ongoing. Tiverton has two public beaches used by residents and non-residents extensively during the summer season.



### **A Waterfront Town**

As a waterfront community, Tiverton has special problems and opportunities. The waterfront serves sometimes conflicting economic, recreational, environmental, commercial and historic functions. There are threats to the waterfront's character, including environmental degradation from a-lack of enforcement of existing regulations.

Tiverton's waterfront consists of: the scenic coastal bluffs and beaches along the Sakonnet River; the coastal marshes and ponds, such as Fogland, Seapowet, Nanaquaket, Nonquit, the harbor basin at Stone Bridge and Bridgeport. It also includes the residentially developed shoreline of Mount Hope Bay in the northern part of town and the industrial fuel depot located in at the State line.

The scenic, natural coastline is a crucial element of Tiverton's character. The combination of beaches, shellfish beds and fishing areas, salt marshes and ponds serve to maintain the natural balance and function as a natural, recreational and economic resource for the town. The water quality of the Sakonnet River and Mount Hope Bay is a regional concern.

The Tiverton Basin, located between the Stone Bridge abutment and the Sakonnet River Bridge is a very special resource. The area functions as a beach, mooring and dock sites, fishing grounds and a visual resource to the community. The basin's marinas have historically served as the main access to the water. To enable these uses to coexist, the town has prepared a Harbor Management Plan. The Plan identifies the urgent need to protect the basin by reinforcing the Stone Bridge abutment in a visually attractive manner.

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation has been working with the Town to develop construction plans to rehabilitate the Stone Bridge abutment. The renovation project has encountered obstacles that have further delayed the 2016 anticipated funding to the Town. The Town will continue working with RIDOT to secure funding and move forward with the project.

The waterfront and its adjoining area at Stone Bridge could be better utilized by both small commercial and mixed use. The future public sewer improvements for the Riverside Drive Area, Stone Bridge to Schooner Drive, will help promote mechanisms to encourage small business opportunities. The town has purchased the old gas station property, adjacent to Grinnell's Beach and the Grinnell's Beach Improvement Committee has developed a redevelop plan for the area. The Committee is working on a recreation grant from the state Department of Environmental Management for 2016.



*Fogland Beach is a popular site for swimming, fishing and boating*

## **A Residential Community**

Tiverton is, and will remain, a desirable place to live. Yet, the quality of the residential environment, and the availability of a range of housing for present and future generations, needs to be addressed. Major issues concern the preservation of existing housing, the types of housing provided, housing costs, the quality of town services and the rate at which land is being developed into residential subdivisions.

The maintenance of existing units is a key concern in north Tiverton and the older areas in the town. Also of concern is the maintenance and preservation of the historic and architecturally significant residential buildings located throughout the town.

Tiverton has developed as a suburban residential location, and the principal form of housing is the single family detached residence. While this housing is adequate for growing families, it can be burdensome for the elderly, small families, single person households and others. There is concern for increasing the variety of housing to serve residents in all stages of life, although some progress has been made through the construction of projects that include housing types that serve a diverse population

There remains a substantial gap between the cost of housing and the ability of most residents to pay. The town must confront the need to preserve existing low cost units, and provide for future housing affordability as well as a healthy range of types for residents seeking to move up in the housing market. The Town should consider utilizing developer fees to rehabilitate existing housing stock for occupancy by low and moderate income residents.

The town must provide services to support the residential community. The availability of public safety services and the quality of the school system has a direct bearing on the desirability of the town as a residential location.



*Sandywoods Farm*

## **A Location of Business Opportunities**

Tiverton serves as a location for neighborhood, community-oriented and family-owned businesses, and for a few small industries. The Bourne Mill is a testament to a previous industrial heritage that was linked to the historic mills in Fall River. Even today, commercial services and industry for the most part are provided by surrounding towns. Commercial development is located in a few locations, along Main Road in north Tiverton, along the waterfront in Stone Bridge, and at several crossroads areas. Regional shopping centers are located in nearby communities. The majority of the town's workers are employed regionally. Most of the tax revenue in town is generated by residential uses with the burden disproportionately cast on an aging population. An expansion of the commercial and industrial tax base would lessen the burden on the residential taxpayers.

Tiverton is well-located for commercial and industrial development and significant areas are zoned for general commercial or industrial uses. These areas have direct access to the regional transportation network. The lack of other infrastructure, particularly sewers, and natural features constraints are the major factors inhibiting these forms of development.

The Tiverton Business Park (TBP), formerly known as the Tiverton Industrial Park, at the intersection of Route 24 and Fish Road offers the opportunity to generate jobs and diversify the tax base. A substantial area in north Tiverton is also zoned for industry, but is underutilized. In 2012 new guidelines for design and build out were written and passed by the town council for the Business Park. The Town developed a Major Subdivision Plan for 172-acre TBP, and in 2013 advertised a requested for proposals (RFP) for opportunity for development. The goal of the RFP is to disposition the Town owned TBP land in a way that will produce the highest quality development and best financial rate for the Town.

The historic function of agriculture as a major economic endeavor has eroded in the past few generations. However, although farmland is being sold for housing developments, some residents still earn an income from agricultural activities. The protection and encouragement of this component of the local economy is important.



*Main Road in north Tiverton is the location of many retail businesses*

### 3.2 A Vision for Tiverton

In order to achieve the desired vision for Tiverton, the Comprehensive Community Plan must serve as a guide to future growth and change within the town. The citizens of Tiverton are justifiably proud of their town, and protective of the physical and social qualities, which characterize it as unique. There is thoughtful discussion on how the community should develop. Development pressures throughout the town are expected to continue. The town should leverage these pressures in a manner consistent with the common good, guided by the perspective of this Comprehensive Community Plan.



*The staff at Tiverton Town Hall works hard for the citizens*

It is the intent of the Tiverton Comprehensive Community Plan to present a vision for the future of the town, which combines opportunities for growth and change with the need for preservation of the essential characteristics of the community. This is an integrated vision for the town, and does not substitute for the more specific Future Land Use Plan found in Chapter 5. The following is a description of major components of this plan:

- **Watershed Protection:** The protection of the sources of the town's water supply is a major concern. Protection areas should be carefully guarded around Stafford Pond and Nonquit Pond.
- **Environmentally Sensitive Areas:** Environmentally sensitive areas are protected by state and federal regulatory systems. The town should continue to monitor compliance as part of the subdivision review process.
- **Residential Growth:** Future residential growth, while providing for affordable housing opportunities throughout town, should consist of density compatible with the existing conditions, available infrastructure and varying housing styles in north Tiverton; and less dense and rural residential style developments in south Tiverton.



- Rural Residential/Agriculture: The rural character of south Tiverton should be preserved with low density residential, developed according to the principals of conservation design. Agricultural activities, which contribute to the economic base of this area, should be protected. The Farm, Forest and Open Space taxation program is an important tool to encourage the preservation of open space.
- Contextual Development: Compatible development which closely matches the existing historic and architectural fabric should be encouraged in all areas of town, particularly the areas of Stone Bridge, Nanaquaket, Puncateest/Fogland and Tiverton Four Corners. Techniques should be developed to encourage the preservation of existing buildings and to discourage demolition.
- Commercial Revitalization: Targeted areas zoned for commercial uses should be revitalized utilizing a comprehensive array of development tools including grant programs, educational programs and clear and predictable municipal permitting and licensing procedures. Development standards and guidelines for the public and private realm within commercial corridors should be expanded and implemented to ensure high quality development and redevelopment in conformance with the vision of this Comprehensive Community Plan.
- Employment: Economic development should focus on new opportunities for the work force to remain local. This effort would have a direct result in growth to the commercial tax base which is much needed, having a positive impact stabilizing the residential tax base.
- Industrial: Land zoned for industrial uses should be developed in a high quality manner with adequate infrastructure and support services. Industrial areas should be studied to determine the appropriate intensity of uses. Design guidelines should be implemented for areas of commercial and industrial development.
- Tourism: The Town has a long history as a destination for seasonal tourism. Local residents and visitors are able to take advantage of the natural open spaces and beaches. Continued economic development capitalizing and marketing these strengths should be encouraged.
- Scenic Shoreline: The natural features, beaches, cliffs and scenic vistas of the shorefront should be protected from over-development. Design standards to protect scenic values should be developed and included as a criterion for approval of developments. The harbor basin scenic corridor should be maintained.
- Harbor Management: The harbor management plan for the Tiverton Basin encourages the incorporation of water-dependent and related uses along waterfront land; supportive land-side regulations and available parking should be pursued at the same time as the necessary physical improvements to protect the basin.
- Sea Level Rise and Coastal Resiliency: The Town should take action to prepare for ongoing and predicted sea level rise and to ensure coastal resiliency. Innovative techniques should be considered for possible future implementation to protect the health and safety of coastal residents and the coastal ecological systems. Storm safety and recovery planning spearheaded by the Tiverton Emergency Management Agency and the RI Emergency Management Agency should be supported to ensure that Tiverton is storm ready.

- **Open Space Network:** A comprehensive open space plan should be maintained.
- **Visual Buffers:** The natural landscape along Route 24 should be preserved as a visual buffer from future development. A protective buffer should be established between residential and commercial uses.
- **Gateways:** Special design consideration should be given for transitional areas into the community. Five such "gateway" areas are identified - two in north Tiverton and three at the Route 24 exits. Secondary gateway areas exist at Bulgarmarsh Road from Westport and on the Main Road from Little Compton.



*New residential development in Tiverton must include affordable homes*

The following chapters elaborate on these concepts in the context of the goals, objectives and policies of the Tiverton Comprehensive Community Plan.