

## **2.0 PLANNING BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Development History**

Tiverton's identity is derived from the interplay of its history, unique natural features and growth from a farming and waterfront community to include a series of residential and commercial villages.

The Pocasset Indians settled the prime areas of Tiverton for farming and shell fishing along the Sakonnet River at Nanaquaket, Puncateest and Seapowet. Puncateest, Nanaquaket and Main Roads follow old Indian trails, and many later roads were named after farmsteads, natural features and commercial villages. A few roadways form historic crossroads such as Bliss Four Corners and Tiverton Four Corners, another small town quality that gives Tiverton an identity of its own. Along the shoreline, each inlet and peninsula has a place in history.

Stone Bridge derived its name from the old stone bridge that crossed the narrows, the remains of which now form a breakwater that protects the Sakonnet River Basin. Historic elements in this area are the Portsmouth commercial fishing docks which serve the local fleet of shell fishermen and commercial fisherman; marinas on Riverside Drive between the Sakonnet Bridge and Grinnell's Beach; and many historic homes. The Stone Bridge Inn, located on Main Road across from the bridge, once a hotel and theater, was demolished in 2000 and replaced with a small commercial plaza. The Newport and Old Colony Railroad Bridge, inoperative for many years, was dismantled as part of the Sakonnet River Bridge relocation project (see Circulation Chapter 8.0).

Tiverton developed as a series of small hamlets along the waterfront and in inland areas based on farming and fishing. Many captain's houses from whaling days are found here and a great architectural legacy of colonial and federal era homes and estates are found along Puncateest, Nanaquaket, Highland and Main Roads. Many roadways in the southern portion of the town are lined by stone fences from historic farms. The hamlets centered around churches adjoined by cemeteries, schoolhouses and commercial establishments such as taverns, general stores and mills. These villages included a woolen factory and a store at Eagleville; a stone church on Stone Church Road; a general store at Bliss Four Corners; a windmill and tavern at Tiverton Four Corners later followed by a church, a store, blacksmith, post office and library; and a saw mill and grist mill at Nonquit Pond. Later development grew up around major thoroughfares and the crossroads areas began to lose their distinctive character.

The spine of Tiverton has always been Main Road, which runs along a natural ridgeline that follows the coast from Fall River to Little Compton. These two ends of Tiverton share some of the characteristics of the adjacent towns. To the north, Tiverton is more urbanized, with a history associated with the Bourne and Eagleville Mills where housing was originally constructed for mill workers. Stafford Pond was part of a water system to power these and other mills in Fall River. Indeed, Fall River still retains water rights to the pond stemming from the mill era. Moving southward toward Little Compton, Tiverton becomes less developed and more rural in character.



*Tiverton has a great architectural heritage*

After World War II, north Tiverton began to suburbanize. Homes were constructed with Veterans Housing Administration financed mortgages, summer bungalows developed around Stafford Pond and at High Hill in south Tiverton. The 1970's era saw the conversion of farms into residential subdivisions and the construction of major public works, such as the Tiverton High School, Middle School and the Tiverton Police Station.

The early 1990's were a period of moderate residential growth with little change in the rural character and scenic beauty of Tiverton. Through a coalition of private fund-raising and a consortium of public and private agencies (RI Department of Environmental Management, Newport Water Authority, Audubon Society through the Federal Wildlife Protection Act, Nature Conservancy, Tiverton Land Trust and Tiverton Open Space Committee) the property was acquired as permanent open space, and is now known as Pardon Gray Preserve.

In the late 1990's, the town also took advantage of a state law allowing a portion of the real estate transfer tax to be set aside in a fund used to purchase open space, if the voters of the given town or city approve. By the time the new century began, the town's scenic and rural qualities, much of it related to its success in open space preservation, in combination with low land prices as compared to other Rhode Island communities, made it very attractive for residential development. Tiverton began to experience strong development pressure, which has continued through the time of the 2015 comprehensive plan update.

The waterfront continues to be important to the community. The fishing docks near the Nanaquaket Bridge and along Riverside Drive and Main Road are still home base to commercial fishermen and shell fishermen. The Stone Bridge Committee, made up of representatives from various groups and commissions, focuses on physical improvements to the area, including administration of a Rhode Island State Department of Transportation grant in 2004 to design

improvements to the aesthetics and functioning of Main Road and the waterfront from Riverside Drive south to Stone Bridge including the Stone Bridge abutment.



*Tiverton's active waterfront*

## **2.2 Regional and Local Context**

The Town of Tiverton is part of the East Bay area of Rhode Island. The town borders the farming community of Westport, Massachusetts to the east and bucolic Little Compton to its south. To the north lies the historic mill City of Fall River. Its western boundary is formed by the Sakonnet River and Mount Hope Bay. Across the Sakonnet River is Aquidneck Island, which exerts major economic influence on the region through its defense and tourism industries.

Route 24, with three interchanges in the northern portion of Tiverton, connects with Route 195 to the north and the Mount Hope Bridge to the west and Newport to the south. Tiverton is approximately 25 miles from the City of Providence, 15 miles from Newport, 25 miles from New Bedford to the east, and 55 miles from Boston to the north. Route 195 is a major highway that serves Cape Cod and southeastern Massachusetts.

Figure 2-1 shows the local and regional context of the town. This location, on the expanding edge of a major population center, has contributed to Tiverton's evolution from a community of farming and fishing, to a suburban residential area with regional recreational resources. Development within the town has been shaped by this regional location, with areas of denser development spreading from Fall River to the north. South Tiverton has been essentially rural in character, although residential subdivisions have begun to suburbanize this part of town.

The scenic rural character and beaches of southern Tiverton and Little Compton are a destination for day-trippers during the summer months. The attraction of south Tiverton and Little Compton as a recreation location is likely to continue. As a residential location, Tiverton offers many advantages. The natural beauty of its shoreline, its rural and historic character, the availability of land, the relative affordability of housing as compared to the Boston regional market, and the

proximity to employment centers within the region contribute to this attractiveness. By the late 1990’s and early 2000’s Tiverton was experiencing strong residential growth in the form of new subdivisions and major housing projects (see Land Use Chapter). The recession beginning in 2009 brought a halt to this development aided by the state’s tolling of all building permits. Tolling automatically extended the expiration date for state and local permits, allowing developers to retain valid approvals without commencing construction.

Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island benefited from great economic growth in the 1980's. Defense industries in Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport, and the military installations in Newport and Middletown, have contributed to past economic surges. The future regional economic picture, which would contribute to additional growth in Tiverton, is strong; the town is now part of a regional marketplace located on a major trading corridor. New York, Providence, Boston and Cape Cod are built out, and developers, particularly retail developers, are looking for places to expand. Tiverton has inexpensive and available land, and access by way of Route 24, to make it a regional attraction. These development pressures, along with the needs and desires of town residents, will determine the extent and type of future commercial and industrial development. The overly burdened residential tax base is in need of help and the town will continue to look for answers in the form of responsible commercial and industrial growth. In response, the town must have clear guidelines in the Comprehensive Community Plan, and in its accompanying zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations, to manage this growth so that the essential character of the town is not lost.

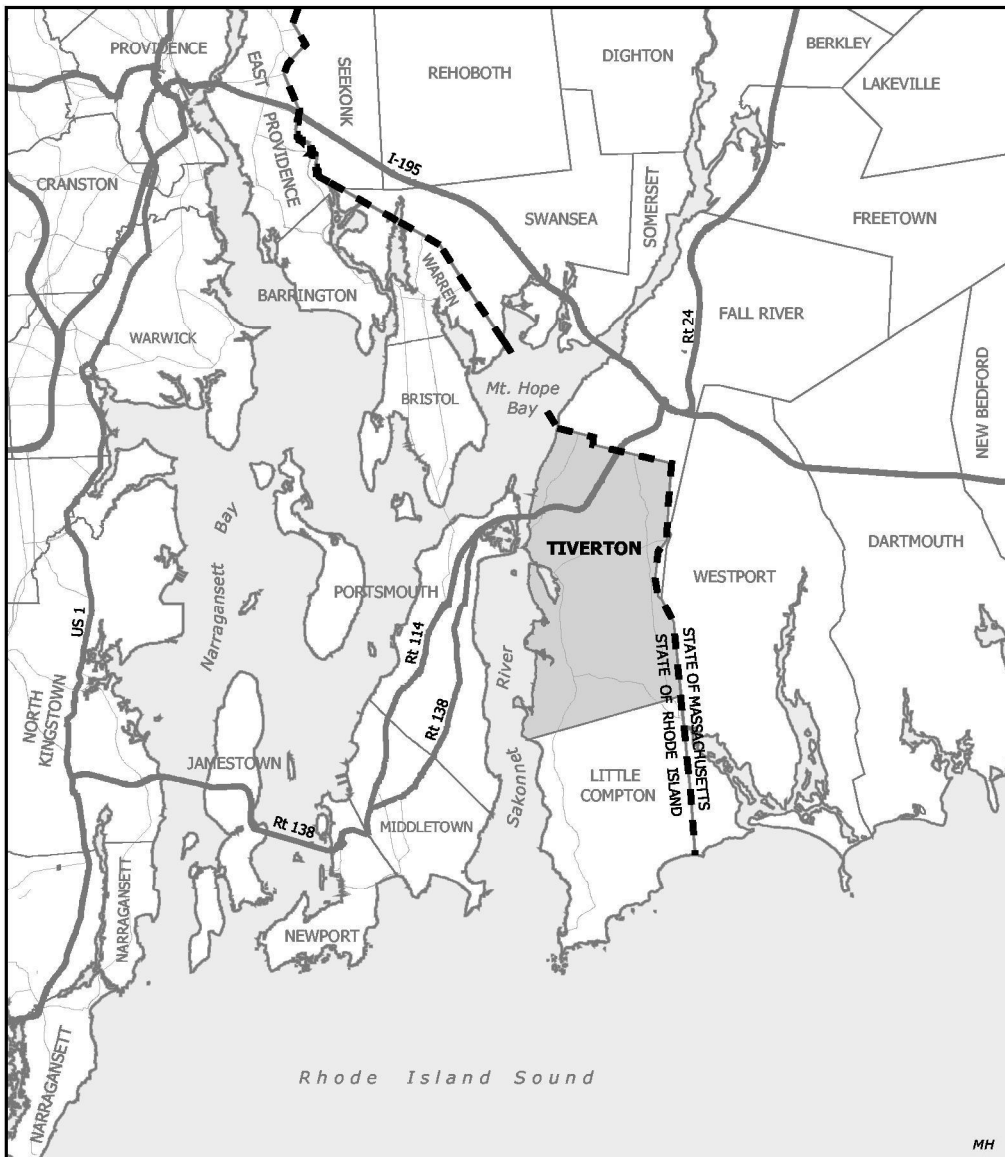
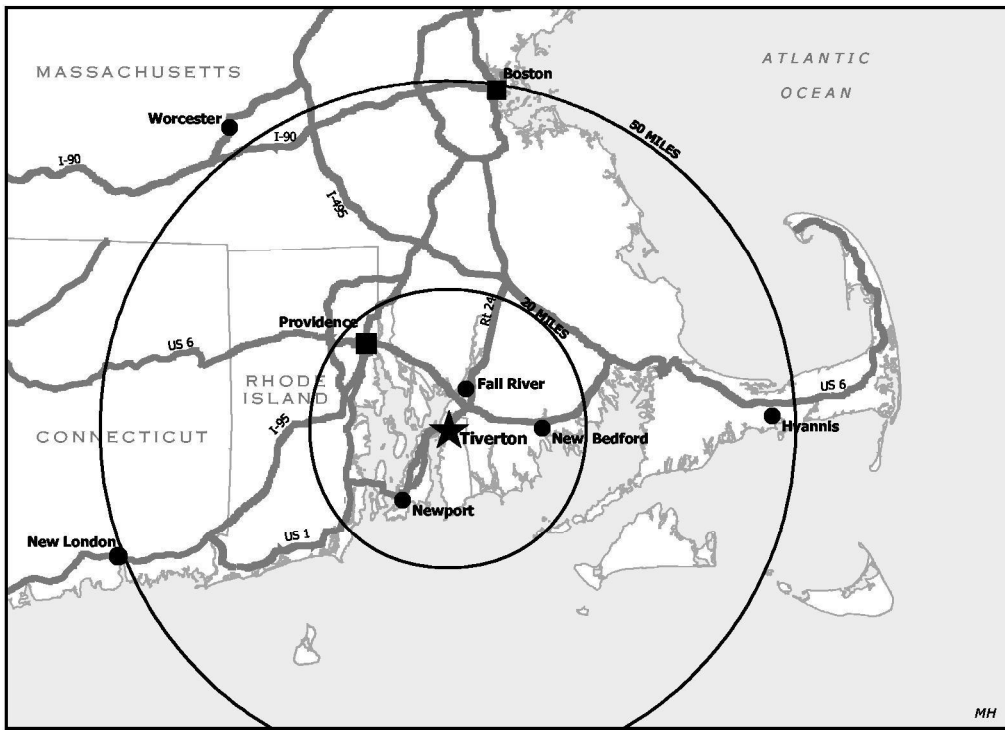
### 2.3 Population Trends and Characteristics

According to the 2010 Census, Tiverton's population is 15,780; this is an increase of 3.4 percent from the 2000 population of 15,260. As seen in Table 2-1, which shows the Census counts from 1960 to 2010, a period in which the population nearly doubled, Tiverton experienced its greatest population growth in the decade 1950-1960, when population increased by almost 70 percent. This was a trend typical of communities in the post-World War II years. In the decades after 1960, growth slowed, but it is expected to continue at steady levels through the next two decades.

**TABLE 2-1: Population Trends, 1950-2000**

<b>Tiverton</b>												
1950	1960	Change	1970	Change	1980	Change	1990	Change	2000	Change	2010	Change
5,659	9,461	+67%	12,559	+33%	13,526	+7.7%	14,321	+5.9%	15,260	+6.6%	15,780	+3.4%
<b>Newport County</b>												
1950	1960	Change	1970	Change	1980	Change	1990	Change	2000	Change	2010	Change
60,807	81,405	+34%	94,228	+16%	81,383	-13.6%	87,194	+7.1%	85,433	-2.0%	82,888	-3.0%

Source: U.S. Census



Source Data courtesy of MassGIS, RIGIS and MAGIC.

TIVERTON COMPREHENSIVE  
COMMUNITY PLAN  
**Figure 2-1**  
**REGIONAL and**  
**LOCAL CONTEXT**



Tiverton's growth since 1970 has been moderate compared to the dramatic changes experienced by its surrounding communities. Newport and Middletown have been impacted by large fluctuations in military personnel. Newport has consistently lost population since 1960, most significantly between 1960 and 1980 (nearly 18,000 persons, or 40% of its population). Middletown also experienced a significant loss between 1970 and 1980, which was offset somewhat by growth between 1980 and 1990, but like Newport, lost population in the most recent decade (back to 1980 levels). The loss of population in these two communities explains why there is a net loss in the county of 2% despite growth in the other towns. Like Tiverton, Middletown and Portsmouth, and to a lesser degree Little Compton, are experiencing residential subdivision activity; this means that countywide, while urban units are being lost, suburban units are being added.

### **Population Projections**

Population projections prepared by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program in 2013 up to the year 2040 predict that Tiverton's growth will continue slowly, only about 8 percent over a 30-year period. By 2015 the population is expected to grow to 15,833; and by 2030 it is expected to reach 16,699.

### **Age Characteristics**

According to the 2010 Census, the median age for Tiverton residents is 46.2 years. In 1990 it was calculated at 37.2 years, in 1980, 33.6 years, indicating a gradual aging trend. Between 2000 and 2010 Tiverton lost population in the age group between 15 and 34 years, the dominant age group is between 25 and 54 years, which makes up 44.6 percent of the total population.

About 19.4 percent of the total population is age 65 or older; in 2000, it was 16.5 percent. While this does not seem significant as an increase in overall percentage, the actual total number of persons in this age bracket increased by 22.7 percent between 1990 and 2000 as compared to the overall population increase of 6.6 percent. The number of school age children is also increasing, as a percentage as well as in total numbers. In 2000, the two cohorts making up the age group between 5 and 14 years represented 13.1 percent of the population; in 2010 they were 11.1 percent.

These figures show that if Tiverton did not experience the out-migration of young adults, it would expect a higher rate of overall population growth. Also worth noting is that over time the older residents become greater components of the population, which reflects the fact that not only are families smaller, but people are living longer. Because the growth in the oldest residents will likely continue to outpace that of the youngest, in the future there will be more focus on the housing and service needs of an older population.

### **Household Characteristics**

Declining household size is the second major national trend clearly reflected in Tiverton. The Town's average number of persons per household declined from 2.69 in 1990 to 2.51 in 2000, and declined again to 2.35 in 2010. In 2010, the Census counted 6,684 households, up from 6,077 in

2000. Note: the number of households varies from the number of household units counted in the Census (see Housing Chapter) because of a number of vacant and seasonal or recreational units.

**Income**

The 2008-2012 American Community Survey (U.S. Census) shows that Tiverton's median household income is \$68,706; while this compares favorably with the state median income of \$54,900, it is the lowest median income of all the communities in Newport County with the exception of the City of Newport (\$57,690). Little Compton, Portsmouth, Middletown and Jamestown all have somewhat higher median incomes, with Little Compton's being the highest at \$91,319. A discussion of median income and how it relates to the cost of housing is contained in the Housing Chapter.

The 2010 Census also shows an individual poverty rate of 6.3 percent (increased from the 4.5 percent level of 2000). This again compares favorably with the overall state poverty rate of 12.2 percent and Newport's, which is high at 10.2 percent, as well as Middletown's, which is 7.5 percent (Little Compton's is very low at 2.9%).

**TABLE 2-2:** Median Household Income, 1980 - 2000

<b>Town</b>	<b>1980 Median Income</b>	<b>1990 Median Income</b>	<b>2000 Median Income</b>	<b>2008-2012 Median Income</b>
Tiverton	\$19,678	\$36,170	\$49,977	\$68,706
Little Compton	\$21,130	\$41,187	\$55,368	\$91,319
Portsmouth	\$21,539	\$42,474	\$58,835	\$73,308
Rhode Island	\$19,440	\$32,181	\$42,090	\$54,900

Source: U.S. Census/ACS

**Educational Attainment**

About 86.1 percent of residents aged 25 years or older were high school graduated, as measured by the 2010 Census (up from 79.5 percent as measured by the 2000 Census), with 29.9 percent obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher (up from 24 percent as measured by the 2000 Census). This is roughly equivalent to the educational attainment measured for the state as a whole. (Statewide: 83.7% had graduated high school and 30.3% obtained a bachelor's degree or higher.) However, the other Newport County communities all have significantly higher rates of educational attainment, including Newport (90.3 percent with a high school degree and 48.2 percent with a college degree, respectively).

## Employment

According to the 2010 Census, Tiverton's labor force was comprised of 8,283 persons. The majority of Tiverton residents find their employment opportunities within the State of Rhode Island. In 2010, 68.4 % of Tiverton residents were employed within the State of Rhode Island, compared with 54.8 % in 2000. While the people of Tiverton seem generally content to work outside of town, there is interest in encouraging small businesses and commercial and industrial development to improve the tax base and create employment opportunities.

**TABLE 2-3: Employment Characteristics – 2010 Census**

Town of Tiverton	Percent
Agriculture	0.2%
Information Industry	2.0%
Transportation, Warehouse & Utilities	3.2%
Public Administration	4.1%
“Other” Industries	5.0%
Construction	6.0%
Arts & Entertainment	7.1%
Finance, Real Estate & Insurance	8.6%
Manufacturing	12.7%
Professional, Scientific & Waste	12.8%
Wholesale & Retail	14.5%
Education, Health & Social Services	23.8%