

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Cumberland is a diverse community located in the northeast corner of Rhode Island, approximately 28.4 square miles in area with a population of over 30,000 people. The Town has a mixed development pattern with urban development dominating the southern portion of the community along its border with Central Falls, Lincoln, and Massachusetts; suburban development in the central and northwest region, and rural development in the northeast. The Town has experienced rapid growth in residential development in the past decades; it is clear that this trend will continue to use up the Town's open lands and diminish its unique character if unchecked. Easy access to State highways makes Cumberland a desirable location for growth; this growth has exceeded former projections. Demand for new housing remains strong, with indications that it will increase. The Town is faced with the difficult challenge of continuing to provide municipal services to a rapidly expanding residential population while maintaining a reasonable tax rate and preserving its unique characteristics and open space.

Cumberland does not possess an adequate tax base for tax revenue from the commercial and industrial sector to offset continued rapid growth in the residential sector. It is not possible for the commercial and industrial sectors to keep pace with the broadening residential sector, nor does the community wish to become a regional shopping or manufacturing center which, in turn, have their own traffic and environmental issues. The increase in population has put tremendous pressure on the Town's ability to provide services to its residents. Moreover, this trend is showing no signs of abating, in part, due to an expanding economy and high demand for housing in the Northeast. As the Town moves towards build-out, increased demand for services for new Town residents will result.

Like all Rhode Island communities, the Town of Cumberland adopted a Comprehensive Plan. Among the many goals and policies that will guide the Town into this new century are a series of recommendations that address growth and development in the Town. *The Cumberland Comprehensive Community Plan 1991-2010, as updated in 2003*, recognizes growth management as a major issue facing the Town. Development of Cumberland's vacant land at current rates is a threat to the environment, rural character, safety, appearance and accessibility of residential areas.

The Town's Comprehensive Plan provides ample justification to pursue growth controls and management in several of its elements. The Town's primary goals are to promote the general health, safety and welfare of its current and future residents. The Town also strives to maintain a high level of educational and municipal services. But the current pace and character of development may limit the Town's choices in charting its own destiny. New regulations and vigilant application of the Town's existing regulations, as articulated in this Plan, must be implemented to meet the needs of the entire community.

#### **A. SCOPE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The Comprehensive Plan examines the physical, cultural, social, and economic characteristics of a community. It determines how these factors, individually and in combination with each other, will influence the future development of the community. The Plan then formulates strategies consistent with the development capacities of the community and the desires of its residents.

The scope of this Plan is comprehensive in three ways. First, it is a plan for the entire Town: providing broad recommendations for the Town as whole, as well as specific recommendations for particular areas within the Town. Second, it makes recommendations for all major policy areas, including land use, transportation, town facilities, etc. Third, it attempts to integrate all of the spatial and policy aspects of future development into a comprehensive development program.

This Plan addresses all parts of the town, both developed and undeveloped. Because of anticipated pressure for development of presently undeveloped lands, there is more emphasis on recommendations for undeveloped areas. The first step to implementation of the Plan will be to revise the Zoning Ordinance to bring it in line with the recommendations of the Plan.

Finally, because the timing and pattern of growth in the community are affected by a variety of dynamic factors, many of which are beyond community control, periodic updating and review of the Plan will be required.

## **B. PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

This Plan updates the 1991 Plan (which, in turn updated the 1966 Plan). Rather than provide revisions in the style of an appendix, this Plan will replace the 1991 Plan. The revisions are so extensive, ranging from inclusion of the year 2000 census data and other newly gathered information, to the reformulation of goals and objectives to reformatting of the document for greater clarity, that the Plan would be too complicated if presented in any other manner. Cumberland's 2003 Comprehensive Plan relies heavily on the growth management program initiated in 2000 and which continues through till today. The Plan development was a dynamic process of data collection, analysis of issues, formulation of goals and policies, and synthesis of recommendations leading to the articulation of the goals. This process was interactive in the sense that it was dependant on the direct involvement of the community through a program of citizen and community participation. While the 1991 plan used a written survey to determine citizen's needs, the 2003 Plan depended more on workshops and interviews. Differences and similarities between citizen's needs in 1991 and 2003 are identified throughout the text as appropriate.

## **C. PLAN FORMAT**

An inventory of existing conditions and resources furnishes the starting point for evaluating Cumberland's options for the future. Each element begins with such an inventory. Also contained in each element is how Cumberland has changed since 1991.

The **Findings** section represents a summary of the research, data collection and analysis for the eight functional elements. The **Goals** are broad statements which represent desired future conditions. Each goal is followed by a set of policies. **Policies** are statements of position which are designed to serve as guides for achieving specific goals. The **Actions** are the methods to be undertaken by the Town to implement the goals and policies. Rather than reprint the findings, goals and recommendations in this Executive Summary, as the 1991 Plan did, the goals and recommendations are offered in an easy to read "Implementation" section at the end of this Plan, as well as at the end of every element.

Ideally, the Implementation section can be used as a checklist by which to measure progress. Citizens at the 2003 public workshops wanted assurance that their suggestions

would be considered and that there be more accountability regarding the Town's stated goals. Regularly scheduled community workshops during which the implementation section is reviewed and discussed may be what is needed to communicate the administration's progress and offer citizens an opportunity to participate in dictating course corrections.

#### **D. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Town of Cumberland wishes to thank all those who assisted in the development of the Comprehensive Plan. The input of those persons who assisted in the development of the original 1991 Plan is acknowledged, their names can be found in the text of this document. The Town also wishes to thank those who assisted in, or provided information for, this update of the Comprehensive Plan:

- David Balfour – Chairman, Historic District Commission.
- Peter Bouchard – Valley Affordable Housing
- Alan Brodd- Director, Department of Public Works
- Joseph Bucci- RI Department of Transportation
- Ernest Cimino – Chief, Valley Falls Fire Department
- Alice Clemente, Blackstone River Watershed Council
- David Coutu – Chair, Cumberland Planning Board
- Dave Doyle, RI Department of Transportation
- Rick Enser – RI Department of Environmental Management
- Neal Fiorio – Superintendent, Cumberland Water Department
- Lori Gagnon – Director, Cumberland Senior Center
- Robert Garon – Chief, Cumberland Fire Department
- George Gifford - Gifford Design Group
- Rene Gendreau – Chief, North Cumberland Fire Department
- Michelle Godin - New England Economic Development Services, Inc.
- Julie Guerin - Cumberland Conservation Commission
- Craig Letourneau – Director, Cumberland Recreation Department
- Janet Levesque – Director, Cumberland Library
- Jon McCoy – Cumberland Land Trust, Inc.
- Joseph Nasif – Superintendent, Cumberland School Department

- Roger Pierce, Cumberland Building Official
- Kevin Ruddock, The Nature Conservancy
- Derwent Riding, RI Statewide Planning Program
- Karen Saucier, Cumberland Land Trust Inc.
- Anthony Silva - Chief, Cumberland Police Department
- George Stansfield – Officer, Cumberland Police Department
- Richard Susi – Chief, Cumberland Hill Fire Department
- Katherine Tripani – RI Statewide Planning Program
- Bruce Vild - RI Statewide Planning Program
- Kathleen Wainwright – The Nature Conservancy

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