

# INTRODUCTION

The 2015 update is the Town's official Comprehensive Community Plan, completed as required by the RI Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act. The 2015 update puts forward new goals, objectives and actions for the next 10 years. Each section of the plan dealing with a particular element contains a description of existing conditions, a discussion of issues and opportunities identified using a 20-year planning horizon, and general goals, objectives and policies to guide the Town's future actions.

The document is intended to be a fully integrated plan, not one that can be pulled apart one item at a time.

With adoption by the Town Council, the Barrington Comprehensive Community Plan is the official policy document of the Town, having both policy and regulatory implications.

## Plan Structure

This Introduction section includes a brief description of the history of Barrington and the overarching issues the community faces. It is followed by nine elements, which describe specific background, issues, goals, objectives, policies, and actions for each of the topics, consistent with the Statewide Planning Office's Comprehensive Plan guidance.

These elements are:

- Housing & Neighborhoods
- Economic Development
- Circulation
- Community Services & Facilities
- Natural & Cultural Resources

- Outdoor Recreation
- Energy
- Natural Hazards
- Land Use

Energy and Natural Hazards are new elements, required under 2011 revisions to the State Comprehensive and Land Use Act. By complying with the requirements of the amended Comprehensive Plan Act, State approval of this Plan will be valid for 10 years.

The final section of this document, the Implementation Plan, prioritizes, identifies resources, and assigns responsibility for the implementation of each action. The intent is to provide a roadmap for tracking progress toward achieving the goals of the plan. Implementation will require action by the Town Council, Planning Board, other boards and commissions, and Town departments, as well as the State and local organizations. This will include changes in Barrington's zoning and subdivision ordinances, the development of new procedures and regulations, revisions to capital planning priorities, and the undertaking of additional plans and studies.

The development of the Comprehensive Plan is only the first step in undertaking changes in Barrington that will prepare it for the future in a way that both provides for its citizens and protects its important resources. Constant attention will need to be given to each of the implementation steps if that future is to be achieved. The Planning Board recommends that the Town conduct a review of the Implementation Plan on an annual basis to assess its progress and prioritize resources for each year.

## Major Themes

Because many issues the facing the Town of Barrington cut across the specific elements described above, the Planning Board has adopted the following “Major Themes” as a guide for the development of the 2015 update and as a way to prioritize individual goals, policies, and actions. These themes are:

-  *Meet the needs of an aging population*
-  *Promote a vibrant Village Center and diverse economy*
-  *Strengthen connectivity within town*
-  *Embrace a cleaner, greener future*
-  *Conserve and protect the special qualities of Barrington's neighborhoods*
-  *Achieve resilience in the face of a changing environment*

These themes can help the Town focus on its broader goals as it balances competing needs and confronts emerging pressures. In a town that is approaching build-out, addressing State-mandated affordable housing goals, promoting economic development, adding parks and town facilities, protecting environmentally sensitive areas, and minimizing the effect of rising energy costs is incredibly difficult.

The updated plan and the themes described above are intended to provide guidance to officials who are dealing with these issues. Our hope is for each decision to be made with an eye toward the future and its effect on the long-term objectives of the Town.

## PROCESS

The Planning Board, together with the Office of the Town Planner, worked for more than a year to develop the 2015 Comprehensive Community Plan. The Board formed subcommittees to focus on specific elements, meet with stakeholders and draft initial recommendations forwarded to the full board. As the Board continued to refine the plan, drafts were made available on the Town website and at Town Hall and the Library.

In September 2014, the Planning Board held community workshops held at sites throughout town: at Hampden Meadows School, Atria Bay Spring Assisted Living and Nayatt School. Everyone in Town was invited to attend, with postcard invitations mailed to every address in Barrington. Overall, more than 60 people attended.

At the workshops, the Planning Board presented an overview of the draft Plan, including key issues, major themes and the goals, objectives, policies and actions. Those in attendance were asked to “vote” on the draft goals and actions using yellow dots for priorities, and red for items that people felt should not be in the plan (see photo below).

To complete the final plan, the Board factored in input from the public as well as comments from the State and local departments, boards and commissions. On March 25, 2015, the Town Council and the Planning Board held a hearing on the 2015 Comprehensive Community Plan. The plan was adopted by the Council on a 3-2 vote, and by the Planning Board on a 7-0 vote.





## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF BARRINGTON

**B**arrington today is the result of hundreds of years of human activity that made use of its lands, waters and natural resources. At the onset of European colonization in the mid-seventeenth century, the town's two peninsulas were within Sowams, the homelands of Massasoit, Chief Sachem of the Wampanoag Tribe. The precise location of Massasoit's village has not been determined, although it most likely was in either Barrington or Warren. The Wampanoag Indians used the lands of Barrington for hunting, fishing and cultivating crops. The same physical resources that supported the Wampanoags had also attracted their ancestors. Archaeological discoveries within Barrington have demonstrated that Native Americans were active here four to ten thousand years before the present.

European colonization in the second half of the seventeenth century initiated a decline in

Native American fortunes. By 1667, enough English settlers from the Plymouth and Massachusetts colonies were drawn to the fertile Sowams lands to incorporate the Town of Swansea. Tensions between the English colonists and Native Americans produced by this English encroachment broke into the open hostilities of King Philip's War here in 1675. By the following year the Wampanoags' hold on their native land was broken, and the colonists began to rebuild their largely destroyed settlement.

From these colonial origins, a farming society developed in the eighteenth century and prospered into the nineteenth century. In this agricultural period of development, the lands of Barrington were parceled into pasture, cropland and homesteads with a simple network of roads linking farmers to their holdings and to neighboring communities.

*Photos (clockwise from top left) Mathewson House (ca. 1850), RI Lace Works (1920, 1938; demolished); West Barrington—view from Bullock's Cove (postcard, ca. 1909)*

*Source: "Historic and Architectural Resources of Barrington, RI," RI Historical Preservation Commission, 1993.*

Barrington's equivalent of a town center developed in the eighteenth century around the Congregational Church still in place along the north end of County Road. At the junction of the Barrington and Warren Rivers, a second water-oriented settlement developed around a number of shipyards and traders' wharves and warehouses. By the early nineteenth century these maritime activities had moved across the river to Warren, and Barrington's history as a seaport was over.

As industrialization transformed Rhode Island in the nineteenth century, Barrington was affected, although not in a typical way. Lacking suitable water-power sites or a working waterfront, the town was largely bypassed in the extensive development of water and steam-powered factories. When industry did arrive, it was in 1840 in the form of brick manufacturing. In the process of working clay beds in the Nayatt area, the brick manufacturers transformed Mouscochuck Creek into a barge canal and created the clay pits, now flooded and known as Brickyard Pond and Echo Lake. This industry which persisted until the 1930's, also transformed the town's social landscape; large numbers of Italian immigrants joined the workforce in the late nineteenth century, and remained to develop their own neighborhoods along Maple Avenue and Middle Highway.

A second pivotal event occurred in the mid nineteenth century with the construction of the Providence, Warren and Bristol Railroad across town in 1855. At a time when Providence was becoming the region's commercial, financial and industrial center, the railroad brought Barrington within the City's sphere and initiated the trend of suburban residential development which was to dominate the town's future. A new neighborhood began to develop along the rail line at Drownville in West Barrington, and a new town center emerged where the railroad crossed County Road. At the same time, the

town began to draw the attention of those eager for relief from the City. At Nayatt Point resort hotels appeared while both vacation and year-round homes spread along the extensive shore-front. These developments included both expensive building in prime locations, as well as more modest houses where conditions allowed.

The patterns established in the second half of the nineteenth century guided Barrington's growth into the twentieth century. The railroad also promoted the growth of a small industrial district in Bay Spring, where factories engaged in textile finishing and lace-making. The automobile, which first supplemented and then replaced the railroad as a means of transportation between Barrington and Providence, induced a broader pattern of development across the town. The post-World War II era saw Barrington as a favored suburb absorbing still more residential development.

Today, this trend has reached a climax of sorts. While the once-predominant rural flavor is still apparent, Barrington's agricultural character has greatly diminished in the recent past and recreational boating now dominates over commercial fishing activities on the waterfront. The town's industry, which was always limited, has gradually dwindled to its present minor status. Barrington is most readily identified as a commuter suburb typified by its extensive residential neighborhoods, yet more than 300 years of history have indelibly stamped the town's character and contribute powerfully to its distinctive and attractive appearance.

*-Richard Greenwood, 1992*

*Rick Greenwood, who lived on Maple Avenue, served on the Barrington Technical Review Committee from 1994 through 2014. With his deep knowledge of history and fair, thoughtful approach to reviewing new development, Rick's contributions to the Town were immeasurable. He made Barrington a better place.*