

The goals and policies that will govern the city or town's future growth and development (physical, social and economic) must cover all functional elements of the plan. If located within each plan element, the goals and policies must be identified to demonstrate the existence of this plan element.

The goals and policies must cover the entire plan period and may be designated as "short range" and "long range." The descriptive material must demonstrate the consistency of such goals and policies with the Act and with applicable elements of the State Guide Plan.

2. Land Use Plan Element - Element 2

Act Citation:

"Designates the proposed general distribution and general location along with the inter-relationship of land use for residential, commercial, industrial, open space, recreational, community facilities and other categories of public and private uses of land. The Land Use Element is based upon the other elements contained in Section 45-22.2-6 and it shall relate the proposed standards of population density to the capacity of the land and available or planned facilities and services. A land use plan map, illustrating the future strategy and land use policy of the municipality as defined by the comprehensive plan, is required. The land use plan must contain an analysis of the inconsistency of existing zoning districts, if any, with the land use plan. The land use plan should specify the process by which the zoning ordinance and zoning map shall be amended to conform to the comprehensive plan."

Consistency with:

- State Guide Plan Element 121 - Land Use 2010: State Land Use Policies and Plan. While this is the principal Guide Plan element covering the use of land, the interrelationship of land use with other elements makes it essential that consistency be checked and established with all other applicable State Guide Plan elements and with all other elements of the local plan.
- Adjacent municipalities to assure coordinated treatment of boundary areas and other shared regional factors and influences
- Goals (1), (3), (4), (5), (6) and (9) of the Act
- All regulatory systems of federal and state governments that affect or control the use of or treatment of land areas, water bodies, wetlands, aquifers, coastal resources and other special areas

Sources:

- State Guide Plan Overview, State Guide Plan Element 010; Element 121- Land Use 2010: State Land Use Policies and Plan; and other Guide Plan elements
- RIGIS data and maps
- Local research, studies and field surveys of land use, demographics, development trends, municipal facilities, and permit and other records
- Local zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and other local land use controls
- Guides on erosion, sediment control and stormwater management
- Rhode Island Soil Survey
- State agencies, including:

Coastal Resources Management Council
Department of Administration - Statewide Planning Program
Economic Development Corporation
Department of Environmental Management
Department of Transportation - Planning Division
Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation
Resource Recovery Corporation
Water Resources Board

Other agencies, including:

Public and private utilities that supply water, electric power, natural gas and communications services or are concerned with solid or liquid waste disposal

Discussion:

The Land Use Plan is the principal element of any local comprehensive plan. Since consideration of the use and treatment of land crosses the boundary into the purview of other required elements, it is essential that this element be formulated in coordination with the other elements, sharing goals, policies and certain implementation steps.

As a minimum, the Land Use Plan must consider the allocation of land for residence, business, industry, municipal facilities, public and private recreation, major institutional facilities, mixed uses, open space and natural and fragile areas. Optimum intensities and standards of development must be established for each use classification and location, based upon current development; natural land characteristics; and projected municipal, regional and state services and facilities.

Allocations of land use must consider impacts on surface and groundwater resources, wetlands, coastal features, and other sensitive and fragile natural resources. Judgments must be made on the ability of various existing and new land use controls to properly protect these natural resources.

The characteristics, trends and projections of population and employment will be essential input to the allocation of land areas for use. The plan may utilize Division of Planning projections or its own but, in the latter case, the derivation of these must be explained. The plan should show how the projections have been used to determine amounts of land needed for residential, industrial, and other purposes. These quantitative relationships carry over to other elements of the plan in that certain facilities and services (utilities, transportation, recreation areas, etc.) are needed to support the land allocated to each use.

Care must be taken to consider regional influences and adjacent community development in allocating land areas for use.

The ability of the regional transportation network to provide for the movement of persons and goods will exert an influence on the allocation of land for use.

Major state and federal lands, such as wildlife refuges, water supply resource areas, forest preserves, airports, military facilities and others, must be included in the local plan. Their basic use must be described, and the plan must set forth how such areas are to be accommodated and how surrounding land uses are to be made as compatible as possible. Any locally proposed changes in the treatment of such areas must be explained.

The Land Use Plan must be supplemented by a map that graphically portrays the policy of the city or town with regard to the planned treatment and use of land. While this plan map need not be at a scale of accuracy that will identify individual land parcels, it must be of sufficient scale and accuracy to allow for the following:

- A visual determination of the policies and goals of the municipality for the future use and intensity of development of all land and water bodies within its jurisdiction.
- A determination of the consistency of the Land Use Plan with the State Guide Plan.
- A determination of the consistency of the Land Use Plan with the current zoning ordinance and map, and use as a basis for the revision or replacement of inconsistent zoning requirements, subdivision regulations and other land use controls.

It is expected that this land use plan map will show features from other comprehensive plan elements such as open space, recreation, economic development, community facilities, natural areas and others that project the allocation of land or special treatment.

A useful feature of the Land Use Plan would be a brief analysis of the general effect on the municipality to be brought about by the implementation of this plan element.

Recognizing that the regulation of the use and development of land is primarily a municipal function granted by enabling legislation, the Act sets forth an eighteen-month period after plan adoption for zoning compliance with the plan. The Act specifically requires that all land use plan elements contain an analysis of inconsistencies between the plan and the existing zoning ordinance and map. The analysis must consider zoning district boundaries and the standards and use requirements for these districts compared to land use goals and policies. The Act also requires that the municipality include within this element an outline and schedule of the process that it contemplates to amend or replace its zoning ordinance and map to achieve consistency with its land use goals and policies. Since the zoning ordinance and map are the principal instruments of implementation for local and state land use policy, it is important to provide an accurate and valid comparative analysis and schedule for zoning action.

GROWTH CENTERS

State Guide Plan Element 121: Land Use 2010 encourages *“development of new growth centers or villages that incorporate the concepts of this land use plan. Those concepts include: encouraging compact, mixed-use development; preserving open space; conserving natural resources; fitting the type of development to the capability of the land to support development and to the availability of infrastructure; and promoting a sense of community.”*

More recently, *A Report of the Governor’s Growth Planning Council – Growth Centers: Recommendations for Encouraging Growth and Investment in Economically and Environmentally Sound Locations in Rhode Island* (<http://www.planning.ri.gov/gpc/pdf/gpc.pdf>.) defined these areas as *“dynamic and efficient centers for development that have a core of commercial and community services, residential development, and natural and built landmarks and boundaries that provide a sense of place.”* The report outlines a process where communities may volunteer to identify and the state approves growth centers. Communities benefit by identifying where they want growth to occur and, at the same time, directing growth away from areas where it should not be encouraged. The state and other levels of government benefit by identifying areas where they can best leverage investment of limited resources.

It is intended that state recognition of local growth centers will facilitate better access to the resources and technical assistance necessary to implement this land use option. Communities are encouraged, as an option, to identify and designate growth centers in their land use elements that are consistent with the above definition and, as applicable to the selected approach, to the following criteria.

1. Strengthen and encourage growth in existing centers

Criteria:

The preferred locations for growth centers are areas with existing infrastructure and public services.

"Infrastructure" is defined here as adequate public water service, public sewerage system or wastewater management district, and transportation facilities and/or services.

Infill projects, reuse of brownfields sites, and conversion of underutilized structures have priority over greenfields sites.

2. Scale new infrastructure to support compact growth

Criteria:

Planned infrastructure is sized to support designated compact growth, not a sprawl development pattern.

New growth centers have adequate infrastructure either in place, or planned for a time-frame to coincide with development of the new center, as documented in the Facilities and Services Element of the local Comprehensive Plan.

Compact design minimizes the amount of land consumed on a per capita, per dwelling, and per job basis.

3. Include mixed land uses

Criteria:

Centers include a mix of housing, significant employment opportunities, schools, commercial and industrial uses, and civic/public spaces and buildings.

Single-use developments, such as industrial parks, are appropriate within growth centers if they represent one component of a mix of land uses within that center.

Community comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances allow a mix of land uses to coexist within a center.

4. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

Criteria:

Residential housing includes a range of housing opportunities, including single-family and multiple-household units for purchase or rental, and should cover a range of prices to address a full spectrum of income levels.

Community comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances allow and encourage a mix of housing types in centers.

5. Protect and enhance critical environmental resources

Criteria:

The center avoids converting working lands, such as prime farmland and forestland, into development.

The center avoids fragmenting existing greenspace, especially natural habitats and forests. Centers provide community green spaces designed for multiple uses (such as parks, sports fields, walking, biking, greenways, and water sports), and contribute to creating community/statewide, inter-connected greenspace/greenway networks wherever possible.

The center protects the local watershed and/or does not negatively impact critical and/or resource areas

Critical Resource areas are defined as Public water supply watersheds; Groundwater aquifers; Wellhead Protection Areas; Rare/unique habitat; High value recreational waters; Critical habitat for economically and/or ecologically valuable species.

The center does not negatively impact unique cultural resource areas.

Unique resource areas are defined as scenic vistas; archeological/historic sites; unfragmented forestland.

6. Provide a variety of transportation choices

Criteria:

Locations with convenient access to mass transit (existing or planned) are preferred. Centers are encouraged to include public transit hubs/stations to connect local routes.

Center layout, density, and design should encourage public transit, walking, and biking over automobile use for local trips

Automobile traffic is accommodated by inter-connected street patterns providing multiple routes to minimize congestion.

7. Promote community design that contributes to a sense of place

Criteria:

Community design within the centers encourages interactions among people, facilitate vibrant and safe street life, and maximize a strong sense of local community in harmony with the natural setting.

The streets have been designed with sidewalks and walkways, appropriate lighting, and connectedness, to promote easy and safe walking.

The center has committed to using older and historic buildings.

Centers exhibit several or all of the characteristics of walkable communities: physical indicators of where the neighborhood begins and ends, relatively narrow streets with sidewalks, residential buildings in close proximity to commercial destinations, non-residential buildings with many windows and doors set close to the street, building entrances accessible to sidewalks, on-street parking, trees and/or architectural elements that protect pedestrians from weather, use of traffic calming devices including right-angled street corners, grid street pattern with connectivity to adjoining neighborhoods, and streetscapes that include amenities such as benches, good lighting, informative signage, and plantings.

8. Encourage growth in appropriately scaled centers

Criteria:

While the configuration of an identified growth center will vary from community to community, in accordance with community character and type of center desired by the municipality, growth centers should be small enough to be comfortably walked. Except in the state's five historic urban core communities¹, municipally-identified growth centers should be no larger than an area with an approximately ¼ to ½ mile radius from its center to its edge in all directions (approximately ½ square mile to maximum of 1 square mile area).

Local governments can identify growth centers through the existing comprehensive planning process, either through the regularly-scheduled five-year comprehensive plan update, or through a comprehensive plan amendment. In order to be considered for state level approval, the identification by a local government of a growth center within its jurisdiction should include updates or amendments of all applicable elements of the community's comprehensive plan needed to incorporate the growth center as part of the plan and ensure internal consistency of all elements with regard to the addition of the growth center. The growth center amendment must include:

- A map depicting the proposed growth center boundaries in relation to the municipal jurisdiction, and showing existing development and land uses in the proposed growth center;

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¹ Providence, Woonsocket, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Newport.

- A narrative section describing the characteristics of the proposed growth center, and how the proposal fits the definitions and meets the criteria of growth centers enumerated above;
- A vision statement for the proposed growth center;
- Proposed amendments of applicable elements of the community's comprehensive plan and future land use map, including all necessary revisions to Plan to ensure internal consistency.;
- Proposed amendment of the implementation element of the comprehensive plan that describes a list of action steps the local government proposes to take to direct development, redevelopment and/or other investments to the proposed growth center. Such steps could include waiver of local license and permit fees for development within the growth center, expedited local government permitting, prioritization of local infrastructure spending within the growth center, adoption of zoning overlays or "smart growth" codes and ordinances to promote growth in targeted areas;
- A statement discussing whether and how the implementation of the proposed growth center will impact development and investment patterns outside of the growth center;

Whether submitted as a comprehensive plan amendment or as part of a five-year plan update, the proposed growth center will be reviewed by the Statewide Planning Program in conjunction with other agencies as appropriate, and will be reviewed and acted on in accordance with the comprehensive plan regulations by the Director of the Department of Administration. This review process will ensure that the identified growth area is consistent with existing statutes and policies and with the State Guide Plan, and that the proposed growth center is consistent with the definition and criteria described above. Upon acceptance of a proposed growth center by the Director as an amendment to the local comprehensive plan, the municipality may then petition the Governor's Growth Planning Council for designation as a state growth center. If determined that the proposed growth center is not consistent with the applicable criteria described above but is consistent with the State Guide Plan the amendment may be accepted by the Director but shall not be considered by the Growth Planning Council.

Upon designation by the Growth Planning Council, the Council will cause those state agencies identified as having resources and/or technical assistance necessary for the successful implementation of the growth center concept to meet with the appropriate local officials. The Growth Planning Council shall monitor state agency response to the needs of the growth center.