



*a plan for conservation and development*



December 2009  
Adopted February 8, 2010

TOWN OF **Westerly**  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



# Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

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*The Westerly Comprehensive Plan*

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## 1.0 *Introduction*

Welcome to the Comprehensive Plan for the town of Westerly. First and foremost, the Plan strives to achieve an appropriate balance between conservation and development. Managing growth and protecting cultural and natural resources are complex and delicate tasks; this Plan is intended to help ensure both are accomplished in a way that enhances the quality of life for all the citizens of Westerly. It includes policies, goals and objectives, and specific actions necessary for the successful implementation of the Plan itself. The Plan was approved by the Planning Board following its public hearing on January 19, 2010 and adopted by the Town Council following its public hearing on February 8, 2010. With this local approval and adoption, the Plan becomes an official statement of Westerly's future direction and the guiding document for all future land-use decisions. After approval by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, state agency activities and projects are also required to be consistent with the local plans that have received state approval.

### 1.1 *Vision*

This Comprehensive Plan envisions Westerly as a community that respects its history and traditions, values conservation and preservation, and strives for a prosperous future for its citizens and businesses. The vision statement crafted for this Plan is as follows:

*The vision for the town of Westerly is to preserve Westerly's quality of life for all generations as a safe and friendly community with a distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources, and fiscally-sound government.*

The Comprehensive Plan is the lens through which all future proposals and initiatives – whether for conservation, development, or infrastructure uses – should be viewed. Each proposal or initiative should be evaluated based on whether it will advance the vision of the future as expressed in the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan itself is not a rigid document that cannot be changed. It must be evaluated on an on-going basis to ensure it meets changing expectations, attitudes or conditions that may develop over time in the community. The need for regular and disciplined evaluation of the progress and appropriateness of the Plan cannot be over-emphasized and is integral to realizing the vision for the future of Westerly.

The future vision for the town of Westerly is entirely consistent with *Land Use 2025: Rhode Island Land Use Policies and Plan* which articulates a robust vision for the state's future that includes a strong economy, a healthy environment and a rich quality of life. *Land Use 2025* is the guide to all planning and development in the state of Rhode Island.



## ***1.2 Authority and Purpose of the Plan***

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act of 1988 requires each community in the state to adopt and maintain a comprehensive community plan that provides the basis for rational decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality. According to RIGL §45-22.2-5, Rhode Island cities and towns must “plan for future land use which relates development to land capability, protects our natural resources, promotes a balance of housing choices, encourages economic development, preserves and protects our open space, recreational, historic and cultural resources, and provides for orderly provision of facilities and services.” RIGL §45-22.2-6 states this plan is to be “a definition of goals and policies relative to the distribution of future land uses, both public and private, and it should form the basis for land use decisions to guide the overall physical, economic, and social development of the municipality.”

This Comprehensive Plan for the town of Westerly is its first comprehensive plan since the previous plan was adopted by the Town Council on January 13, 1992. On November 28, 2005 the Town Council appointed a broad-based Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee to complete a two-phase process consisting of a required update to the then-existing plan and development of a new plan for the future. The Comprehensive Plan Update to the 1992 Plan was completed by the committee during calendar year 2006; approved by the Westerly Planning Board on December 19, 2006; adopted by the Westerly Town Council on January 29, 2007; and submitted to Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program in February 2007. After completion of several revisions requested by Statewide Planning, the Comprehensive Plan Update was approved in March 2009.

In June 2007, the committee selected planning consultant peter j. smith & company of Buffalo, New York to assist in the development of a new comprehensive plan for Westerly. Developmental work on the new plan, including a broad community outreach program, continued from the latter part of 2007 to the latter part of 2009, culminating in this recommended Comprehensive Plan for the town of Westerly.

Under the provisions of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, each city or town must conform its zoning ordinance and map to its comprehensive plan within 18 months of plan approval. Also, a city or town with an adopted community comprehensive plan should update the plan at least every five years. These revisions should reflect changes in the economic, demographic and other aspects of the community and should incorporate changing goals, objectives and policies. The 1988 Act also provides for review by the state for consistency with the state goals and policies.



### 1.3 Summary of the Plan

The complete Comprehensive Plan presentation for the town of Westerly consists of three components, as follows:

1. The Plan itself
2. Appendices I & II
3. Executive Summary

The Plan document is the pivotal component and will guide the day-to-day implementation and use of the Plan. In addition to this introductory Chapter 1, it includes:

- Chapter 2: Community Character. This chapter describes the make-up of the community, some of the concerns of its citizens, its history and its diverse neighborhoods. It explains the importance of maintaining the distinct character of Westerly and the need for careful planning to allow Westerly to grow and prosper while preserving the quality of life that all enjoy.
- Chapter 3: Inventory Summary with Findings & Implications. This chapter provides a brief summary of each of eight Plan elements and the associated findings and implications that shaped the overall direction of the Plan. A complete inventory of current facts, figures and conditions as of mid-2009 is provided in Appendix I to the Plan.
- Chapter 4: The Future. “Where do we want to be in 2025?” The answer is provided in this chapter by way of a summary of local priorities in the context of *Land Use 2025*, a build-out analysis based on existing zoning, a Future Land Use Plan, and a discussion of the financial implications of implementing the Plan.
- Chapter 5: Implementation Plan. A plan is only as good as the quality of its implementation. This chapter details the goals, objectives and specific actions necessary for successful implementation. It also includes responsibilities and timeframes to ensure clear accountability and tracking of progress over time.

Appendices I & II to the Comprehensive Plan contain important background information and documentation to support the Plan. *Appendix I – Inventory* is central to the Plan’s development and provides a detailed snapshot of Westerly’s “as built” condition and resources. It consists of the following eight elements:

- Existing Land Use and Zoning
- Housing
- Economic Vitality
- Natural Resources
- Services and Facilities
- Open Space and Recreation
- Transportation Network
- Historic and Cultural Resources

This Inventory documents local characteristics and trends regarding resident population composition, land use, housing, the natural environment, economic development and provision of services. It reveals future conservation, development and infrastructure needs and provides a comprehensive source of current information that can be used by the town, its citizens and businesses in their daily activities.



*Appendix II – Public Input* contains summaries and compilations of input from approximately 700 Westerly residents who participated in development of the Plan through public meetings, focus groups, letters, email messages, and a statistically-based survey. During the initial stages of Plan development, a public input program was designed to ensure residents and stakeholders were given ample opportunity to participate in the planning process. The following elements were incorporated:

- Vision Sessions – Vision Sessions were held with the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee and the town’s department heads at project kickoff.
- Focus Groups –Six focus groups were conducted in October and November 2007 as part of the planning process. The focus group topics were:
  - Natural Resources and Open Space
  - Real Estate, Housing and Development
  - Economic Development
  - Circulation, Traffic and Transportation
  - PTO and School Administration
  - Fire Districts
- Interactive Public Workshops – The interactive public workshops were designed to allow the public to give individual input as well as to collaborate with other residents and participants. Three rounds of workshops were held at different locations in Westerly:
  - Round One on July 31 and August 1, 2007 at the Venice Restaurant and Elks Club respectively
  - Round Two on July 29, 2008 at Westerly Middle School
  - Round Three on March 7, 2009 at the Westerly Hospital Conference Center
- Community Survey – A community survey was mailed in September 2007 to a randomly selected representative number of Westerly households to gain community feedback about a broad range of community issues. The survey was designed as the scientifically executed component of the public input program.
- A number of interviews were held throughout the planning process with elected and appointed officials and other local citizens. In addition, numerous unsolicited letters, email messages, phone calls and other inputs from citizens were received and included in the committee’s deliberations.

The third component of the complete Comprehensive Plan presentation is an Executive Summary. Modeled on the state of Rhode Island *Land Use 2025* Executive Summary, the Executive Summary is an easy-to-read, graphics-oriented guide to the Comprehensive Plan which will be available to Westerly citizens once the Plan is adopted by the Town Council.



## 1.4 Using the Plan

The adoption of the Comprehensive Plan is a commitment to a coordinated and inspirational vision for the future of Westerly. The Plan's success will be measured through the committed use by elected officials, appointed boards and commissions, the town's municipal staff, residents and businesses.

- Elected officials will use the Plan to align their priorities with the community's vision of the future as described in the Plan and adopt local codes and ordinances that support the Plan's goals. The Plan provides both background information and leverage as elected officials fulfill their legislative responsibilities and dedicate financial and administrative support for implementing the specific actions identified in the Plan.
- Local boards and commissions will assess the desirability of development applications by their conformity to the Plan; adopt policies and procedures that actively assist those initiatives that further the Plan's goals; and develop budgets and investment alternatives that are consistent with those described in the Plan.
- Municipal staff will use the Plan when interpreting legislative mandates and regulations, making administrative decisions, enforcing development-related codes and establishing priorities for work efforts. The Plan provides an overarching framework for developing individual and team objectives and a context for the many daily decisions that are made in providing services to the citizens of Westerly.
- Finally, local residents and businesses will use the plan as a reference when making residential or commercial location choices, supporting programs to preserve our cultural and natural resources, appealing for financial or legislative support, and evaluating the effectiveness of local government and elected officials.

## 1.5 A Final Word

The Comprehensive Plan represents the collaborative effort of professional and volunteer citizen planners, municipal staff, the town's planning consultant, and the citizens of Westerly. Guided by the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, the process has required an extraordinary commitment over time to complete a plan for Westerly that is both practical and visionary. The contributions of all involved – and their efforts, passion and thoughtfulness – are reflected in countless ways throughout the Plan and are very much appreciated.



## 2.0 *Community Character*

Perhaps more than anything else, a Comprehensive Plan is intended to encourage the preservation of a municipality's character and to set forth the goals, objectives, and actions which will guide that municipality in shaping its future. This chapter addresses the make-up of the town of Westerly, its history, the specific character of its different constituent neighborhoods, and the concerns and aspirations of its citizens.

*“People love the area and want to visit or retire here. Why not help make this a good experience for them?”*

- July 2008 Public Workshop

### 2.1 *Community Make-up and Concerns*

The residents of Westerly, whether life-long or more recently arrived, have a strong affection for their town. They see it as a special place, with a character all of its own. This character reflects its unique geography – its spectacular location along the river, bay, salt ponds and ocean, as well as the quiet charm of its back-country rural areas – and its history.

*“We are all one town but we believe the Comprehensive Plan should value and respect the special character and individual qualities of Westerly's constituent neighborhoods.”*

- July 2008 Public  
Workshop

The rich mix of old settler families, whose roots here go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the more populous 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrant families, who came here to work in the mills and quarries; and the people whose families established the shoreline summer communities, some of whom have chosen to make the town their year-round residence, provides a stimulating diversity. All, however, are united in the pride they feel for the elements which give the town its special character.

There is universal appreciation of the handsome downtown core of the town, centered around its park, including on Broad, High and Elm Streets, largely preserved 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century streetscapes and the ambiance of a small, but prosperous, community of an earlier age. Its sensitive renovation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is a source of great civic pride.

Its shoreline communities – their magnificent beaches (the first open-ocean beaches along the New England coast as one travels east from New York) and marine waters, which are enjoyed by beach-goers as well as boaters, together with their largely residential architectural treasures – are another source of pleasure and pride for all residents of the town.



*“People want to live where their children get a good education, and where they have access to quality healthcare.”*

- November 2007  
School/PTO Focus Group

The residents speak of the town as a place where they feel comfortable and safe, and as a family-friendly town. Yet there are concerns about changes which could erode the quality of life in the town.

The high cost of housing raises questions about affordability, and the availability of high quality employment for area residents, especially for the young of the community, is a major concern.

There is a recognition that commercial sprawl has turned a significant portion of Route 1, including Granite and Franklin Streets and the Post Road, into a faceless strip of highway that could be anywhere in the country. There is a strong desire to halt and even reverse the trend.

Traffic and congestion during the summer tourist season months regularly clog the gateways into the town, especially Route 78 and Airport and Winnapaug Roads, and parking is not always available in popular destinations such as the commercial waterfront of Bay Street, Watch Hill, and even at the Misquamicut State Beach.

Residential development, especially in the shoreline communities, raises concerns about loss of open space and scenic views, as well as the degradation of the salt ponds. There is a concern that unchecked development will erode the character of the community and a widespread commitment expressed for the preservation of open space and the protection of the town’s natural resources.

*“I think Westerly is very nice the way it is...I’d also like to have a bike/hiking trail throughout Westerly.”*

- September 2007 Community  
Survey

## 2.2 History

In pre-colonial times the Westerly area was home to the Pequot, Niantic, and Narragansett tribes. The first European settlers arrived in 1648. By 1660 the Native Americans had conveyed to the colonists a tract of land twenty miles along the coast and ten miles deep into the interior, which included what is now Westerly and parts of Charlestown, Hopkinton and Richmond. The area was then known as “Mishquamicuk” or Misquamicut, a native word which denoted “land of red fish” or salmon. The town of Westerly was incorporated in 1669 and the current legal boundaries were established in 1757, by which time Charlestown, Richmond, and Hopkinton had been separated from Westerly. The town’s boundaries are the Pawcatuck River, which separates Westerly from Connecticut on the west, Fishers Island Sound and Block Island Sound on the south and the boundaries of Charlestown and Hopkinton on the east and north.

Farming and fishing were the major occupations in the early days of Westerly. The town’s location along a navigable river and the coast also destined it to play an important maritime role. A thriving shipbuilding industry grew up along the banks of the river in the 1700’s and 1800’s. Textile mills also developed along the river in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1850, steamboats were being built and



making runs between Westerly and Stonington and Groton. In 1837 the construction of the Stonington and Providence Railroad provided Westerly with a rail connection between New York and Boston.

The discovery of Westerly granite in the 1830's launched a new Westerly industry. The fine-grained local granite was recognized to be of superior quality and was soon in great demand from all over the country and abroad. It is prominently visible in various handsome buildings in town, as well as in architectural elements of structures on Elm and Main Streets, and elsewhere. The rise of industry was accompanied by an influx of immigrant workers, first from Ireland and then from Italy.

Beginning in the 1830's, Westerly's future as a resort community began with the building of the first of a number of grand hotels in Watch Hill. These attracted a clientele from as far away as the Mid-West. Initially, these visitors arrived by train at Stonington and from there by ferry. By the early 1880's, when the first major farm tract in Watch Hill was subdivided for building sites, Westerly's transition to a location for summer homes began. About the same time a substantial summer community was established at Weekapaug, and shortly thereafter, a simpler one at Pleasant View, later known as Misquamicut.

After World War II, Westerly, like many towns in Rhode Island and the rest of the country, expanded greatly. There was significant commercial expansion along Route 1 with construction of several strip malls. Large areas of farmland were developed for housing subdivisions, some of which include a substantial number of two-family homes. Typically, the lots in these subdivisions are square or rectangular in shape and correspond to minimum zoning requirements. More recently, new residential developments consist primarily of single-family homes and some subdivisions have been constructed using cluster or conservation zoning.

### ***2.3 Westerly Neighborhoods***

In addition to its notable Downtown, Westerly is comprised of a number of distinct communities, each with its individual character and history. Several, like Downtown, are designated Historic Districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and a number of them have Fire Districts, which provide local quasi-municipal functions, funded by special district real property taxes. These communities take their individual character seriously. For instance, 20 years ago the Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation developed a process of establishing a greenway around and leading to Weekapaug, and by purchase of land and development rights, it has largely achieved this goal.

Figure 2-1 provides a visual display of special character areas in Westerly.



### *2.3.1 Downtown Westerly*

Downtown Westerly has developed as the commercial and civic center of Westerly. It is anchored by a green core area, Wilcox Park, and is defined by commercial streets (Broad and High) and a residential street (Grove Avenue). Along Broad Street are massive late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century eclectic masonry structures, including Christ Church, the Library, the Town Hall, the Post Office and the headquarters of the Washington Trust Company. The former Industrial Trust Bank and the YMCA on High Street, and on Canal Street, the United Theater, the Martin House (both currently undergoing restoration), the recently restored AMTRAK railroad station and Armory, on Railroad Avenue, are other notable Downtown structures. Along High Street, two-story brick commercial buildings have storefronts with office and/or residential space above. Main Street, which runs from Broad Street and the Pawcatuck River Bridge, is largely commercial (a significant portion of it soon to be redeveloped, as part of the new Westerly KeepSpace program), and Granite Street, which runs up the hill from the Park is mixed in use.

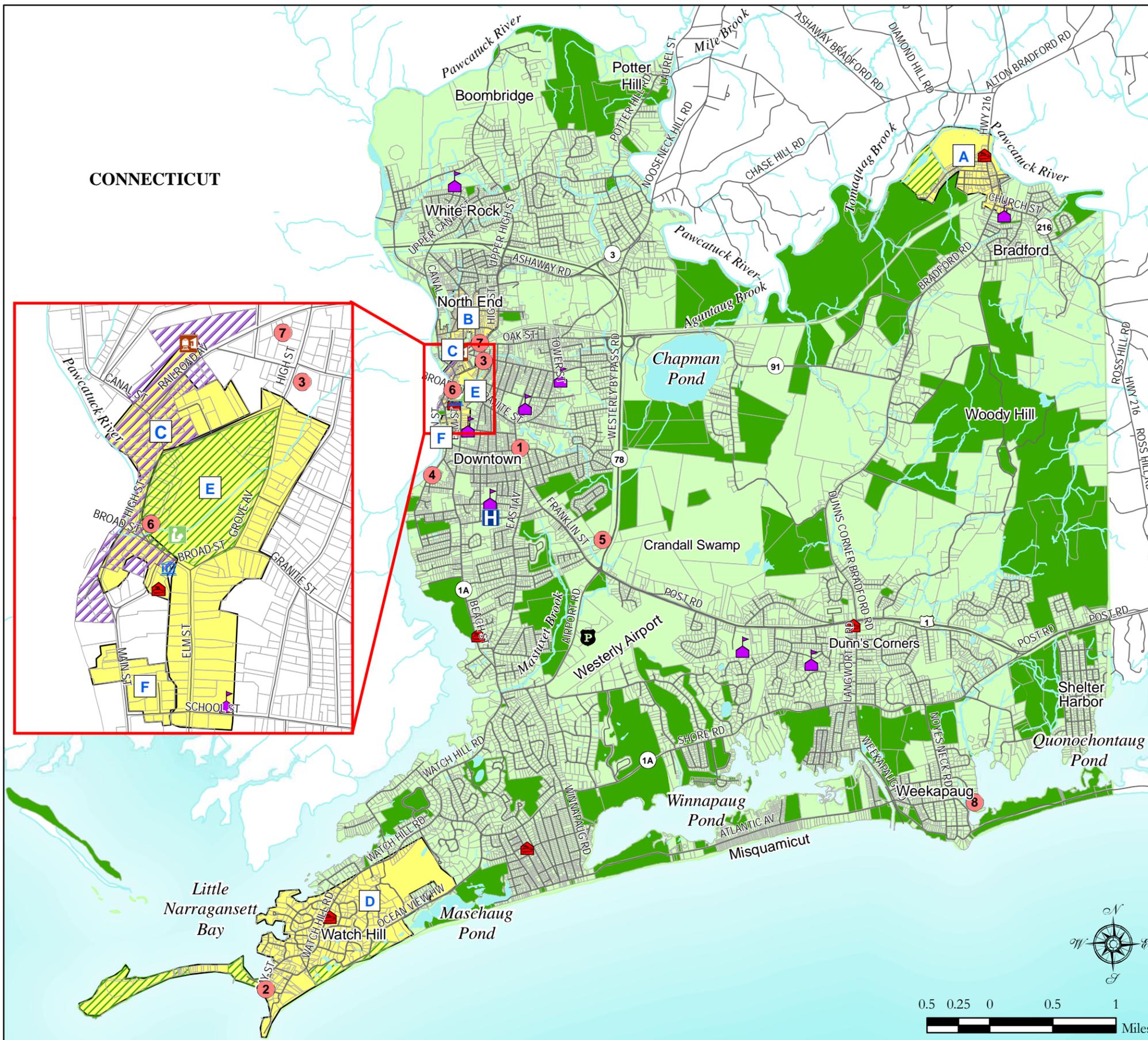
Apart from the stately 19<sup>th</sup> century houses on Elm Street, including Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate and Second Empire structures, and similar handsome houses along Margin Street, the area surrounding the central core, from the railroad tracks on the north to Wells Street on the south and from the river on the west to Granite Street on the east, is primarily 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, small lot, single and multi-family residential, identified by two- and three-story largely framed structures. A significant number of the buildings are set close to the street or with a small setback. The area is largely zoned as high density residential. While the zoning district allows for a variety of housing types, some of the more traditional residential architecture in this area would not be allowed by the current zoning code because the setbacks are smaller than the code allows. The street pattern in the core area is generally an irregular grid.

To the north of Downtown is the North End, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century neighborhood which became the home of successive waves of European immigrants, who came to Westerly to work on the railroad and in the textile mills and granite quarries. In recent years, the town together with multiple private and governmental funding sources has made a concerted effort to revitalize the North End while preserving its historic character. These efforts are most visible in the Pierce and Pond Street neighborhoods where there has been restoration of buildings and landscapes.

### *2.3.2 Mill Villages*

Still further to the north of Downtown and bounded by the Pawcatuck River, as it flows west and south, are the mill villages of White Rock, Bradford and Potter Hill, which developed as distinct clusters of workforce housing, each with its own iconic mill. The Village of Stillmanville, partly in Westerly and partly in Pawcatuck, straddles the Pawcatuck River. Typical land uses in the Mill Villages include industrial, residential, park/conservation land, vacant land and undevelopable land. The area has a significant number of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. Residential structures include single family buildings and duplex buildings.

Most residential structures are two or two-and-a-half stories. Zoning in this district varies between low, medium and high density residential, industrial and open space/recreation. As in the Downtown area, some of the existing traditional and residential architecture in this area would not be allowed by the current zoning code because the setbacks are smaller than the code allows. The street pattern in this area is an irregular grid intertwined with winding roads.



### Legend

- Railroad Station
- Library and Wilcox Park
- Westerly Police
- Fire Stations
- Westerly Town Hall
- Westerly Hospital
- Elementary and Secondary Schools
- Conservation Land
- Conservation Land within Historic Districts

### National Register of Historic Places

- 1. Babcock Smith House
- 2. Flying Horse Carousel
- 3. Former Immaculate Conception Church
- 4. Lewis-Card-Perry House
- 5. Nursery Site - RI 273
- 6. United States Post Office
- 7. Westerly Armory
- 8. Weekapaug Inn

### Historic Districts

- A. Bradford Village
- B. North End
- C. Downtown
- D. Watch Hill
- E. Wilcox Park
- F. Main Street

- Westerly Arts and Entertainment District
- Town Boundary
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

source: RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, Camp Dresser & McKee Inc. (CDM), National Register of Historic Places

## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 2-1  
Special Character Areas

November 2009



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.





### ***2.3.3 Shore Communities***

South of Route 1A are the shoreline communities of Avondale, Watch Hill, Misquamicut, Weekapaug and Shelter Harbor. Each of these areas has its individual distinctive character. But all have the common element of seasonal and summer homes; and two, Watch Hill and Misquamicut, attract large concentrations of summer visitors to their commercial areas. In recent years, large areas of farmland surrounding these communities have been preserved from subdivision and development, primarily by the Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation, but also by the Audubon Society and the Westerly Land Trust.

Avondale, which lies along the Pawcatuck River, north of Watch Hill, was primarily a fishing and boat-building village, once known as Lotteryville. Now largely residential, but still including three boatyards, it retains its quaint waterfront character.

Watch Hill in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries transformed itself from a colony of grand hotels into a community of large summer “cottages,” mostly in Shingle Style, Arts and Craft, and Colonial Revival, but also including an eclectic mix of Norman, Mediterranean and even Bermudian designs. Watch Hill’s Village has always been a vibrant commercial center along its harbor in Little Narragansett Bay. Napatree Point, which extends westward from the Village, is a mile-and-a-half barrier beach, an area which is known as the Napatree Point Conservation Area and is enjoyed not only by summer beach-goers, but also by naturalists, who know it as one of the prime shore bird and migratory bird preserves in the Northeast. Watch Hill’s Flying Horse Carousel is perhaps the oldest of its kind in the nation. The Watch Hill Lighthouse has served as a beacon at Watch Hill Point since colonial days.

Misquamicut, once known as Pleasant View, is located between Watch Hill and Weekapaug, and lies between the ocean and Winnapaug Pond. Its principal road, Atlantic Avenue, has mixed use, residential as well as commercial, and includes the State Beach and two Westerly Town Beaches. Its residential lots are small, and many of its houses, mostly dating from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, are generally modest in size, but many are undergoing remodeling and expansion and, since the area is low-lying, being raised in height above the flood plain.

Weekapaug and Shelter Harbor are residential, with the exception of an inn located in each community. Haversham Point, which lies between them, is entirely residential. Weekapaug surrounds the western end of Quonochontaug Pond and fronts on the ocean at Weekapaug Point and along its barrier beach. Haversham and Shelter Harbor lie along the northern shore of Quonochontaug Pond. The predominant architectural character of Weekapaug is Shingle Style. The architecture of Shelter Harbor, which developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a “Musicolony,” is more eclectic in character.

### ***2.3.4 Dunn’s Corners/Bradford Road***

North of Route 1 is a largely undeveloped area of town. Along Dunn’s Corners/Bradford Road, one of the major roads in this area, there is some sparse residential development and the town’s largest concentration of remaining working farmland. The other major road in this area, Route 91, runs through a large cedar swamp, much of which is either preserved for habitat protection or too wet to be developed. This entire area presents environmental challenges for development and has the lowest density zoning in Westerly.



### ***2.3.5 Route 1 Corridor***

North of the shore area, Route 1 is lined by commercial strip development similar to the sprawl which has inundated portions of other historic East Coast communities. Based on typical post-World War II zoning ordinances, this area is not characteristic of the rest of Westerly. Typical land uses in the Route 1 Corridor include commercial, residential and vacant. The area is characterized by more recent development including subdivisions and strip malls. Residential structures range from single family to multi-family units including condominiums. Commercial structures include large national and regional chain stores such as Walmart, Shaw's, Home Depot, Tim Horton's and Pizza Hut, as well as several small motels. Typical architectural styles for residential structures range from modern to post modern to new urbanism styles. Commercial structures typically are consistent with national trademark forms applied to box-stores.

Residential subdivision housing units are consistently slightly set back from the street. Commercial structures are typically set back a considerable distance from the street with ample parking in front of the structure. Zoning in this area includes medium and high density residential and highway commercial. Road patterns in this area are winding and feature a substantial number of cul-de-sac roads. Most minor roads are connected to Route 1, but do not have interconnectivity with other minor roads.



## 2.4 Westerly Facts and Statistics

Table 2-1 provides a summary of important facts, statistics and other data for the town of Westerly.

**Table 2-1 Facts and Statistics**

<p><b>Town of Westerly Rhode Island</b></p> 		<p><i>Westerly was designated one of a “Dozen Distinctive Destinations” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (2002).</i></p> <p><i>South County, RI – with Westerly as its centerpiece – was named one of the top 12 “Best Places to Vacation in North America” by Money Magazine (2006).</i></p> <p><i>Washington County, RI was included as 12<sup>th</sup> on its list of “Best Places to Raise a Family” by Forbes.com (2008).</i></p>
<p><b>HISTORY</b> Westerly was established in 1661 and incorporated on May 13, 1669. It originally included the towns of Charlestown, Hopkinton and Richmond which were later separated from Westerly.</p>	<p><b>FORM OF GOVERNMENT</b> An appointed Town Manager and an elected seven-member Town Council headed by a council president. The Town Council meets on Monday evenings at 7:00 pm.</p>	
<p><b>LAND &amp; WATER</b> The town of Westerly contains approximately 31 square miles and includes 7 miles of sandy beaches bordering on Block Island Sound. Water accounts for slightly more than 5% of Westerly’s area including major coastal salt ponds such as Quonochontaug Pond (733 acres), with its eastern half within the town of Charlestown and the western portion within Westerly, and Winnapaug Pond (446 acres). Preservation efforts in Westerly by public and private entities have protected over seven square miles (21%) of conservation land.</p>		
<p><b>FINANCE</b> FY2010 Budget – Municipal Departments: \$27,247,640 FY2010 Budget – School Department: \$49,370,000 FY2010 Budget – Enterprise Funds: \$9,271,051 Grand List: \$6.49 billion Property Tax Rate: \$8.87 per \$1,000 assessed value Moody’s Bond Rating: Aa3 S&amp;P Bond Rating: AA-</p>	<p><b>HOUSING</b> Total Housing Units: 12,300 Owner-occupied: 64% Renter-occupied: 36% Single-family residences: 7,755 Median Assessed Value: \$336,800 Average Assessed Value: \$506,791</p>	
<p><b>EMPLOYMENT</b> Outside of the public sector, the largest employers in Westerly include the Westerly Hospital, the Washington Trust Company and the Moore Company/Darlington Fabrics. Employment is concentrated in the following key industry segments: health care, financial services, manufacturing, professional and technical services, and retail trade. During the summer months, the robust tourist/vacation economy boosts town revenues and employment, especially in the accommodations/food services sector.</p>		
<p><b>EDUCATION</b> Westerly High School: 1,067 students Westerly Middle School: 967 students Westerly Elementary Schools (4): 1,141 students Total enrollment – 3,175 students Education Attainment (Washington County, 25 years &amp; older): Less than High School graduate – 8.6% High School graduate – 26.2% Some college or Associate degree – 24.5% Bachelor or Graduate degree – 40.7%</p>	<p><b>POPULATION, WORKFORCE &amp; INCOME</b> Year-round population: 23,424 Age 24 &amp; under: 29% Age 25-49: 35% Age 50-64: 19% Age 65 &amp; above: 17% Labor Force: 13,185 Median Household Income: \$54,694</p>	
<p><b>COMMUNITY SERVICES</b> Fire Depts – Westerly, Bradford, Dunn’s Corners, Misquamicut, Watch Hill Westerly Ambulance Corps – 30 Chestnut Street Westerly Public Library – 44 Broad Street Westerly Hospital – 25 Wells Avenue YMCA – 95 High Street</p>	<p><b>MUNICIPAL OFFICES</b> Town Hall – 45 Broad Street Engineering &amp; Utilities – White Rock Road School Department – 15 Highland Avenue Public Works – Larry Hirsch Drive Public Safety – 60 Airport Road</p>	
<p><b>TRANSPORTATION</b> Amtrak Rail Station Westerly State Airport Access to Interstate 95 T.F. Greene (Providence) Airport</p>	<p><b>TRAVEL DISTANCE TO/FROM</b> Boston – 100 miles Hartford – 65 miles New Haven – 65 miles New York City – 140 miles Providence – 45 miles</p>	



## ***2.5 Conclusions***

Maintaining the character of Westerly is important to the future of this special place. The combination of the features and characteristics of the various neighborhoods make Westerly unique from other towns and is an important reason why people want to visit and reside here. Residents want to preserve the sense of place in Westerly, our open space, and our precious natural resources. They also recognize the importance of economic development and employment opportunities as well as housing for all income and age levels. The key is to balance these potentially competing needs through careful planning for new residential and commercial development and redevelopment of underutilized areas. This should allow the town to maintain the quality and vitality of locally-based businesses and provide housing that will allow residents to live, work, and retire in the community.

Westerly was originally formed around the river crossing, the mills and the oceanfront. Citizens of the town were once primarily employed by fishing and farming, shipbuilding and the marine industry, textile mills, and the granite quarries. These industries are all still a part of the community; however, Westerly today is also an important center in southwest Rhode Island for commercial and professional services. For example, the Westerly Hospital and the Washington Trust Company are major employers in town. In addition to jobs in town, some residents commute to New London or Providence or use technology to become self-employed or to work at some distance from their company's home bases. In the future, jobs that require advanced training and specialized skills are likely to become a bigger share of the employment mix. To achieve continuing economic growth, Westerly will need to focus on providing a quality education for all and actively encouraging companies with high-value jobs to locate here. Westerly will also need to work to improve commuting opportunities so that residents have access to jobs located in other areas of Rhode Island and in neighboring states.

The hospitality and tourism industry will continue to be an important part of Westerly's economy. Visitors who come to enjoy beautiful beaches and other amenities bring an important source of jobs and income; they also bring increased traffic and other stresses on the town during the summer. Maintaining a balance between the competing needs of seasonal and year-round residents and short-term visitors will be an important key to continuing a high quality of life in Westerly.

Building on the existing character and composition of the town, the design for Westerly of the future can offer an organized, functional and attractive place to live, work, and visit. Achieving this vision, however, will require careful planning and decisions that reinforce the best aspects of the community's character to allow Westerly to grow and prosper while maintaining the quality of life that all enjoy.

## *3.0 Inventory Summary with Findings & Implications*

A thorough understanding of Westerly's current status is a necessary basis for planning for the future. This chapter consists of summaries of inventories of current (2009) conditions and trends. The inventories contain information of interest to Westerly residents, businesses, and town government as well as providing documentation to support the Plan. The topics covered in this chapter are:

- Existing Land Use and Zoning
- Housing
- Economic Vitality
- Natural Resources
- Services and Facilities
- Open Space and Recreation
- Transportation Network
- Historic and Cultural Resources

In addition to facts and figures, each of the inventories contains a set of findings and implications which point towards actions to address issues or concerns identified in the inventory process. The complete inventories, which contain additional information and analyses, are in Appendix I of this Plan.

### *3.1 Existing Land Use & Zoning*

Land use planning determines how a community will look, what uses will be allowed and how those uses will be arranged to best meet the needs of current and future residents as well as finding an appropriate balance of the rights of property owners and their neighbors.



### 3.1.1 Existing Land Use

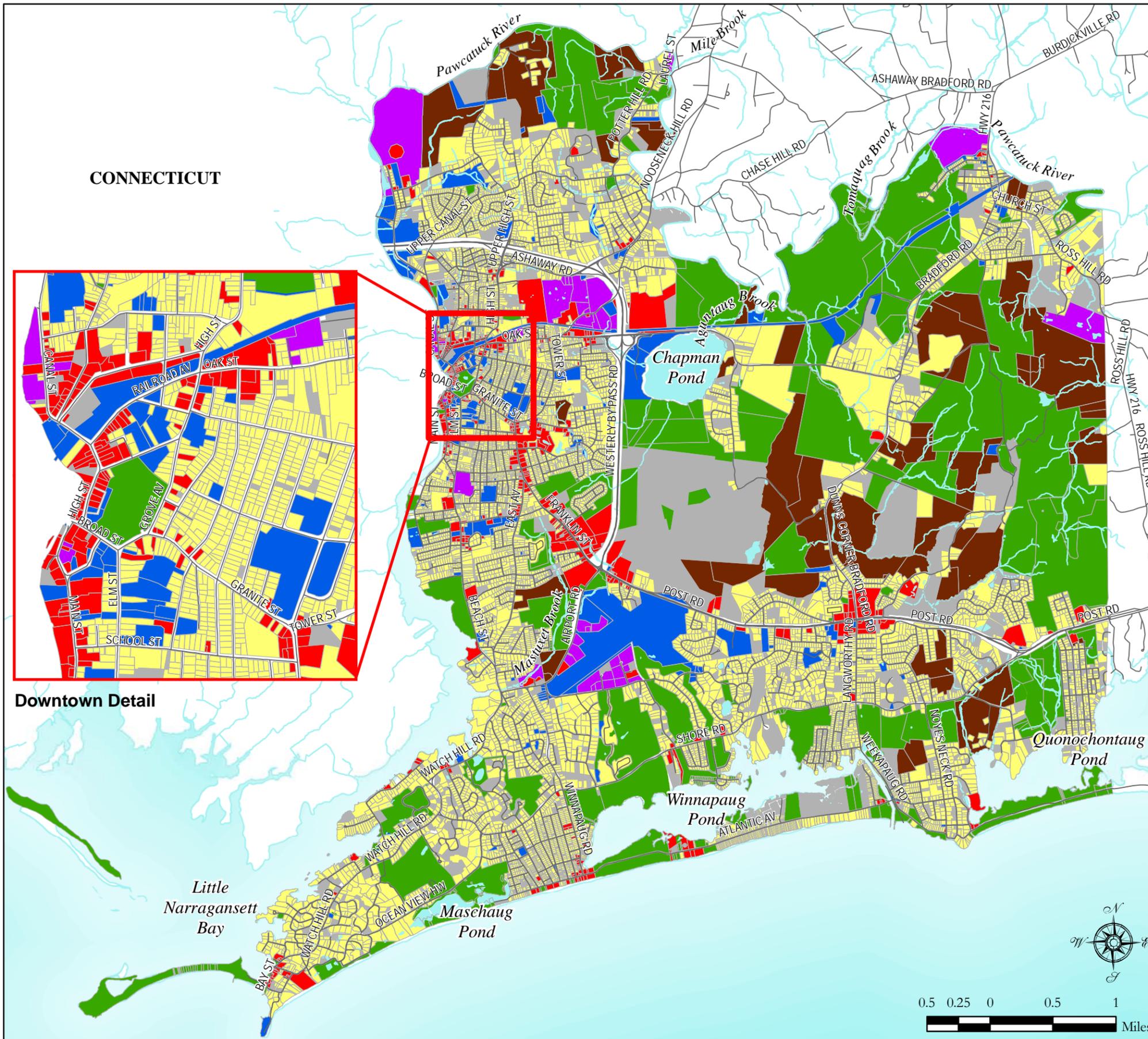
Current land use in Westerly is illustrated in Figure 3-1 and summarized in the Table 3-1 below.

**Table 3-1 Existing Land Use**

Land Use	Acres	Percent of total
<b>Agriculture</b> —includes actively farmed land (cropland, pastures, and orchards). About 248 acres of farmland is being conserved through acquisition of development rights or conservation easements	2,046	10.3%
<b>Commercial-Mixed Use</b> —includes all commercial uses consisting of retail, services and professional uses, and areas with both commercial and residential uses such as the downtown area and part of Watch Hill	728	3.7%
<b>Community Facilities</b> —includes schools, churches, government buildings, community safety facilities, hospitals, airport, rail yard, roads, other transportation uses, public utilities, and the transfer station	2,144	10.7%
<b>Industrial</b> —includes manufacturing and quarrying operations	436	2.2%
<b>Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space</b> —includes golf courses, marinas, beaches, parks and other recreation, cemeteries, and vacant land that is protected from development by conservation easements or other permanent protection	4,112	20.6%
<b>Residential</b> —includes all residential uses	7,193	36.0%
<b>Vacant</b> —most of this land is currently forested; it includes land that is potentially developable and land that would be difficult to develop such as wetlands, inland sandy soils, and rock outcrops	2,385	11.9%
<b>Water</b> —includes inland fresh water and salt ponds; the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are not included	923	4.6%

### 3.1.2 State Land Use Policy

In April 2006, the Rhode Island Department of Administration completed a statewide land use plan titled *Land Use 2025*. The goal of *Land Use 2025* is to eliminate sprawl and protect the natural resources of the state. The state plan encourages an urban/rural model that concentrates new development into established areas and some rural centers. It identifies urban service boundaries within which are areas that either provide public sewer and water, or are planned to do so in the near future, and where higher density and infill development might be considered. The state plan encourages the conservation of natural resources through cluster development, conservation development, or transfer of development rights in areas that have development potential.



**Legend**

- Commercial/Mixed Use
- Community Facilities
- Industrial
- Conservation/Recreation/Open Space
- Residential
- Agriculture
- Vacant \*
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

map source: *RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, CDM*

\* Includes land potentially developable as well as wetlands, inland sandy soils and rock outcrops.

## *Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island*

*Figure 3-1  
Existing Land Use*

November 2009



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.





### 3.1.3 Existing Zoning

The town of Westerly last comprehensively updated its Zoning Ordinance in 1998. There have been multiple updates since including the Affordable Housing Amendment in 2007. The Zoning Ordinance establishes permitted uses, minimum lot sizes, minimum front, side and rear setbacks for principal and accessory buildings, maximum building heights, maximum building and lot coverage, and minimum floor areas. The Zoning Ordinance is a critical tool for controlling the type, density, and appearance of development within the town. Zoning districts in the town of Westerly are illustrated in Figure 3-2 and described below.

- Residential districts make up 67.2 percent of the land area of the town. The lowest density area is rural residential (RR-60) which has lot sizes of 60,000 square feet (about 1.4 acres) on land that is currently agricultural, contains wetlands or other severe soil constraints, or other sensitive environmental characteristics. These areas have neither public water nor public sewers. The highest density areas (HDR-6, HDR-10, and HDR-15) with lot sizes of 6,000-15,000 square feet are all served by public water. HDR-6 and HDR-15 are served by public sewers.
- Commercial districts make up 3.8 percent of the land area of the town. Land uses in these areas include professional office, downtown center, neighborhood business, highway commercial (along Route 1), general commercial, shore commercial, and marine commercial. Some areas include the potential for mixed commercial and residential uses.
- Industrial districts make up 9.2 percent of the town's land area but much of the land in these districts that is not already developed is protected by conservation easement.
- Special districts protect parks and open space or areas dedicated for commercial recreation such as golf courses. More than 19.7 percent of the town's area falls into one of these zoning districts.
- The Zoning Code also has an option for Planned Resort Facilities Development which is intended to recognize the town as a tourist resort area, provided that such facilities are located on a substantial tract of land and are designed to limit their impact on neighboring property. This type of planned development has never been used.

### 3.1.4 Findings and Implications

- The state plan identifies urban services areas and defines them as the areas with both municipal water supply and municipal sewers; these areas are designated by the state in the 2025 Land Use Plan for higher density and infill development.
- Nearly all the vacant developable land in Westerly is forested or agricultural land. Therefore any development other than infill projects will result in the loss of open space.

## 3.2 Housing

The availability and affordability of housing is a major factor in the livability and prosperity of a community. Important characteristics of Westerly demographics and housing include the following:

- The age of Westerly's population has shifted upward since 1990.
- School enrollment has declined over the last decade.
- Westerly has a significant seasonal population.
- About two-thirds of the houses in Westerly are occupied by owners, one-third are occupied by renters. About 13 percent of the houses are used seasonally.



- Westerly’s affordable housing plan is intended to help meet the housing affordability standards of the state of Rhode Island for low- and moderate-income households.

### 3.2.1 Demographics

The town of Westerly had an estimated year-round population of 23,408 in 2006 which was 2 percent higher than in 2000. Between 1990 and 2000 the population grew by 6.3 percent. Through 2025, Westerly’s population is expected to increase slowly but steadily according to population projections prepared by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program resulting in a population of about 26,400 in 2025.

An important statistic for planning purposes is the age distribution of Westerly’s residents. As Table 3-2 illustrates, the percentages of the population over 50 is growing and is projected to be about 39 percent of the total by 2012. In contrast, the town’s school-aged population has declined over the past 10 years. For example, between 2004 and 2007 public school enrollment dropped from 3,710 to 3,314. Public school enrollment is projected to be 3,175 students in the fall of 2009; this constitutes a 15 percent decrease between 2004 and 2009.

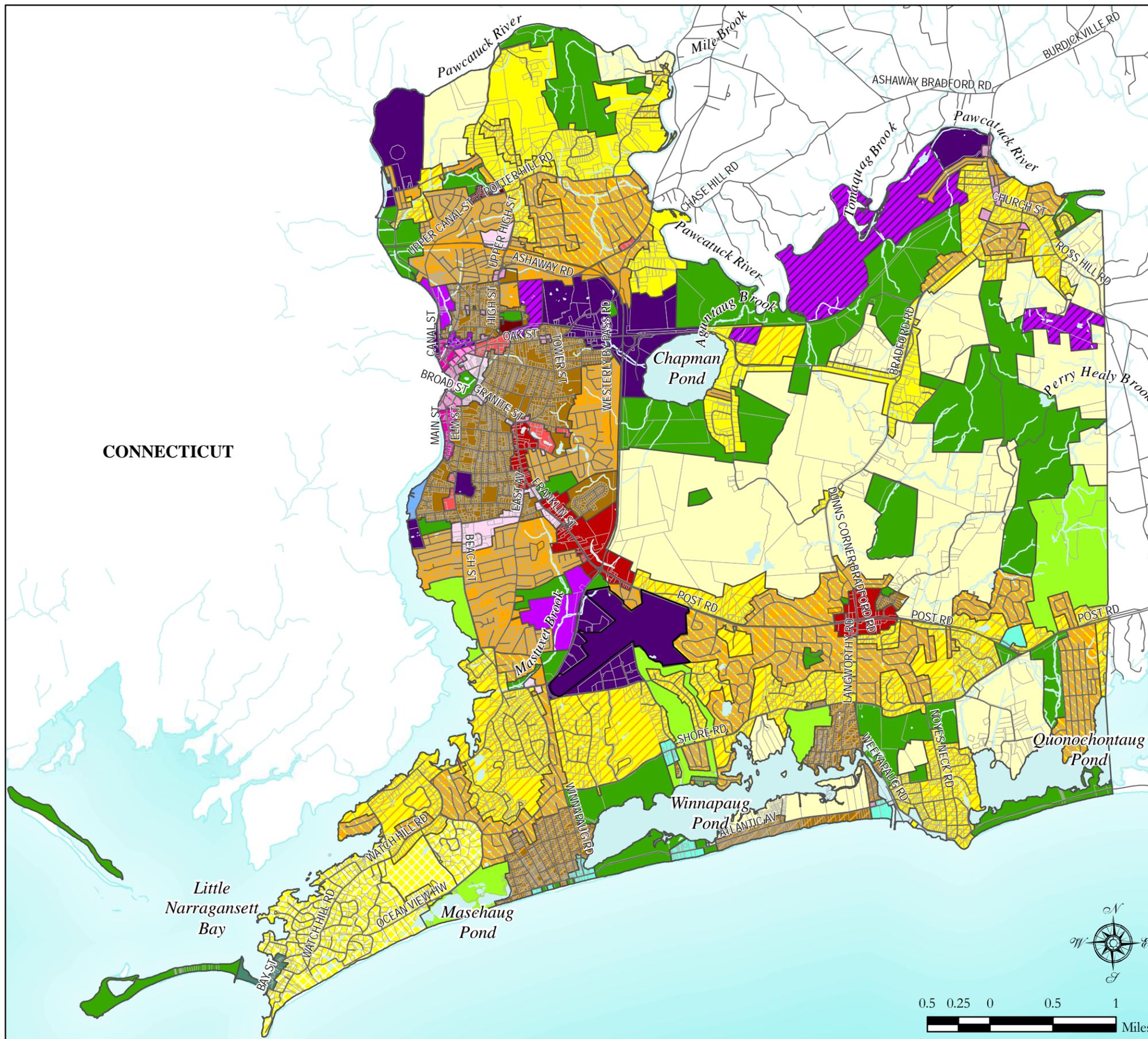
Table 3-2 Demographics

	1990	2000	2007	2012 (projected)
Total Population	21,605	22,966	23,662	23,959
Age 2-11	N/A	13%	12%	11%
Age 12-24	17%	15%	15%	15%
Age 25-49	37%	37%	35%	33%
Age 50+	30%	33%	36%	39%

### 3.2.2 Housing Characteristics

In 2008 there were about 12,300 housing units in Westerly. Of these about 64 percent were owner-occupied, 36 percent renter-occupied. About 60 percent of the residential structures in Westerly were single-family residences. Included in the single-family residence count are about 1,490 that are occupied seasonally. The median year for homes built in Westerly is 1965.

According to the Tax Assessors office, the median assessed value of single-family homes as of the December 2006 revaluation was \$336,800 with an average assessed value of \$506,791. Each town in the state of Rhode Island must perform a statistical update every three years and a full revaluation on the ninth year. The town of Westerly has begun its full revaluation as required by state statute and will complete the revaluation in December 2009. There is evidence that the general economic downturn which began in 2008 has affected the value of housing in Westerly. For example, 57 percent of the houses sold in 2008 were sold for less than the assessed value; in the first half of 2009, 83 percent of houses sold for less than the assessed value. These housing transactions over the 18-month period represent approximately 6 percent of the total number of single-family units in the town. The December 2009 full revaluation should document the extent of any shift in median and average housing values compared to 2006 levels.



### Legend

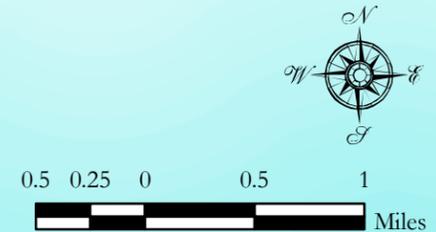
- RR-60 Rural Residential 60
- LDR-43 Low Density Residential 43
- LDR-40 Low Density Residential 40
- MDR-30 Medium Density Residential 30
- MDR-20 Medium Density Residential 20
- HDR-15 High Density Residential 15
- HDR-10 High Density Residential 10
- HDR-6 High Density Residential 6
- P-15 Professional Office
- NB Neighborhood Business
- DC Downtown Center
- DCII Downtown Center 2
- GC General Commercial
- HC Highway Commercial
- MC Marine Commercial
- SC-G Shore Commercial - General
- SC-WH Shore Commercial - Watch Hill
- ORAT Office, Research, Assembly & Technology
- LI Light Industrial
- GI General Industrial
- CR Commercial Recreation
- OS/R Open Space and Recreation
- PUD Planned Unit Development
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

map source: RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, CDM

## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 3-2  
Zoning Districts

November 2009



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.





### ***3.2.3 Affordable Housing***

High and stable housing prices and rental rates reflect the desirability of Westerly as an attractive community for both year-round and seasonal residents; however, prices have a significant impact on housing affordability. In 2004, the RI Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation certified 517 housing units (5 percent of the town's year-round housing) as meeting the statutory definition of low- and moderate-income housing. To address issues of housing affordability, the town of Westerly has developed an Affordable Housing Plan to reach the state-mandated goal of 10 percent of the town's housing being affordable to low- and moderate-income households which will require an additional 718 units by 2024.

### ***3.2.4 Findings and Implications***

- Between 1990 and 2000, and continuing through 2006, population size and number of housing units have grown at a similar rate; however, the increasing cost and valuation of housing for both owners and renters presents challenges to residents across the economic spectrum.
- Over half of the housing units in Westerly are more than 40 years old. This contributes to the character of the town but also requires extensive upkeep and maintenance.
- To address state affordable housing standards, the town of Westerly has developed an Affordable Housing Plan which is currently being implemented and monitored.
- The implications of the changing age demographics in town will need to be addressed in the future.

## ***3.3 Economic Vitality***

### ***3.3.1 Economic Overview and Distinctions***

Westerly's credit rating was enhanced in 2007 when the two largest and most prominent bond rating agencies (Moody's and Standard and Poor's) raised the rating on the town's general obligation debt. In making their determinations, both agencies cited a number of favorable aspects of Westerly's economy, including the town's good financial position, reserves, modest existing debt burden, recent property appreciation resulting in an expanded tax base and market value of homes. Standard & Poor's noted the town's tourism-based economy "slightly constrains" the town's rating but that the financial outlook for the town's economy is stable. A discussion of town and school finances appears in greater detail in the Services & Facilities element of Appendix I.

Westerly traditionally has had an unemployment rate approximately 20 percent lower than the statewide rate. For example, the average unemployment rate in Westerly from 2005-2007 was approximately 4.3 percent, which is generally recognized as near full employment. In the midst of the current 2008-2009 economic downturn, the local unemployment rate is approximately 10 percent. Median household income is approximately \$54,700.

Westerly and its surrounding area have achieved significant national and international distinctions in the last several years:

- In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Westerly one of its "Dozen Distinctive Destinations."



- In 2006, Money Magazine named South County, R.I. – with Westerly as its centerpiece – as one of the top 12 “Best places to vacation in North America.” (The town of Westerly is part of Washington County, which is also known as South County.)
- More recently, on June 30, 2008, Forbes.com named Washington County, RI as 12<sup>th</sup> on its list of “Best Places in America to Raise a Family.”

### ***3.3.2 Employment***

Rhode Island based employers of significance include the state of Rhode Island, particularly the University of Rhode Island, the Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics at Quonset Point, and a diversified group of employers in the health care, financial services, education, defense and manufacturing sectors. Because of its location, Westerly’s economy is vitally linked to southeastern Connecticut with significant employers at the U.S. Naval Submarine Base, Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics, Pfizer, Yardney Electric Battery Company, and Davis-Standard. All of these industries provide high-value research and technical jobs and also provide business for smaller companies in the area. The Westerly hospitality and tourism industry is also linked to tourism and entertainment venues in southeastern Connecticut, including Mystic Aquarium and Mystic Seaport and Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun gaming facilities.

Westerly is primarily a town of small employers. Of Rhode Island’s top 100 employers, there are two with headquarters in Westerly: Westerly Hospital and The Washington Trust Company. In addition to health care and finance, other sectors of significance to Westerly’s economy include textiles, printing, and construction. The town of Westerly is also an important employer with 717 full-time equivalent positions (189 in municipal departments and 529 in the school department).

The travel and tourism sector is particularly important to Westerly. Tourism industry wages in Westerly in 2002 were seventh highest among the state’s cities and towns, generating \$27.88 million in wages. Tourism is also a significant factor in the general local economy with estimates that for every one dollar of wages generated by tourism, \$3.64 in economic activity is generated. Despite the global and national economic downturn, comparisons of adjusted 2007 and 2008 meal and hotel tax collections show a resiliency in this sector in Westerly.

Second home and part-time residents have a significant positive effect on Westerly’s economy. These residents own approximately \$1.15 billion in assessed property value, upwards of 21 percent of total assessed residential property. In 2007 this property generated about \$11 million in property tax revenue for Westerly. Second home owners also contribute to construction and trades employment and they shop in Westerly, contributing to the vitality of businesses throughout the community. Seasonal residents also participate, along with full-time residents, in funding amenities such as the Public Library, the Westerly Hospital, and numerous other charities.

### ***3.3.3 Economic Development Initiatives***

There are several economic development efforts underway in Westerly which are designed to attract new development and employment. These include the following:

- \$154 million in new residential construction and \$142 million in commercial construction has been approved and is currently underway.
- Westerly Landing, located along Main Street and the Pawcatuck River, and Westerly Depot, near the train station, feature river access and development and redevelopment of undeveloped and underutilized sites.



- The revitalization plan for the North End of Westerly provides for housing rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing commercial and industrial properties.
- The Westerly Tax-Free Arts District, located in the historic downtown, provides sales and personal tax exemptions for artists who live and work in the district or sell their original art in the district.

### *3.3.4 Findings and Implications*

- Dependence on three major industries leaves the regional economy vulnerable to shifts in the pharmaceutical, defense, and hospitality and tourism industries.
- All community hospitals in Rhode Island had operating losses in fiscal 2006. Reimbursement rates by government and health insurers as well as uncompensated care contribute to the fiscal problems. The Westerly Hospital as an employer, together with its high quality, easily accessible health care is among the most vital institutions in the community.
- There has been no systematic evaluation of the accommodations available in Westerly to determine whether modern markets for seasonal vacationers, year round visitors, and business travelers are being adequately served.
- Sites for new businesses are needed; redevelopment of existing commercial areas can meet much of this need.
- Westerly State Airport offers aviation maintenance, commercial passenger and charter service but not freight service. The airport has the potential for a larger role in the economy although proximity to residential areas presents challenges to any expansion of services.
- Westerly has the opportunity to promote economic development based on features such as its location midway between Boston and New York City and near leading academic institutions, access to Interstate 95, and a train station with the potential for expansion of Amtrak and introduction of commuter rail services.

## *3.4 Natural Resources*

### *3.4.1 Overview of Natural Resources*

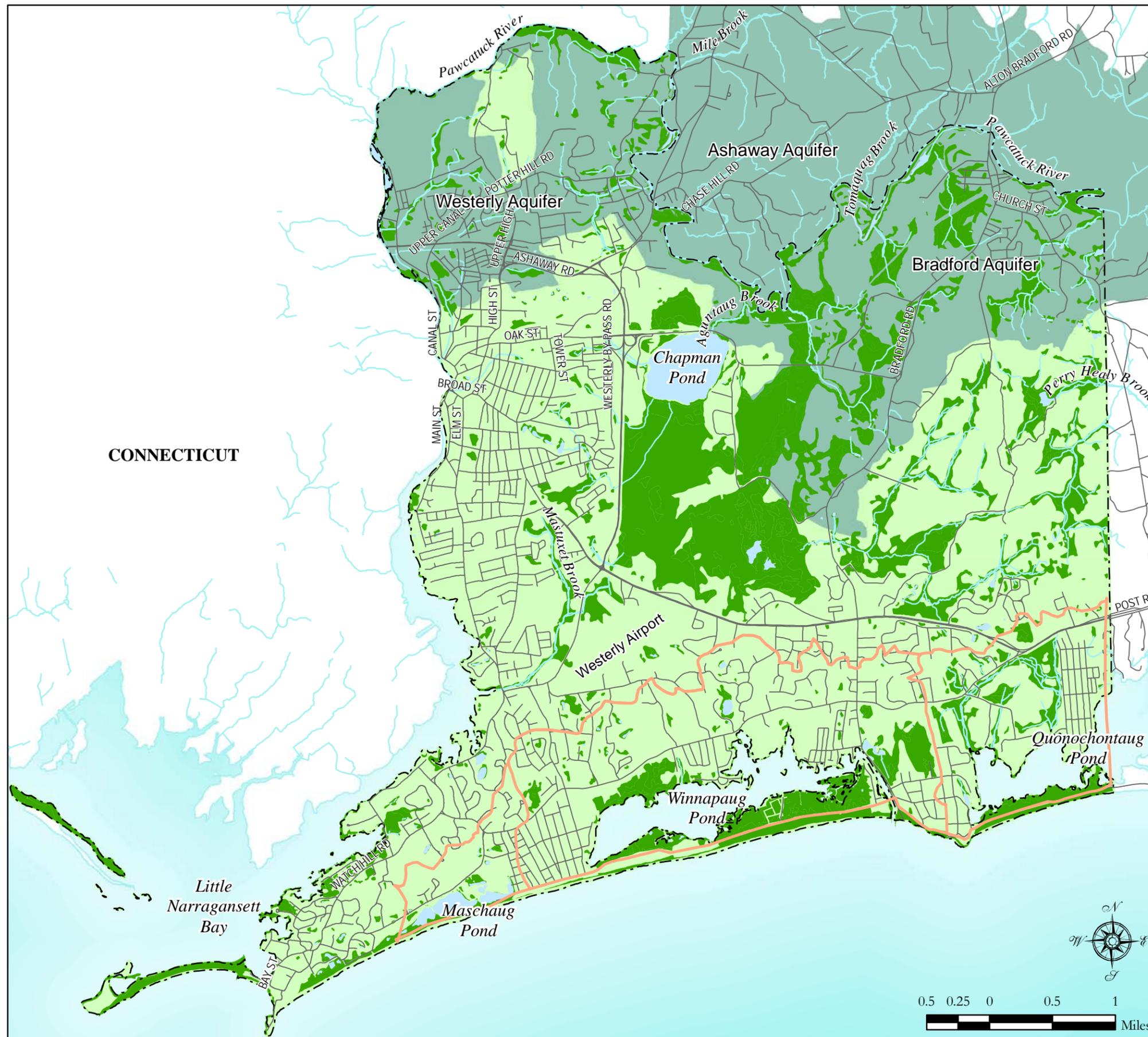
Westerly's natural resources help to make Westerly a wonderful place to live today and are critically important to the town's future development. The Pawcatuck River, the ocean beaches, and the coastal salt ponds provide important ecosystem and habitat functions. They are an important factor in the quality of life for residents and a prime recreational attraction for tourists. Westerly's groundwater resources exist within three aquifers: Westerly, Ashaway, and Bradford. These aquifers are located within the Pawcatuck River Aquifer Region, which is the sole source of drinking water for the town. Wetlands along the rivers and streams, the shore and salt ponds, as well as Crandall Swamp and other interior wetlands remove nutrients, pollutants, and sediments from surface waters runoff; recharge water supplies; reduce shoreline erosion and flood risks; and provide fish and wildlife habitat. Farmland and forests provide important open space as well as wildlife habitat. The location of many of these natural features is illustrated in Figure 3-3.

An overview of the current status of many of Westerly's natural resources, their issues and problems, and stressors is provided in Table 3.3 below. This table is abstracted from Appendix I which contains extensive background information and references to laws and regulations and organizations that have management and regulatory authority for natural resources.



**Table 3-3 Natural Resources**

Resource	Water Quality Status	Issues/Problems	Stressors
<b>Coastal Ponds</b>			
Quonochontaug	Good	Increasing bacteria, Increasing nutrients, Low DO	Failing or substandard septic systems, stormwater runoff, development, siltation
Winnapaug	Somewhat impaired	High bacteria and nitrate concentrations	“
Maschaug	Unknown	Unknown	“
<b>Pawcatuck River</b>			
Upper river—from Bradford Dye to bridge at Route 3	Impaired	High bacteria, elevated lead and nitrate concentrations	Stormwater runoff, failing septic systems, farm and wild animals
Lower river—tidal	Impaired	High lead levels, heavy metal pollutants, high bacteria, low DO, no shellfishing	Urban runoff, stormwater runoff
<b>Wetlands</b>	Unknown	Large wetland areas protected by conservation groups, small wetland areas are subject to encroachment by development	Stormwater runoff
<b>Groundwater</b>			
Westerly aquifer	Good	Localized contamination, elevated levels of nitrates and bacteria, spills	Development in recharge zones, failing septic systems, road salt
Ashaway aquifer	Good	“	“
Bradford aquifer	Good	“	“
<b>Beaches</b>	N/A	Storm erosion, flooding	Population pressure, Storms (hurricanes and Northeasters)



**Legend**

- Salt Ponds Special Area Management Plan Areas
- Aquifers
- Wetlands
- Town Boundary
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

map source: *RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, CDM*

## *Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island*

*Figure 3-3  
Natural Resources  
November 2009*



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.





### 3.4.2 Findings and Implications

- The approved five-year update to the town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan requires changes to the existing Zoning Ordinance and subdivision regulations to comply with the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) which provides for maximum density, setbacks, buffers, requirements for nitrogen-reducing technologies for onsite wastewater treatment, and CRMC participation at an early stage of municipal land-use regulatory review.
- Westerly has begun implementation of its *Phase II Storm Water Management Plan*. Implementation of the plan is a five-year process that began in 2004.
- The acquisition of significant natural communities, habitats, and other highly vulnerable undeveloped areas by state, municipal and private groups is one of the most effective means of protecting their natural functions.
- Appropriate development and regulations can protect open space from fragmentation and reduce sprawl, both of which will prevent potential negative impacts on the aesthetic character of the town and its natural resources.

## 3.5 Services and Facilities

Since 1992 when the last comprehensive plan was adopted, Westerly has undertaken a concerted effort to upgrade and modernize its public services and facilities. Recent examples include improvement of the water treatment and distribution system, construction of a new police headquarters, a new Department of Public Works facility, and a new middle school and planned renovation of the Westerly High School. In addition, there has been a privately-funded renovation of the Westerly Hospital and construction of a new animal shelter and a new headquarters for the Westerly Ambulance Corps. Several private, public and quasi-public agencies are located in Westerly and provide social services to its residents.

### 3.5.1 Emergency Services

The Westerly Police Department has 61 full-time employees, 48 of whom are sworn officers. The new police headquarters on Airport Road houses all police operations and serves as a regional emergency operations center.

The town of Westerly is divided into seven fire districts: Westerly, Bradford, Misquamicut, Watch Hill, Dunn's Corners, Shelter Harbor, and Weekapaug. Each fire district is incorporated to provide services within its boundaries. Fire districts have taxation powers and do not rely on appropriations from the town. The fire departments are staffed with volunteers with the exception of one or two paid employees in the Westerly and Dunn's Corners departments. The departments have established working relationships that allow them to provide back up support to each other as needed.

The Westerly Ambulance Corps is a private, non-profit, organization that provides basic life support and advanced life support emergency medical services to Westerly, Pawcatuck, CT, and parts of Stonington, CT. Ambulance services are provided by paid staff (8 full time) and volunteers (20 active members). The all-volunteer Rescue Squad (20-30 active members) specializes in rescue from vehicles, water, and ice.



The non-profit Westerly Hospital has been serving residents since 1925. With a total active medical staff of 100, the hospital provides emergency services, inpatient and outpatient medical and surgical care, diagnostic laboratory services, imaging services and a variety of therapeutic services. Similar to other hospitals in the state, the major issues impacting the hospital are uncompensated care and issues related to low reimbursement rates. During recent years, the hospital has had operating losses. In addition to the hospital, Westerly is served by Visiting Nurse Services Home Health Services of Rhode Island and there are several nursing homes located in town.

### ***3.5.2 Schools***

The majority of the town's school-aged children (93 percent) attend public school. At the conclusion of the 2008-2009 school year, the Westerly School Department closed one of its five elementary schools and moved all fifth grade students to Westerly Middle School due to a decade-long trend of declining enrollment. Projected enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year is 3,175 students including 1,067 in Westerly High School, 967 in Westerly Middle School, and 1,141 in Westerly's four remaining elementary schools. St. Pius X School in Westerly, a private K-8 school, has an enrollment of approximately 230 students.

During the 2006-07 school year, the district had a teacher-student ratio of 1:9, a 95 percent attendance rate and a student drop-out rate of 6 percent. The average teacher had over 10 years of teaching experience and over 50 percent of the teachers had a master's degree. The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) establishes targets in various educational areas. The 2008 report card for Westerly shows that all of the public schools in Westerly met all of the educational targets.

### ***3.5.3 Public Library***

The Westerly Public Library and Wilcox Park are located on approximately 14.7 acres in downtown Westerly. Both the park and the library are owned by the non-profit Memorial and Library Association of Westerly. In 2006, 57 percent of the library's funding came from non-public sources, 22 percent came from the state, and 21 percent came from local sources (Westerly and Stonington and North Stonington, CT). As of mid 2009, the library is undergoing extensive renovations.

### ***3.5.4 Water System***

Westerly's water system is owned by the town and operated by the Water Department which is part of the Department of Public Works. The budget for the town's Water Department is prepared to incorporate all of the costs of operating the department and the water rates are established so that the users pay for all of the activities of the department. There is a small portion of town (approximately 6 percent) that depends on private wells. The area of town served by public water and by both public water and sewers is illustrated in Figure 3-4.

The source of Westerly's public water supply is wells that tap groundwater resources. The quality of the water is good and the town has recently implemented a new and improved disinfection system. The town has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of its groundwater resources. The conclusion is that its existing White Rock sites, combined with its Bradford II and III sites and the Crandall well sites provide sufficient capacity. However, to enhance the town's reserves, a new well is being developed (Bradford IV). The town continues to actively acquire land for aquifer protection. As required by the state of Rhode Island, Westerly has prepared a plan for drought management that includes procedures for addressing drought.



The water distribution system in Westerly is over 125 years old. Extensive investments have been made and are being made to extend its useful life. Improvement projects recently completed include the construction of the new one million gallon Winnapaug Tank, the Winnapaug Tank site lead remediation, permitting of a new pump station and well in Bradford, design of a new main extension on Westerly-Bradford Road, the Tower Street tank rehabilitation and lead soil remediation, and the new White Rock transmission main. A major pipeline rehabilitation study is in progress.

### ***3.5.5 Sanitary Sewer System***

The town of Westerly owns and operates a wastewater collection and treatment system that services approximately 45 percent of the town. The rest of the town is served by individual wastewater treatment systems such as septic tanks with on-site infiltration. In terms of residential parcels only, 39 percent have public sewers and 61% use individual septic systems. The area served is illustrated in Figure 3-4. There are areas within the Westerly Sewer District to which sewer service has not been extended; these include the Misquamicut residential area, Mount Moriah/Springbrook, Apache Drive/Ledward Avenue, and Avondale/Winnapaug Road. Westerly has one wastewater treatment plant that discharges effluent into the Pawcatuck River. The discharge is regulated by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. The plant went through a major upgrade in its biological nutrient removal capability in 2003. The plant is near the threshold of its treatment capacity; however, it has capacity for all currently proposed and approved subdivisions. The town is trying to limit the amount of groundwater that infiltrates the system which will reduce the amount of water that is currently being treated. The plant is designed so that its capacity can be increased by the installation of additional components.

### ***3.5.6 Stormwater System***

The town of Westerly owns and maintains a stormwater sewer system. Most of the system flows into the river or wetlands rather than the ocean. There are no combined sewer overflow connections between the sanitary sewer and storm sewer systems. There are several new residential and commercial developments that have created storm retention basins or ponds in order to comply with newer stormwater regulations. After the private developer builds the basins, the town assumes responsibility for maintenance. The town has an ongoing maintenance program for the storm system that includes cleaning catch basins and pipes and replacing aging pipes and structures. In 2007, the town received approval from Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) to install a municipal storm drainage collection and treatment system serving the Misquamicut area to address serious flooding problems during moderate to heavy storms. Phase I is currently (2009) operational.

### ***3.5.7 Solid Waste Disposal***

The town of Westerly owns and operates a solid waste transfer station which also has a recycling facility. At the transfer station, the town compacts and loads and then trucks the trash to the state's central landfill. The town does not provide curbside pickup. Instead, residents either bring trash to the transfer station in special bags sold by the town or pay private haulers to pick up trash for delivery to the transfer station.

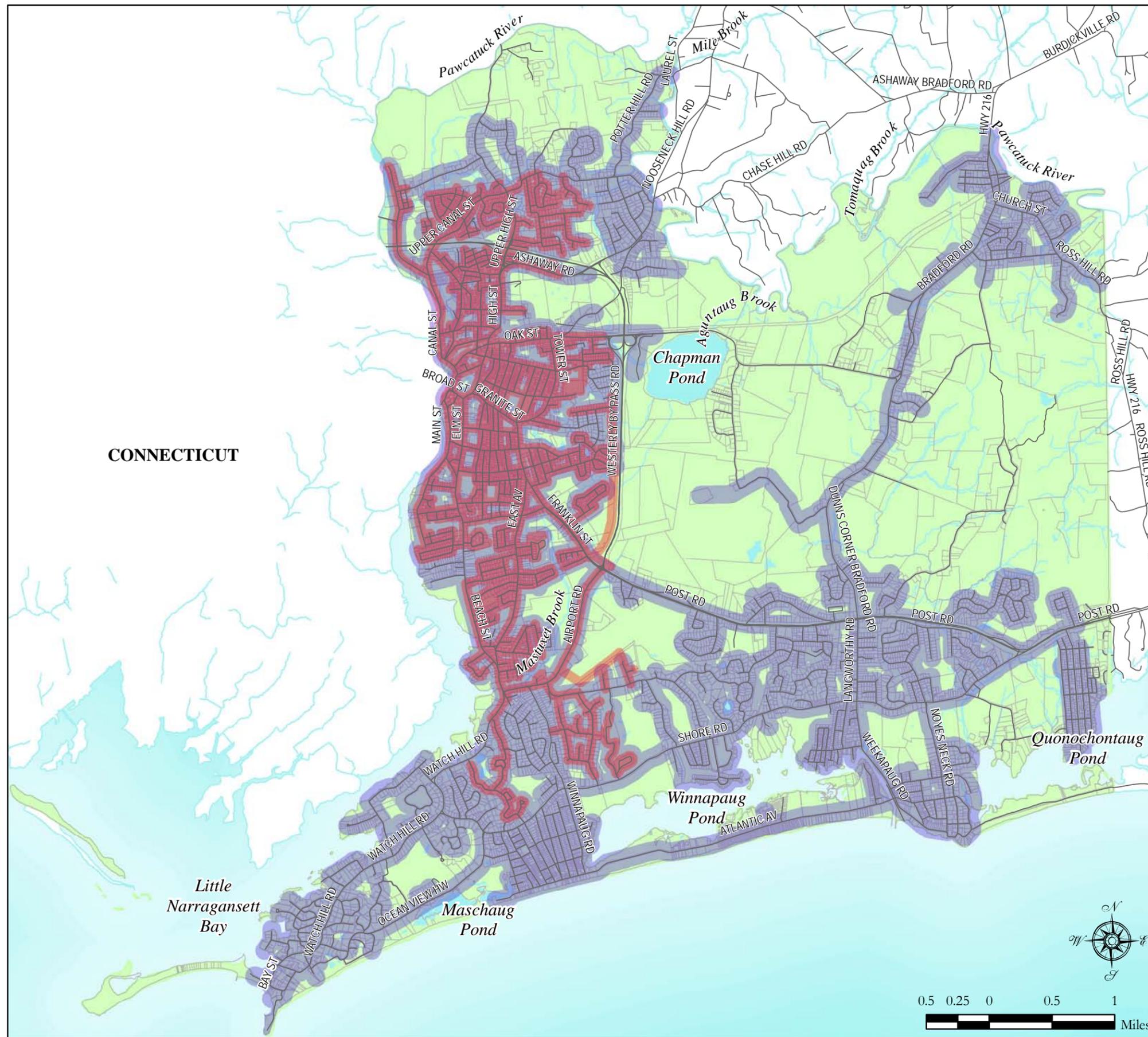


### ***3.5.8 Natural Gas and Electric***

Both gas and electric service are provided by National Grid which owns and maintains the utility poles, electric lines, and gas lines. Gas service is available in some areas of town but the main transmission line is not adequate to provide town-wide service.

### ***3.5.9 Findings and Implications***

- The Westerly School Committee and Town Council must continue to work together to develop and maintain appropriate school facilities for the community. Facility planning and maintenance are on-going concerns.
- Water distribution deficiencies have caused use restrictions in the past. On-going improvement projects have mitigated this problem to a large extent; however, drought planning and water-supply protection remain as issues.
- The wastewater treatment plant in Westerly is nearing its capacity. Design plans for plant expansion exist; however, funding and implementation remain as issues.
- The Westerly Hospital serves the town and surrounding communities in Rhode Island and Connecticut. This facility and most other health facilities in the State are struggling with increasing costs due to uncompensated care and low reimbursement rates from the federal and state governments and insurance providers and related issues.



CONNECTICUT

**Legend**

- Sewer and Water Service Area
- Water Service Area
- Town Boundary
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

map source: RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, peter j. smith & company, inc., CDM

## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 3-4  
Areas Serviced by Public Water  
and Sewer Systems

November 2009



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.





### ***3.6 Open Space and Recreation***

Open space and recreation resources play a critical role in the quality of life in Westerly, serving as important natural resource protection areas and providing opportunities for leisure and exercise.

Since the 1991 Comprehensive Plan was prepared and adopted, there have been many changes to the town's open space and recreation resources. The following are selected highlights of accomplishments of the town of Westerly:

- Acquisition of approximately 135 acres in an aquifer recharge area near Bradford
- Acquisition of shorefront property to create a new Town Beach (Wuskenau Beach)
- Creation of Rotary Park
- Clearing of hiking trails and provision of signage in the Town Forest
- Upgrading town and school playground facilities
- Establishment of the Recreation Department
- Expansion of the Senior Center
- Approval of \$3.0 million open space bond (2006)

#### ***3.6.1 Open Space***

In addition to the town, a variety of public and private organizations preserve open space in Westerly. This combination of preservation efforts in Westerly have protected over 4,000 acres of conservation land, translating into over 21 percent of the town. Approximately 74 percent of the town's conservation land has public access or limited public access. Major owners of conservation land in Westerly include the state of Rhode Island, the Westerly Land Trust, town of Westerly, Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation, Watch Hill Fire District, Weekapaug Fire District, the Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society of Rhode Island, Shelter Harbor Fire District, Nopes Island Conservation Association, Watch Hill Conservancy, Westerly Memorial Library, and various foundations and private owners.

The largest concentration of open space is in the northern portion of Westerly, including the Town Forest, the Woody Hill Management Area, and the Grills Preserve. In the southern and southeastern portion of town, a substantial amount of open space is preserved by four golf courses: the Shelter Harbor Golf Club, the Misquamicut Club, the Weekapaug Golf Club, and Winnapaug Golf Club. Coastal open space includes Misquamicut State Beach, two town beaches, the Weekapaug Fishing Area, Napatree Point Conservation Area, and several beaches owned by fire districts. The Audubon Society of Rhode Island and the Westerly Land Trust maintain large areas of open space along Route 1A. Open spaces in the central portion of the town include swamp lands such as Crandall Swamp and Newton Swamp Management Area.

#### ***3.6.2 Recreation***

A variety of recreational opportunities exist in Westerly. Major water-based recreation includes the state and town beaches and marinas and access points for launching boats and fishing. Non-water based recreation facilities are summarized in Table 3.4. In addition, recreational opportunities are available at nearby facilities including Burlingame State Park, Ninigret Park, Quonochontaug Breachway, and Barn Island Wildlife Management Area.



**Table 3-4 Recreation Resources**

Name	Acres	Facilities
Cimalore Field	25	Baseball and softball fields, basketball courts, playground, picnic area
Craig Field	7	Softball field, basketball court, playground, picnic area
Gingerella Sports Complex	21	Basketball court, tennis court, soccer fields, skate park, playground, picnic area
Rotary Park	19	Tennis courts, volleyball courts, hiking trail, playground, picnic area
Town Forest	229	Hiking trails
Public School Facilities		Baseball and softball fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, soccer fields, football field, outdoor track, gymnasiums, playgrounds
Wilcox Park	15	Walkways, benches
YMCA		Swimming pools, gymnasiums, fitness centers, tennis court
Grills Preserve	482	Hiking trails, cross country track
Dr. John B. Champlin Glacier Park	132	Hiking trails
Trombino Sports Complex	23	Baseball fields
Golf Clubs (listed under open space)		Private, semi-private, and public

### *3.6.3 Findings and Implications*

- A systematic prioritized plan, including potential funding alternatives, is needed for open space preservation.
- Both the state and the town propose greenways that follow the Pawcatuck River and the town’s coastline.
- The public has long supported development of a bikeway system; however, previous attempts to create one have been unsuccessful.
- Trails are the most clearly demanded recreation in state-wide surveys. It is necessary to identify trail needs in the town and continue to develop interconnected pedestrian paths.
- Seventy-nine percent of respondents in the Westerly community survey agreed or strongly agreed that the riverfront should be developed with more greenspace. This finding implies that one of the key recreation focuses should be on the development of greenspace along the river, enhancing the efforts of the riverwalk project.



## ***3.7 Transportation Network***

### ***3.7.1 Roads and Traffic***

The town Engineering Department has been proactive in designing and implementing a program for the rehabilitation and maintenance of local roads and bridges. There is a comprehensive pavement management plan in place that determines specifically where money is to be used for resurfacing of roadways and there is bond money available for roadway reconstruction, roadway drainage, and overall improvements to town roads. Traffic congestion is an important problem in Westerly, especially in the summer when the population swells with visitors to the beaches. At times traffic volume approaches gridlock in the Route 78-Airport Road-Winnapaug Road area and at the roads that feed into Route 1A.

### ***3.7.2 Parking***

Parking is an important concern for many in the downtown area. Strategies to decrease demand for on-street parking in the downtown area include encouraging walking and bicycling, exploring opportunities for shuttle bus service, and alternative parking facilities, and identifying properties that provide opportunities for parking facilities and shuttle bus stops. As downtown redevelops and its most vital areas increase in size, motorists may be more willing to walk a block or two, particularly if there is an opportunity for window shopping along the way. Parking shortages in other areas of town include the train station, Watch Hill, and Misquamicut.

### ***3.7.3 Bus, Van and Taxi Service***

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) provides public transportation service for the state of Rhode Island. Within Westerly, service is limited but there is some service extending to Wakefield. Park-n-Ride service operated by RIPTA provides transport between the Westerly rail station and Providence. Cab service and paratransit service are also available.

### ***3.7.4 Rail Service***

The Westerly Train Station, renovated in 1999, provides Amtrak service. Currently (2009) the station is being studied for potential commuter rail service to New London, CT (17 miles away) and to Providence (44 miles away). Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) has determined that the location of the Westerly station is within a ten minute walk of the surrounding downtown area and is, therefore, suitable as a commuter rail station. One potential problem with expanded service is the lack of parking; there are only 37 parking spaces at the station.

Residents who provided input to the development of this Comprehensive Plan agreed that commuter rail accessibility should be a high priority for transportation improvements within Westerly. Community members and transportation agencies have also indicated that beyond commuting to and from work, rail service would provide a convenient means of transportation between Westerly and the soon-to-be-completed rail station at T.F. Green Airport.

A commuter rail system with extensions to South County stations is in the planning stage and discussions with the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) and Amtrak have taken place. Connecticut's Shoreline East rail runs to New London and there has been interest in extending the Shoreline East to Westerly. One major barrier, however, is the series of drawbridges along the path where boat and train traffic intersect. Shoreline East, however, is currently planning renovations to



all stations of their line. This stretch of rail from New London to Providence is the only part of the New York to Boston corridor not connected by commuter rail.

### ***3.7.5 Air Service***

The Westerly State Airport is state-owned and operated by the Rhode Island Airport Corporation to serve the aviation needs of Westerly and nearby communities. The airport serves private and corporate aircraft and New England Airlines which provides important commercial passenger and cargo service between Westerly and Block Island. Recreational flying is the most frequent activity at the airport; however, corporate and business activity and training and flight instruction are also supported at the airport. In the summer, the airport serves seasonal residents and vacationing visitors in addition to its regular year-round commercial and general aviation traffic. The Rhode Island State Airport System Plan dated September 2007 estimates that Westerly State Airport in 2006 had 9,900 enplanements and 15,400 operations. Enplanements are defined as the number of passengers boarding departing flights and operations are defined as the total number of takeoffs and landings.

### ***3.7.6 Water Access for Boaters***

Boats can be launched during the operating season at the Westerly marina, which is free to all Westerly residents and is operated under a lease agreement between the owners of the marina and the town. Another free boat launch area with parking for boat trailers is the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management facility located on Main Street. There are several other marinas on the Pawcatuck River where boat ramps are available for a fee. Westerly has had a Harbor Management Plan under development for some time and its successful completion should help manage the growing activity within the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay.

### ***3.7.7 Bicycle Travel***

RIDOT has conducted studies of a shoreline bikeway that would include roadways within the towns of Charlestown and Westerly. The roadways would be signed as “shared roadways” to alert drivers that the roadway is to be shared with bicycles. The plan has not yet been implemented.

### ***3.7.8 Findings and Implications***

- Shared use of driveways ought to be considered for adjacent uses to minimize impacts to traffic flow currently experienced as a result of numerous access points along short stretches of roadway.
- Extension of commuter rail to Westerly should be encouraged.
- Improvements to the existing Westerly Train Station are part of state transportation plans. Additional parking is needed to support these plans.
- Innovative methods to address parking issues in town are needed.
- According to the Rhode Island State Airport System Plan dated September 2007, Westerly State Airport enplanements (the number of passengers boarding departing flights) are expected to increase by 1.8 percent per year on average, reaching 13,600 in 2021.



### 3.8 Historic and Cultural Resources

Westerly was incorporated as a town in 1669 and over the years it has remained a hub of commerce and recreation in southern Rhode Island. The abundance of historic resources has not gone unnoticed. In 2002 the town was designated one of the “Dozen Distinctive Destinations” which are selected each year by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to reflect “unique and lovingly preserved communities in the United States.”

#### 3.8.1 Districts and Neighborhoods

The core of Westerly is approximately bounded by the Pawcatuck River between Margin Street and the Stillman Avenue Bridge on the west; Canal Street and the Amtrak rail tracks on the North; Tower Street, Granite Street, and Franklin Street on the east; and Wells Street and Beach Street on the south. Westerly also has a collection of distinct villages which provides a glimpse into the town’s historic past whether they are commercial centers, coastal communities, or mill towns. These villages and districts are listed below and identified on Figure 2-1.

**Table 3-5 Villages and Districts**

Avondale	North End	Watch Hill
Bradford	Potter Hill	Weekapaug
Misquamicut	Shelter Harbor	White Rock

There are six neighborhoods in Westerly that are listed as Historic Districts on the National Register of Historic Places: Bradford Village, Main Street, North End, Watch Hill, Westerly Downtown, and Wilcox Park. In addition to historic districts, there are eight structures and sites in the town which have been listed individually on the National Register. These are: Babcock-Smith House, Flying Horse Carousel, Former Immaculate Conception Church (now George Kent Performance Hall), Lewis-Card-Perry House, Nursery Site RI-273, U.S. Post Office (Broad and High Streets), Westerly Armory, and Weekapaug Inn.

#### 3.8.2 Cultural Resources

There are a variety of non-profit cultural institutions and events which are important to the community and its tourist industry. Performing arts include the Chorus of Westerly which has programs year round in its concert hall and a Summer Pops concert in Wilcox Park; the Granite Theater; and the Shakespeare-in-the-Park series of summer plays. The Westerly Armory houses the Westerly Band which is the oldest civic band in the country. The town contributes to several of these programs and sponsors other music programs in the summer. Westerly is also home to artists, many of whom live and work in the state-recognized Westerly Arts District. Special benefits are provided to artists and art facilities at these specially designated areas of downtown Westerly.

The Memorial and Library Association of Westerly owns and operates the Westerly Public Library, itself built as a Civil War memorial, and the surrounding 14-acre Wilcox Park. Although Westerly is a medium sized community, its library collection is the second most actively used in the state. Wilcox Park which was designed in 1898 is perhaps the single most character-generating feature in Westerly’s downtown and is the site of numerous community activities throughout the year.



### *3.8.3 Findings and Implications*

- The town is rich in historic buildings and districts that help to create its character. Opportunities exist for preservation and careful development of these districts and structures.
- The town has successfully taken advantage of the Community Development Block Grant program to restore and enhance historic areas and sites. This approach could be more widely employed.
- Within Westerly is an Arts District that provides tax incentives for artists who live and work in Westerly and for gallery spaces in the District. Utilization of this program can support redevelopment.

## 4.0 *The Future*

### 4.1 *Vision and Values: Where do we want to be in 2025?*

As stated in Chapter 1, this Comprehensive Plan envisions Westerly as a friendly and safe community that has preserved its quality of life for all generations, protected its distinctive heritage and extraordinary cultural and natural resources, and dedicated itself to fiscally-sound government. Looking forward to 2025 evokes an image of what the future holds:

- Westerly of 2025 will be a unique and special place, retaining its distinctive neighborhoods, history, traditions and natural beauty, while growing in a way to meet its residents' needs for a vibrant place to live, raise and educate families, and work.
- Westerly will have contained sprawl, and the development of housing and commerce will have been thoughtfully managed to meet the needs of residents of all generations and to promote a prosperous economy.
- Downtown Westerly will be a premier center for people, culture and transportation, and will be well-connected to its shoreline and inland neighborhoods through programs and services of community-wide interest.
- Westerly will have secured its water supply for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and carried out its extensive programs of infrastructure revitalization including water, sewer and stormwater management systems and upgrading of town facilities.
- The shoreline, Pawcatuck River, salt ponds and greenspace will remain Westerly's trademark, carefully managed to sustain their uses while preserving their health and natural beauty for future generations to enjoy.

In developing this Comprehensive Plan, an important set of values evolved which guided the creation of the Plan and will shape the future landscape of Westerly. These values are described below to assist residents in understanding the Plan and to suggest what they should anticipate during its implementation.

1. *Protect the integrity of the town's existing zoning map with limited changes to density.* The current districts represent the actual development patterns in the community which the Plan intends to preserve.
2. *Focus on redevelopment/revitalization of commercial/industrial districts and traditional residential neighborhoods.* It is important to Westerly citizens to retain the town's traditional character and heritage while discouraging further commercial sprawl.
3. *Preserve Westerly's sense of place, physical character, open space and natural resources.* Public meetings and surveys clearly indicate the highest priority of Westerly residents is protection of our waterfront, beaches, water quality and environmentally-sensitive lands.
4. *Maintain critical infrastructure as a high priority, especially including our roads and our water and sewer systems.* Water supply protection and potential expansion of the town's wastewater treatment plant are highly important issues for future consideration.



5. *Limit automobile traffic through support of commuter rail service and establishment of local pedestrian and bicycle networks.* Westerly can take full advantage of its strategic location between Boston and New York, exceptional transportation assets, and extraordinary local recreational opportunities.
6. *Promote the quality and vitality of locally-owned businesses.* This includes enhancing the commercial diversity of the town and providing more local well-paying jobs for our residents.
7. *Encourage a range of viable housing options for all income and age groups.* It is to Westerly's advantage to retain as residents younger professionals and families who represent our future and retiring seniors who have devoted their lives to the community.
8. *Support critical institutions such as the school system, the hospital, the library and the strong volunteer spirit that exists in Westerly.* People choose to live where their children get a good education, where they have access to quality healthcare, and where they can participate in and contribute to community activities.
9. *Implement the Plan while maintaining the sound financial condition of the town.* We cannot fail to implement the Plan due to financial constraints but neither can we jeopardize the financial condition of our town.

A crucial ingredient in Westerly's future is the town's continued reliance on volunteers and not-for-profit organizations to provide important services such as fire protection, ambulance and other emergency services, and the public library. The Plan specifies the need for increased coordination between the town and the organizations that provide these services for mutual benefit. The Westerly Hospital, in addition to being the largest employer in town, provides important medical services to the region. Its continuing success is critical to the future of the town and therefore, there are several actions in the Plan directed towards increasing support for the hospital.

This chapter of the Plan includes a discussion of the long-term priorities of our community and how they are supportive of and compatible with *Land Use 2025: Rhode Island Land Use Policies and Plan*; a Build-Out Analysis which describes the town's capacity for development under the existing zoning ordinance; a Future Land Use Plan which demonstrates in text and graphic form the future strategy and land use policy of our town including patterns of development and conservation; and critical observations on the importance of financially supporting the Plan implementation and protecting the future integrity of the town's financial position.

## ***4.2 Long-term Priorities***

### ***4.2.1 Introduction***

This section discusses the town's longer-term priorities, in the context of important historical accomplishments, and the compatibility of the Comprehensive Plan with *Land Use 2025: Rhode Island Land Use Policies and Plan*.

Westerly has been at the forefront of regulating land use and providing infrastructure to accommodate land development. In 1897, the town of Westerly purchased the private Westerly Water Works to create its own municipal water system. By the mid-1920's, acting on authority from the Rhode Island General Assembly, the town adopted a Zoning Ordinance. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, it substantially increased the area served by municipal sewer disposal and upgraded its treatment plant not only to increase its capacity but to enhance the level of treatment. In the last decade, the town has substantially revised its Zoning Ordinance and other land use



regulations while acting flexibly to accommodate development it has deemed desirable. Throughout the public outreach activities conducted in support of this Plan, citizens overwhelmingly expressed love for Westerly while stressing the importance of continually improving its infrastructure and related public services. Consistent with these sentiments, this Plan's vision for the future is grounded in respecting Westerly's history and traditions, cherishing its natural resources, and thoughtfully managing growth and development.

The four goals articulated in *Land Use 2025: Rhode Island Land Use Policies and Plan* provided a constant touch-point for development of this Comprehensive Plan and the longer term view of Westerly's future. These goals are:

- Goal 1: Build the Greenspace and Greenways System
- Goal 2: Achieve Excellence in Community Design
- Goal 3: Develop First-class Supporting Infrastructure
- Goal 4: Implement the Vision

### ***4.2.2 Build the Greenspace and Greenways System***

#### ***4.2.2.1 Protect Open Space and Important Land Features***

The town must employ and support a full array of public, charitable, private and multi-sector strategies to acquire and/or otherwise protect areas of open space and important natural land features.

Since the adoption of Westerly's existing Comprehensive Plan, substantial areas of open space for preservation and recreational use have been acquired or otherwise protected. Charitable entities such as the Westerly Land Trust and Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation have been active and successful in both acquiring ownership of open space land or development rights. The town of Westerly has acquired multiple sites for well head and aquifer protection and for recreational use.

The town and its charitable organizations will continue to use traditional means of property acquisition, but it must also continue to employ other techniques to achieve its objectives without direct expenditure of taxpayer and water-user revenue. Especially in uncertain economic times, federal, state and local government contributions to such acquisition and protection efforts are likely to be reduced. The lessons of Westerly's experiences will need to be employed to continue the success of the past, preserve the images and appearance of Westerly, and yet allow sustainable vibrant growth.

An example of public-private-charitable sector collaboration is Champlin Woods at Winnapaug Pond which preserved 134.5 acres of unique land features, a 2,100 foot long undisturbed scenic roadscapes and tree canopy, and completed the preservation of a 7,800 foot wide prehistoric land formation. Under local and state land use regulations, the 173.09 acre site had the capability of being divided into 88 building lots including up to 17 lots along Shore Road (Scenic Route 1A), each with its own driveway cut and the emasculation of the canopy. The Westerly Land Trust and the private Newbury Development Corporation partnered in the acquisition of the site with the joint objective of achieving development of the site at a density otherwise permitted but confining the area of development and disturbance to 38.6 acres and preservation of the remaining acres. The project approval includes 60 two-bedroom homes, and a 171 room congregate care facility, which



approximates the number of bedrooms which would have been built in an 88 lot conventional subdivision.

The Town Council of the town of Westerly accommodated this “win–win development” (see Providence Sunday Journal, March 13, 2005) by:

- adding “assisted living/congregate housing” to the uses allowed under its “Large Parcel Alternative Development” Zoning Ordinance provision;
- amending its Comprehensive Plan to clarify the appropriate locations for assisted living/congregate housing; and
- adopting an amendment to the town’s sewer district to allow the site to be serviced by public sewer based upon testimony that absent the amendment, the on-site disposal of septic wastewater would require a much larger area of development.

The Zoning Board granted the required special use permit and the Planning Board granted Development Plan Review approval.

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation financially contributed to the Westerly Land Trust for the scenic roadway preservation aspect. The state Coastal Resources Management Council agreed to review the project based upon the total bedroom count analysis rather than the number of “dwelling units”.

The use of “cluster-subdivision” regulations have been used to permit the same number of residential building lots on a site at a reduced size while protecting land along the Pawcatuck River in Bradford and land and the scenic vista across Spring Pond on Watch Hill Road. The use of the “multifamily dwellings” provisions of the Zoning Ordinance by other developers, also in conjunction with the Westerly Land Trust, has significantly contributed to the Land Trust’s land holdings along Mastuxet Brook.

Conservation Subdivision regulations should be adopted as well as other Smart-Growth options. All town entities involved in land use regulations and permitting should be cognizant of newer land-use regulatory alternatives, consider their implementation and be flexible in the use of their powers so that the development which it authorizes also protects important greenspace and greenway systems. Pro-active approaches at the earliest stages of the regulatory process rather than a reactive response later can be valuable in achieving the town’s desired objectives.

#### ***4.2.2.2 Connect Greenspace, Recreational Land and Commercial Areas by Means and Methods other than Automobiles***

As noted above, while more needs to be accomplished great strides have been achieved in the protection of open space and important land features. However, there has been little progress in access to these areas by means other than roadway and automobiles. If the last twenty years has created a culture of open space acquisition and protection, the challenge of the next twenty years is the creation of a greenspace system of connections and access other than by roadways and automobiles.

The public outreach which occurred in relation to this plan shows widespread support for the creation of bike and walking trails and paths. The state of Rhode Island’s initiatives to create such facilities for the East Bay and South Kingstown–Narragansett are wildly successful. While the Plan



calls for the establishment of such facilities generally, it prioritizes the creation of a discrete specific scenic coastal loop.

The *Land Use 2025* plan encourages the identification of an urban services area in which higher density infill development and revitalization or retrofitting are encouraged. The Westerly Plan responds by identifying an Urban Services Area which principally encompasses the Downtown Commercial Districts and some surrounding HDR-6 and HDR-15 district land, including properties within and adjacent to the core of Westerly as described in paragraph 3.8.1. The area is serviced by municipal water and sewer. Pedestrian sidewalks (of various state of repair) exist in most of the Urban Services Area, while streetscapes are less prevalent and spotty. Its entire western boundary is the Pawcatuck River. Wilcox Park is the most prominent greenspace feature in this area. This Plan commits to focus redevelopment, revitalization and growth initiatives in this historic urban center, while preserving the best attributes of the traditional core of Westerly that contains vital residential, municipal, commercial, institutional and school activities. The approximate area identified in this Plan is not co-extensive with the entire area referenced in the state *Land Use 2025* plan because of the critical necessity of focusing Westerly's resources on the highest potential and most important opportunities for redevelopment and revitalization.

While there is a public access boat launch on this portion of the river, there are no other public recreational space or dock spaces to permit water travel. There is no portion of the river where an adjacent riverwalk is present.

Our identification of the need for connecting the various uses in the area other than by automobile is confirmed by the recent article "Making Suburbia More Livable", [The Wall Street Journal](#), Saturday-Sunday, September 19-20, 2009, which highlights:

"Retrofitting typically invokes creating a compact walkable community".

### ***4.2.3 Achieve Excellence in Community Design***

The Zoning Ordinance adopted in 1998 to implement the existing Comprehensive Plan initiated Development Plan Review by the Planning Board for all uses other than one- and two-family homes. It also introduced General Development Standards and Development Standards for Particular Uses. In the interim 11 years some refinements and additional provisions have been added.

Most significantly, in October 2006, Development Standards for the Shore Commercial-Watch Hill (SC-WH) zoning district were added. The entire area of that district is within the Watch Hill Historic District which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Zoning Ordinance provides standards which are intended to reflect the character-generating elements of the particular historic district for the Planning Board to apply in its Development Plan Review of proposed development in the area.

There are five other Westerly neighborhoods listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Excellence in design requires a study of each of these areas and the development and adoption of standards for each as was achieved in the SC-WH district.



The town Charter has also been recently amended to establish an Architectural Review Board. The scope of its reach and the standards to be applied are yet to be determined by the Town Council. As in other first time initiatives the limits of public support and acceptance will be a challenge; however, the new charter provision offers a new opportunity to contribute to excellence in community design.

The character of Westerly is already substantially defined by existing structures and uses, many of which are facing challenges which require redevelopment, renovations and revitalization.

Again our recent experiences should be a strong signal that Westerly officials appreciate both the value and challenges presented and will work cooperatively to achieve preservation of our iconic images while using the means at their disposal to accommodate the financial challenges such undertakings present.

The Town Council joined with conservation groups in a leap of faith to allow the “preservation, restoration and/or replication” of the Ocean House, the last of the multiple historic oceanfront hotels to survive in the Watch Hill area. It adopted specific development standards developed by the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission to be incorporated in any such effort together with a significant review process by third-party engineers and architects at the owner’s expense. Simultaneously, it accommodated the financial challenges by permitting a number of two-bedroom luxury suites to be incorporated in the hotel structure which may be sold under a condominium arrangement under Rhode Island law. The same provisions were subsequently extended to the Weekapaug Inn, another historic hotel located on an “estuarine embayment” in the Weekapaug area.

Despite the significant economic downturn the Ocean House project is proceeding as a replication of its “historic kernel” with near unanimous acceptance of its accuracy.

The successful revitalization of the historic Westerly downtown area and the enhanced development of the Urban Services Area which encompasses and surrounds it will require the same spirit of cooperation, creativity and flexibility. Transforming the appearance of the Route 1 commercial corridor from “everywhere US Route 1” to a distinctive, inviting, safe, commercial, professional and residential area will similarly require new efforts including incentives to property owners.

#### ***4.2.4 Maintain and Develop First-class Supporting Infrastructure***

Achieving the future vision of Westerly requires that the town maintain and develop a first-class supporting infrastructure in critical areas such as water, sewer, stormwater and facilities. While outside of their direct control, municipal officials must also lead the coordination, planning and implementation of private utilities (electricity, telecommunications and gas) with respect to capacity and supply, as the town addresses its own infrastructure issues, including maintenance, repair and replacement. This effort also requires ongoing coordination with adjoining communities. The repair and extension of public sidewalks is also essential to connecting the areas of greenspaces and greenways of the town. Again, giving priority to the Urban Services Area and the streetscapes (hardscapes and softscapes) is essential for achieving the future vision for this area.

##### ***4.2.4.1 Water***

The availability of a high quality and abundant municipal water supply for industrial and domestic use and fire suppression is essential. This requires protection of our water supply sources.



Continued concentration on the maintenance and enhancement of the water distribution systems is essential. The prioritized program of assessment and replacement of the mechanical and distribution elements of the system needs to remain at the forefront.

#### ***4.2.4.2 Sewer***

In addition to the public health aspects of the municipal sewer system, the availability of such a properly functioning system enables development to be concentrated and greenspace to be protected. For example, the amount of land preservation at Champlin Woods at Winnapaug Pond could not have been achieved without the availability of municipal sanitary sewers. If the Urban Services Area is to be the centerpiece of future development, adequate treatment capacity and transmission line integrity are necessary. Similarly, adequate sewer capacity is essential to economic development, redevelopment and retrofitting of underutilized structures and property.

For Westerly, the first step toward achieving a first-class system is a firm commitment to eliminate the excessive stormwater and groundwater infiltration into the system. The construction of the additional components of the plant to its design capacity and identification of areas of system expansion need to be part of a periodically updated facilities plan. This will enable the town to be ready to obtain any and all federal, state and/or private funds available for such purposes. It will also allow these needs to be part of the town's prioritized long-term capital investment program.

#### ***4.2.4.3 Stormwater***

The stormwater collection system in the Urban Services Area has experienced several failures in the recent past. A study followed by a systematic prioritized program to address this issue is immediately necessary. Implementation of new federal mandates with respect to stormwater management and its costs need to be understood and planned for. The construction of the Watch Hill drain project which is in permitting and completion of Phase II of the Misquamicut drain project are essential to the future vision.

#### ***4.2.4.4 School Facilities***

Meeting all the public works and private utility infrastructure needs outlined above are necessary for the future vision of Westerly. However, if the town neglects to achieve a first-class educational system by providing adequate, clean and comfortable school facilities offering superior educational opportunities for each child, the vibrant place to live, work, raise and educate a family cannot be achieved. Our current demographic data and projections suggest that the town is at a unique time to reassess its student mix and needs, educational objectives and delivery systems.

### ***4.3 Build-out Analysis***

#### ***4.3.1 Capacity Analysis***

A potential capacity analysis was performed based on the current zoning. A capacity analysis estimates the amount of development that could occur based on a set of assumptions. This analysis will only analyze the amount of new development that can occur on developable vacant and agricultural land. It is impossible to determine the amount of development that would occur as a result of infill and redevelopment.

The analysis was performed using a Geographical Information System (GIS) program. The zoning layer was combined with the land use layer so that the resulting layer had attributes of both existing



land use and existing zoning districts. A constraints layer was created consisting of wetlands with a 50 foot buffer, conservation areas, 200 foot buffer from the shoreline and the Pawcatuck River, and a 100 foot buffer from all other streams. These areas were considered undevelopable. The constraints layer was combined with the zoning/land use layer and the constraint areas were removed. The GIS program calculated the areas of each polygon within this combined layer. The resulting database was then brought into an Excel spreadsheet.

At this point, the areas could be summarized by land use and zoning district. Only the vacant and agricultural land uses were summarized. Based on the zoning district, calculations were performed on the resulting areas to establish the possible number of residential units, commercial space, and industrial space that could be developed. Residential units are based on the minimum lot size permitted in each of the residential zoning districts. The commercial districts did not specify a floor area ratio or maximum building coverage. Maximum impervious surface was used to control the size of buildings. This analysis assumes that half of the impervious surface specified in the Westerly Zoning Ordinance is used for building and half for parking. The summarized areas were multiplied by half of the impervious surface percentage to get the amount of commercial space. A similar assumption was used for industrial districts for the same reason. Both the commercial space and the industrial space assume only one floor of development.

The methodology used for this analysis has limitations. First, it assumes that there is an unlimited demand for land and development and it builds out to the maximum extent possible. There is the assumption that all parcels created can be divided perfectly into the overall area. In order to compensate for this, 20 percent of the area was deducted from the summarized areas. This analysis is designed for comparison and not as a prediction of concrete numbers.

#### Residential Districts

The following calculations were used for residential districts:

- RR-60            Area÷60,000 = Residential Units
- LDR-43        Area÷43,000 = Residential Units
- LDR-40        Area÷40,000 = Residential Units
- MDR-30        Area÷30,000 = Residential Units
- MDR-20        Area÷20,000 = Residential Units
- HDR-15        Area÷15,000 = Residential Units
- HDR-10        Area÷10,000 = Residential Units
- HDR-6         Area÷6,000 = Residential Units
- Any District in CRMC SAMP        Area÷87,120 = Residential Units



Commercial Districts

The following calculations were used on commercial districts:

- P-15 (30.0%) Area = Commercial Space
- NB (30.0%) Area = Commercial Space
- HC (37.5%) Area = Commercial Space
- DC (50.0%) Area = Commercial Space
- DCII (25.0%) Area = Commercial Space
- SC-G (27.5%) Area = Commercial Space
- SC-WH (27.5%) Area = Commercial Space
- MC (37.5%) Area = Commercial Space
- GC (37.5%) Area = Commercial Space

Industrial Districts

The following calculations were used on industrial districts:

- GI (35.0%) Area = Industrial Space
- LI (25.0%) Area = Industrial Space
- ORAT (32.5%) Area = Industrial Space



The results of the capacity analysis are summarized in Table 4-1 below. The numbers presented are rounded off to the nearest 10 units or 1,000 square feet.

**Table 4-1 Capacity Analysis Results**

	Zone	Area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	20% Adjusted Area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Residential Units	Commercial Space (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Industrial Space (ft <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Residential</b>	RR-60	45,068,446	36,054,757	600		
	LDR-43	1,312,901	1,050,321	20		
	LDR-40	13,737,692	10,990,154	270		
	MDR-30	6,568,835	5,255,068	180		
	MDR-20	4,077,160	3,261,728	160		
	HDR-15	3,486,356	2,789,085	190		
	HDR-10	-	-	-		
	HDR-6	1,441,137	1,152,910	190		
	CRMC SAMP	15,177,223	12,141,778	140		
<b>Commercial</b>	P-15	426,819	341,455		102,000	
	NB	114,427	91,542		27,000	
	HC	668,106	534,485		200,000	
	DC	6,733	5,386		3,000	
	DCII	154,699	123,759		31,000	
	SC-G	80,193	64,154		18,000	
	SC-WH	43,908	35,126		10,000	
	MC	14,450	11,560		4,000	
	GC	29,472	23,577		9,000	
<b>Industrial</b>	GI	585,174	468,139			164,000
	LI	20,308	16,247			4,000
	ORAT	4,612	3,690			1,000
				<b>1,750</b>	<b>404,000</b>	<b>169,000</b>

Source: Westerly Planning Department, peter j. smith & company, inc.  
 Note: Data from HDR-10 is included in the CRMC SAMP area.



### ***4.3.2 Build-out Analysis Implications***

#### ***4.3.2.1 Residential***

The build-out analysis estimates that under the existing Zoning Ordinance approximately 1,750 additional residential units can be built in Westerly.

The Plan recommends that the residential zoning districts within the town remain essentially unchanged. This recommendation considers the rate of growth which has occurred in the ten-year period following the adoption of the current Zoning Ordinance map and text. During the ten-year period of January 1, 1999 to December 31, 2008, 1,266 residential dwelling units were constructed. The ordinance marked a significant departure from prior ordinances which had allowed, as of right, duplex buildings including units with unlimited bedrooms, on lots which did not require twice the land area as required for a single-family home. There was significant community concern expressed with respect to these provisions. The ordinance responded with provisions which limit the districts in which duplex buildings are allowed; require a special use permit in the residential district in which they are allowed; and require twice the land area as necessary for a single-family home. The result is that in the ten-year time period only 31 duplex buildings with 62 units were built.

Simultaneously, the 1998 ordinance adopted new regulations with respect to multi-family dwellings. The regulations allow for the number of bedrooms in a multi-family complex to reflect the predicted number if the site were built out as single-family homes, but limits each individual unit to two bedrooms. Studies suggested the number of school age children would be relatively small in such complexes. The number of such two-bedroom units constructed in the ten-year period is 207, or more than 16 percent of new housing stock.

Despite the increase of 1,266 dwelling units, during this ten-year period the total public school population in the community has dropped from 3,605 on October 1, 1999 to 3,232 on October 1, 2008 – a more than 10 percent decline. Current enrollment suggests this trend will continue. For example, the second grade class in 1998-99 was the largest in the school district with 306 students. This class was the 2008-09 senior class. In contrast, the 2008-09 second grade class had only 243 students or 20 percent fewer students than the second grade class a decade earlier.

It is therefore deemed not necessary to further change the zoning districts or the regulations applicable within each district to control future growth. Comparison of the estimated additional residential unit capacity (1,750) and the historic building growth over the last ten years (1,266) demonstrates a relatively small capability for growth under the traditional “cookie cutter” subdivision development approach. This Plan’s recommendation with respect to generally not increasing density is a deliberate attempt to responsibly limit such further development. However, the Plan encourages and provides accommodation for future growth including density intensification within the Urban Services Area, where public utilities and infrastructure are in place. Mixed-use and in-fill development together with revitalization and retrofitting of existing properties are all strategies identified for this area.



When 2010 federal census information is available and disaggregated, town officials must address the future implications for schools and school children and for services required by an aging overall local population. Important questions must be thoroughly examined such as – are more households seasonal and occupation therefore not reflected in the census, or has the average occupancy in year-round homes declined?

#### ***4.3.2.2 Commercial***

The build-out analysis estimates a total of 404,000 square feet of commercial space can be added in the town. This includes commercial space ranging from the less intrusive Neighborhood Business (27,000 sq. ft.) and Professional (102,000 sq. ft.) to Highway Commercial (200,000 sq. ft.).

This Plan recognizes that Westerly has historically been the regional center for commercial and professional services. Sufficient area exists to continue in that role.

It is important to understand that there is no large vacant tract of land remaining in the Highway Commercial district. Rather there are only 19 vacant parcels within this district, the largest being approximately four acres. Several parcels do not have access to public sewers which is an additional constraint on development. This Plan specifically provides that this district should not be enlarged. It is intended that this recommendation and revised development standards for new commercial development on vacant property will control commercial sprawl. By such limitation it is also intended that renewed interest in renovation, restoration and redevelopment of existing Highway Commercial properties will be achieved.

#### ***4.3.2.3 Industrial***

Available industrial land is extremely limited. However, areas which have the infrastructure available for industrial development but which are also isolated enough to be compatible with existing residential development are not apparent.

There are three large industrial parcels zoned General Industrial or Light Industrial that are currently operated as granite quarries. These parcels – in White Rock, on Old Hopkinton Road, and in Bradford – have been excluded from this analysis since they are unlikely to be developed for other uses during the timeframe of this Plan.

Town officials necessarily must therefore encourage the expanded use of underutilized industrial facilities provided that doing so is consistent with environmental considerations.

The lack of industrial land also means that Westerly must participate in regional economic development initiatives. This recognizes new job opportunities in the region not only provide job opportunities for Westerly residents but also for the larger regional population. Such opportunities contribute to the vibrant commercial and professional service sectors in Westerly.



## **4.4 Future Land Use Plan**

### **4.4.1 Introduction**

The key theme of this Plan is balance. The Plan recognizes the need for both preservation and development and the importance of establishing a balance between them. Included among its goals are maintaining Westerly's character and heritage and preserving open space and irreplaceable natural resources. The Plan also calls for providing for economic development and for the homes, jobs and services needed by current and future generations. It acknowledges the need for balance among the various aspects of Westerly which include a home to year-round and seasonal residents, a short-term tourist destination, and a regional service and retail center. The goals, objectives, and actions enumerated in the next chapter provide specific detail on how balance among these competing needs can be achieved through careful planning.

In this section some of the major characteristics of the Comprehensive Plan are reviewed with an emphasis on how the goals, objectives, actions, and policies will affect future land use, transportation, infrastructure, and services and with a focus on the first five years of plan implementation. The Plan should be viewed as a whole because, taken together, its various elements reinforce each other and present a comprehensive and coherent view of Westerly's future. After the priorities presented in the five-year implementation plan are achieved, another group of actions will be developed for the next five years. In this way, Westerly will move steadily and incrementally towards achieving the long-term goals and objectives outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.

The Future Land Use Plan map is included as Figure 4-1 and its details are discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **4.4.2 Zoning**

No major changes in current zoning districts are proposed in the Plan. However, there will be changes in land use regulations and land use. Changes under the scope of the Plan include the following:

- current zoning allows growth in residential land use, as covered under the build-out analysis in the previous section of the Plan
- this growth could result in the loss of some land that is used for agriculture or is currently open space (for example, forest land) because the underlying zoning allows for residential or commercial use
- modern development methods such as conservation development and cluster development should be used to protect the most valuable aspects of development sites
- additional increases in residential density may be allowed in certain specified areas (for example, the urban core) and as incentives for certain kinds of development (for example, affordable housing) except in these areas, intensification of residential zoning will not be allowed
- regulations required for the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) near the salt ponds will be included in the Westerly zoning ordinance
- redevelopment of existing commercial and residential areas is encouraged
- extension of the highway commercial zone will be prohibited



- zoning provisions in commercial and residential areas may be needed to encourage additional green space and improve aesthetics

#### ***4.4.3 Residential***

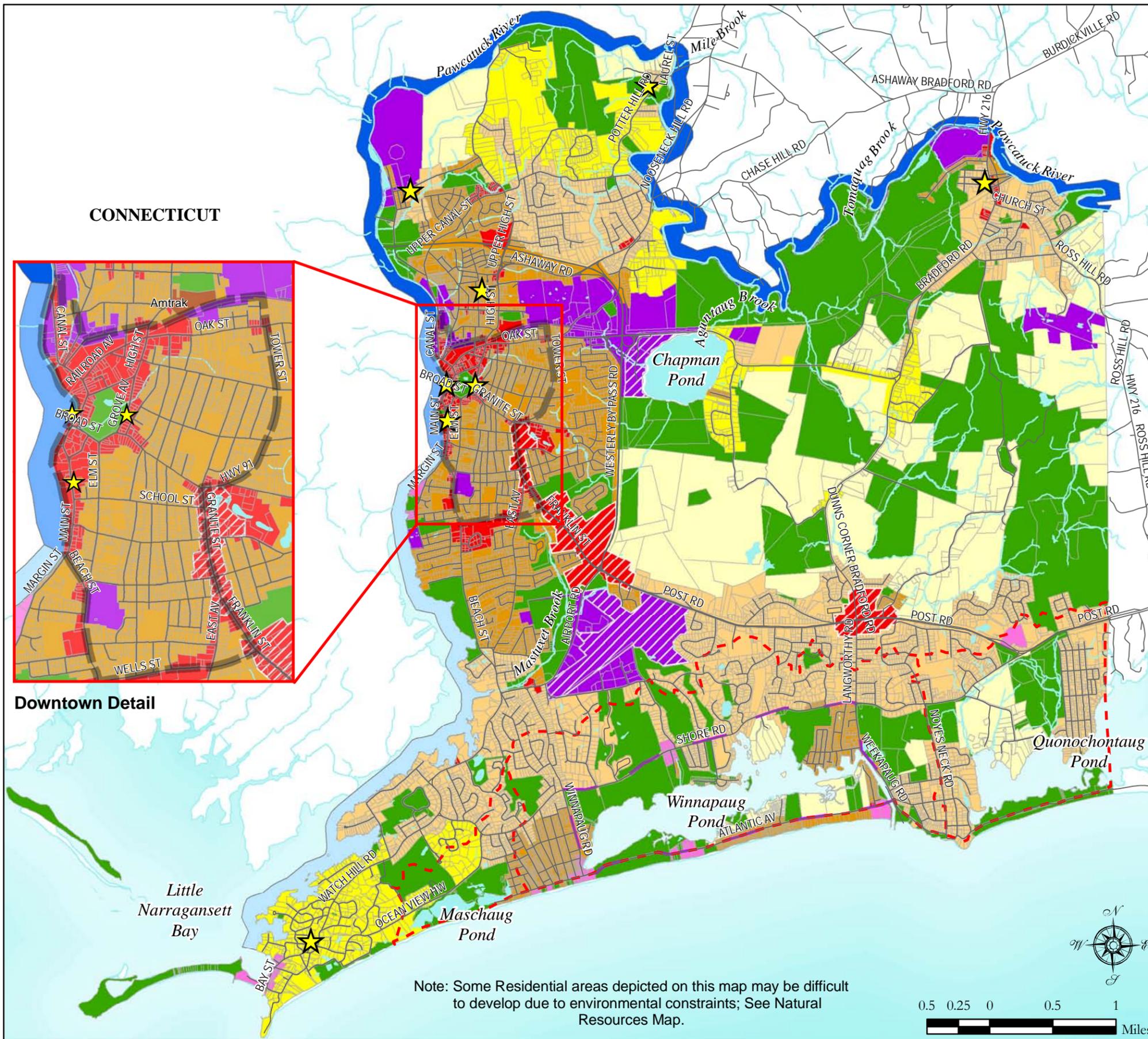
As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the build-out analysis for Westerly under current zoning indicates a capacity of an additional 1,750 housing units. Most of these new units would likely be located in the Potter Hill area which is currently zoned LDR-40 and east of the Dunn's Corners-Bradford Road on the east side of town where land is zoned RR-60. There is a large area of vacant land in the center of town north of Route 1 and east of Route 78 that is zoned RR-60 but much of this land is either protected by conservation easements or is wetland or has high water tables making development problematic.

The Plan calls for adoption of conservation development regulations for major subdivisions as an alternative subdivision methodology. All applications for major subdivisions would be required to include cluster development, conservation development, and conventional subdivision as alternatives for consideration by the Planning Board. Increased use of conservation development approaches would help to preserve open space and natural resources.

A new zoning ordinance is called for that prevents any increase in present zoning density except in land that is within the Urban Services Area. This area, shown on Figure 4.1, has both public water and sewer services. Other areas of Westerly outside the Urban Services Area where increased residential density could occur are areas that are currently zoned RR-60 but which could be rezoned to LDR-40 if the municipal water system is extended to those areas. An exception is that there can be no increase in zoning density in the RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) Salt Ponds Special Management Area.

The Plan calls for implementation of the existing affordable housing plan including annual review of progress. The Plan suggests approaches that would encourage rehabilitation of existing housing and give priority to neighborhood revitalization and existing housing over new construction. For example, it calls for a program that would allow housing credits to be banked and/or transferred and carried forward to promote rehabilitation of existing housing and construction of affordable housing during periods of economic opportunity.

Finally, the Plan proposes an increase in urban and community green space through street trees; landscaping and buffers in commercial, industrial, and multi-family developments; and selective park development. This could be accomplished through public and private projects and revised development standards.



### Legend

**Land Use**

- Rural Residential
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Commercial
- Highway Commercial Limit
- Shorefront Commercial
- Industrial
- Airport/State and Town Facilities
- Recreation/Agriculture/Permanent Open Space

**River Corridor**

- Upstream - Charlestown to Stillman Ave Bridge
- Middle - Stillman Ave Bridge to Margin Street
- Downstream - Margin St to Watch Hill

**Other Designations**

- Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan Areas
- Areas for Historic Development Standards and Mill Village Revitalization
- Urban Services Area Boundary
- Bike Path
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

map source: RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, CDM

## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 4-1  
Future Land Use  
November 2009



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.





#### ***4.4.4 Commercial and Industrial***

The Plan prohibits the expansion of the existing highway commercial district and encourages redevelopment of existing under-utilized commercial space, particularly in the Route 1 corridor. The Plan also calls for the town to work with existing commercial property owners in the Route 1 corridor to enhance landscaping and green space through incentives such as reduction in required parking area.

Reuse and revitalization of existing commercial and residential space as an alternative to new development is one of the themes of the Plan. For example, it calls for modification of zoning land use regulations to support adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized industrial and commercial buildings and associated areas in town. Examples of these areas are the mill villages of Bradford, White Rock, and Potter Hill.

The Plan envisions that the downtown area will continue to be a focal point for commercial, arts, and civic activities. Walking to and through the downtown area will be facilitated by providing good pedestrian connections through densely-built neighborhoods and non-residential districts through public projects with a goal of having a town-wide network of connected sidewalks and trails, a portion of which will be near downtown. The Plan also calls for obtaining financial support from multiple sources for revitalization of downtown and its surrounding areas (zones DC1 and DC2) and modification of land use regulations to complement this effort. The Plan calls for the town to promote the use of the Westerly Downtown Arts District tax benefits and encourages cultural and performing arts as bases for economic development. The Plan recognizes the need to coordinate with Stonington on issues of mutual interest which include Pawcatuck River quality and downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck revitalization.

Westerly has been a tourist destination for years and the Plan has several actions that will help sustain the tourism and hospitality industry. It calls for a program to proactively work with owners of existing lodging facilities to encourage rehabilitation and updating of facilities to extend tourist use. There is also a need to evaluate the mix of accommodations in Westerly to determine whether the markets for seasonal vacationers, year-round visitors, and business travelers are being adequately served. The Plan calls for an ordinance that accommodates the needs of hospitality and tourism industry employers to provide housing for their seasonal employees while not discouraging hiring of local residents and protecting the interests of affected neighborhoods. The Plan asks for a review and revision of the planned resort development provision in the Westerly zoning ordinance as a strategy to promote longer stays by visitors while limiting impact on local neighborhoods.

No changes to the existing industrial zones are proposed in the Plan except to encourage revitalization and reuse of existing industrial space.

#### ***4.4.5 Open Space and Recreation***

Protecting and enhancing Westerly's natural resources and open space is an important goal of the Comprehensive Plan. Land that is currently protected open space will remain protected. The Plan calls for adding to existing open space through development of a systematic prioritized plan, including potential funding alternatives. The use of conservation development as described above under residential land use will also preserve some existing open space and important natural resources while allowing for additional housing units in Westerly. The Plan also contains several



actions related to stormwater and sediment control and an action regarding use of renewable energy, all of which will help protect the environment.

An important plan recommendation regarding recreation is construction of a safe bike path that is a loop along Atlantic Avenue to Weekapaug Road to Shore Road, west to Crandall Avenue and back to Atlantic Avenue. The bike path route is illustrated in Figure 4-1. This loop is envisioned as the first phase of a larger Westerly Bike Trail System with additional parts of the system, such as one in Watch Hill, to be designed in future years. Two of the town's existing golf courses (Weekapaug Golf Club and Shelter Harbor Golf Club) are protected by conservation easements and will remain in the recreational land use category. The Misquamicut Club is not formally protected by easements but is expected to remain as a golf course for the foreseeable future. The Winnapaug Golf Club, the only public golf course in Westerly, is currently zoned commercial recreation which appropriately accommodates its current use.

#### ***4.4.6 Special Districts***

Salt Ponds Overlay District: The Plan calls for adoption of the salt ponds overlay district specified by the CRMC Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). The SAMP is designed to protect the quality of water in the ponds which provide important habitat for wildlife and are key natural features of Westerly's shoreline. The SAMP specifies maximum density, setbacks, buffers, requirements for nitrogen-reducing technologies for onsite wastewater treatment, and CRMC participation at an early stage of municipal land-use regulatory review. The area included within the Salt Ponds SAMP is illustrated in Figure 4-1.

River Corridor Overlay District: The Plan calls for development of a river corridor overlay district within an updated zoning ordinance. Westerly needs a special river corridor overlay zoning district because the Pawcatuck River is vital to the continuing prosperity of the town. First, the river is connected to and provides water to the underground aquifer that is the primary source of water supply for Westerly. Second, land fronting on and near the Pawcatuck River in the downtown area will have an important role in continuing renovation and revitalization in Westerly. Third, the river provides important recreational opportunities for residents and tourists and affects the quality of habitat for fish and shellfish and other wildlife in the river and in Little Narragansett Bay.

The proposed river corridor overlay district (illustrated in Figure 4-1) is composed of three parts:

- Area for protection of drinking water: The upstream section of the proposed district extends along the river from the Westerly-Charlestown border to the Stillman Avenue Bridge in Westerly. The primary purpose of zoning in this section is to protect Westerly's water supply. Zoning language for this district should be similar to or identical with aquifer protection areas. Industrial and commercial activities such as gas stations or industrial activity that uses chemicals that might get into the river in the case of a spill should not be allowed within a certain distance of the river's edge. The width of the overlay district in this area will be determined after appropriate topographical and geologic studies to delineate areas of overland and underground flow of water to the river.
- Area where redevelopment is encouraged for purposes of economic development: The middle section of the river in Westerly's downtown area, from the Stillman Avenue Bridge to Margin Street, is an area for potential redevelopment including enhanced use and access to the river. Development projects tied to enhanced use and access to the river are encouraged.



- Area where current use is preserved: The most downstream section of the district stretches from Margin Street to the northern boundary of the Shore Commercial – Watch Hill (SC-WH) zoning district. Zoning in this area should stay as it currently is with residential property and marinas along the river and the commercial area in Watch Hill. Any intensification of use or increased development of this section should be discouraged.

Development Standards for Historic Districts: The Plan calls for the town to continue to enact development standards for historic districts that are appropriate for each district, similar to what was adopted for the Shoreline Commercial Watch Hill zoning district. Current designated historic districts (see Figure 2-1) are Bradford Village, Main Street, the North End, Westerly Downtown, Wilcox Park, and Watch Hill.

#### ***4.4.7 Transportation, Infrastructure and Services***

Because future land use is necessarily linked to transportation, infrastructure, and services, major actions in the Plan related to these issues are included here for completeness.

An important set of recommendations in the Plan relate to improving the area around the train station and increasing its use. The Plan specifies increasing parking, safe access, and redevelopment planning at and near the railroad station. The Plan also calls for more daily stops by Amtrak at the Westerly station and support for commuter rail, both of which could improve rail connections for visitors and residents. A second major transportation recommendation is to initiate a parking shuttle system for under-utilized or new parking space at major retailers. A shuttle bus loop would include transportation centers (train station and airport), the river and shoreline business districts, and beaches. This shuttle could have a beneficial effect on businesses in Westerly and relieve traffic congestion, particularly during the summer season.

In regard to infrastructure, the Plan asks the town to pursue all available state and federal funding to enlarge the wastewater treatment plan capacity consistent within its existing design capacity. Within current capacity, the Plan specifies that any expansion of sewer service should be carefully prioritized based on environmental protection and economic development. The town has made significant improvements to the water distribution system in recent years; however there is still a need to improve the security of the water system. The Plan also supports continuation of the program to meet other infrastructure needs such as roadway maintenance, sidewalk replacement, and stormwater control.

In recent years, Westerly has constructed a new middle school and begun renovation of the high school. The final phase of the high school renovation is currently underway. The importance of a strong school system to the town is recognized by the Plan, which calls for an annual public meeting including the Town Council and the School Committee to review progress in improving student performance. In regard to post-high school education, the Plan calls for recruiting the Community College of Rhode Island and/or some other educational institution to provide local businesses and residents with educational and vocational opportunities.

Economic development is an important goal of the Plan. A key mechanism to facilitate economic development in the town is to make sure that someone is always paying attention and considering the effects of all town decisions on Westerly's economic climate. The Plan calls for adopting an economic development strategy focused on job creation and preservation that provides for specific



responsibility within the town government for implementation. The Plan also mandates an annual review of effectiveness as measured by types and numbers of jobs in Westerly.

#### ***4.4.8 Policies***

In addition to the goals, objectives, and actions, the Plan also includes nine policies which cut across plan goals, objectives, and actions and specify practices that will help ensure an effective and efficient town government and a sound economic foundation for the Plan. Selected examples of these policies include the need for commercial growth and progress; clarifying responsibilities for land use within the town government; establishing a person within the town government to oversee all aspects of economic development; continuing development of the town's new Geographic Information System (GIS); and regular review of the status of implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.

### ***4.5 Facing Challenges: Investing in our Future***

To achieve our vision for 2025, the town must anticipate challenging issues related to conservation and development and ensure the specific actions called for in the Comprehensive Plan are implemented to meet those challenges. While support from the state of Rhode Island is necessary, a disciplined local management approach and investment policy that recognizes the community's critical priorities will be essential to the success of this Plan. The town's annual budgeting and capital improvement plans must direct appropriate financial resources – consistent with the Plan and the town's overall needs – to the highest priority initiatives. We cannot fail to implement the Plan due to financial constraints but neither can we jeopardize the strong financial condition of our town.

#### ***4.5.1 Town Financial Position***

The town of Westerly enjoys a very good financial rating by both national rating agencies, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. Currently, long-term debt is about \$80,000,000 which is comfortably within the limit specified by state statute and supported by Westerly's gross land assessment value. The debt repayment schedule is consistent for the town's rating with 54 percent being retired over the next ten years. The town's strong cash position of approximately 10 percent of its annual operational budget also supports this rating. By most indicators, Westerly is in a competitively advantageous financial position relative to the rest of the state.

One fundamental long-term consideration is the stability of real estate values, now in question, which could reduce the debt capacity. There is also appropriate caution about expanding future long-term obligations given the state's existing employment situation and Rhode Island's unfriendly tax structure. Like many other cities and towns, both Westerly and the state of Rhode Island need to upgrade local infrastructure, roads, bridges, and buildings, some of which have been neglected in prior years. Additionally, there is a potential need to upgrade and expand the town's sewer capacity. Phase II of the school facilities renovation program is underway, but not yet funded in the amount of the \$30,000,000 bond referendum approved by voters in November 2008. Debt service for Phase II will have to be accommodated in the town budget beginning with FY 2011. These are all important considerations for future investment and financial planning.

#### ***4.5.2 Cost of Plan Implementation***

It is important that the necessary focus and resources be applied to implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. This should be considered in the context of current Planning Department staff priorities. A detailed examination of all recommended action items indicates that



approximately a 50 percent effort of one full-time equivalent (FTE) position should be allocated over the initial five-year Plan period to spearhead the Plan implementation. This ongoing focus appropriately resides in the Planning Department and should be accommodated within the current scope of departmental duties. In addition to day-to-day activities, this effort would include the responsibility for reporting progress against individual action items to the Town Manager on a regular basis.

Funds are necessary to support analyses, research, technical studies and possibly expert consulting advice in areas needed to ensure successful implementation of the Plan. To that end, it is recommended that a specific line item for “Comprehensive Plan Implementation” be incorporated in the municipal operating budget and funded in the amount of approximately \$25,000 annually to be deployed based on priorities identified during the annual budget process. This amount should be adjusted year-to-year depending on the priority of projects planned for each budget year.

Certain recommended actions will require major expenditures and capital investment and should also be included in the annual budgeting process. Examples of such actions would be: planning and construction of the Westerly bike path; development of a parking/shuttle system; expansion of parking and redevelopment at the train station; continued funding for roadway drainage and sidewalk repair; and potential expansion of the wastewater treatment plant. Many of these initiatives that strengthen infrastructure may be candidates for grants which have the effect of increasing the value of the town’s investment.

To assist in the Plan implementation effort, it is recommended that the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee continue to meet at least semi-annually to assess status of recommended actions, advise on priorities, and identify emerging issues and trends that may impact the Plan.



## 5.0 *Implementation Plan*

### 5.1 *Introduction*

The effectiveness of the town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan will be highly dependent on the timeliness and quality of the Plan implementation. The Plan is designed to be implemented over three main phases:

- Some major actions should be accomplished in a relatively short period of time since they will signal early success and are critical to the overall implementation of the Plan;
- Many other actions should be implemented over time because they may require further study, coordination with others, or involve the commitment of financial resources beyond the current year budget;
- A few actions are long-term in nature and will require continuous attention over the entire term of the Plan.

At the heart of this implementation is a well-defined structure of goals, objectives and actions developed based on broad public input and a thorough inventory of the town's assets and characteristics. The 10 goals give clear direction as to the type and extent of conservation and development the community desires. The objectives further define the goals and provide the foundation for development of actions required to realize the goals. Goals and objectives are long-term and may take a decade or more to achieve. Fifty-seven specific actions have been developed to help reach the goals. The actions are focused and measurable and are generally intended to be accomplished within five years. Responsibilities and timeframes have been assigned to the actions to make it possible to track progress and determine degree of completion, ensuring accountability for future success of the Plan. It is anticipated that new actions will be developed during the required five-year plan update to replace those that have been successfully implemented.

### 5.2 *Goals, Objectives and Actions*

More than 700 Westerly residents provided their thoughts about Westerly and its future to the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee through public meetings, focus groups, letters, email messages, and a statistically-based mail survey. Several points were very clear from this input; these points form the basis of the goals, objectives and actions:

- People love Westerly. They describe it as a friendly and safe community and a good place to raise a family.
- People are concerned that Westerly's character is in danger of changing too quickly because of development pressure. They want some development but without urban and commercial sprawl.
- Westerly's natural resources are extremely important to its citizens. They say development should be planned to preserve the waterfront, beaches, and water quality, and to protect open space.



- Traffic and transportation issues need to be addressed. Citizens are concerned with the volume of traffic and traffic safety, the need for additional parking in town, and pedestrian safety. Residents want access to commuter rail service and more bike lanes and trails.
- Westerly must continue to maintain its infrastructure including water and sewer systems, roads, sidewalks, and schools.
- The town should promote specific strategies for economic development, quality education and affordable housing for all ages and income levels.

### **GOAL 1**

*Protect and enhance Westerly's **natural resources** including open space, the river and shoreline, wildlife habitat, and watershed, for purposes of future enjoyment, recreation and assurance of a sustainable water supply.*

- Objective 1. Protect and conserve the natural beauty of Westerly's setting and natural environment.
- Objective 2. Ensure natural resources considerations are paramount in any development proposal.
- Objective 3. Foster awareness of and protect and develop appropriate access to the community's natural resources for enjoyment and recreation.
- Objective 4. Promote land use decisions that encourage the protection and sustainable use of the town's natural resources.
- Objective 5. Support a comprehensive groundwater protection strategy including conservation of Westerly's existing groundwater sources and investigation of future potential sources.

### **GOAL 1: ACTIONS**

- Action 1.1 Modify the zoning code to adopt a Salt Pond overlay district as specified by the CRMC Special Area Management Plan (SAMP).
- Action 1.2 Enact an ordinance that prevents any increase in zoning density (down-zone) except (A) land within the Urban Services Area which already has water and sewer service and (B) areas that are outside the Urban Services Area and also outside the RI CRMC Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan which could be rezoned from zoning district designation RR-60 to LDR-40 but only after the municipal water system is extended to those areas.
- Action 1.3 Adopt conservation development subdivision regulations applicable to major subdivisions as an alternative subdivision methodology. Require all applications for major subdivisions to include cluster development, conservation development, and conventional subdivision as alternatives for consideration by the Planning Board.
- Action 1.4 Develop a systematic prioritized plan, including potential funding alternatives, to acquire open space for water resources protection, habitat protection, and water-dependent recreation and to protect farmland, forests and natural landscapes.



- Action 1.5 Construct a safe bike path that is a loop along Atlantic Avenue to Weekapaug Road to Shore Road west to Crandall Avenue and back to Atlantic Avenue. This is Phase I of the Westerly Bike Trail System; additional parts of the system (Phase II) shall be planned during implementation of Phase I.
- Action 1.6 Enforce stormwater control and sediment-control ordinances; require best management practices (BMP's) to control non-point pollution; monitor the effects of these steps; and modify pollution-prevention actions as necessary.
- Action 1.7 Extend sediment and erosion-control ordinances to include single and two-family houses as part of the building permit process.
- Action 1.8 Develop a river corridor overlay district and incorporate it in an updated zoning ordinance.
- Action 1.9 Provide all local land-use decision makers at least one in-service program each year addressing new developments related to contemporary preservation and conservation issues for their consideration and possible implementation.

**GOAL 2**

Promote **transportation strategies** that ensure the safe and efficient flow of traffic within Westerly to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.

- Objective 1. Explore strategies that support access to shore, river, and local businesses.
- Objective 2. Provide safe alternatives that reduce dependency on motor vehicles and promote a healthy lifestyle.
- Objective 3. Ensure that traffic safety and efficient flow are necessary considerations in approval of any development plan.

**GOAL 2: ACTIONS**

- Action 2.1 Revise development standards in the zoning ordinance to require shared access to roads for new and redeveloped projects.
- Action 2.2 Enact an ordinance that regulates the use of the unimproved portion of town streets except for right of access and other permitted uses to reduce unsightly appearance and dangerous traffic situations.
- Action 2.3 Revise the intersection of Airport Road and Winnapaug Road to improve safety and traffic flow.
- Action 2.4 Continue to fund a program of roadway drainage and sidewalk replacement and maintenance.



- Action 2.5 Provide good pedestrian connections through densely-built neighborhoods and non-residential districts through public projects and revised development standards. Work towards a town-wide network of connected sidewalks and trails.

### **GOAL 3**

*Pursue development of Westerly's strategic geographic location and extraordinary **transportation assets** – its rail station, airport and river – as focal points for revitalization and economic development, in balance with the needs of the affected neighborhoods.*

- Objective 1. Facilitate the ease of rail travel.
- Objective 2. Promote and enhance use of waterways for recreation and transportation.
- Objective 3. Study and implement strategies by which the Westerly airport increases the town's economic development opportunities.

### **GOAL 3: ACTIONS**

- Action 3.1 Work with state and federal officials to increase parking, safe access, and redevelopment planning at and near the railroad station.
- Action 3.2 Work with Amtrak and elected officials to increase the number of daily stops in Westerly during the summer months. Publicize the availability of current Amtrak service.
- Action 3.3 Initiate a parking shuttle system for under-utilized or new parking space at major retailers for a shuttle bus loop that will include transportation centers (train station and airport), river and shoreline business districts, and beaches.
- Action 3.4 Develop and implement a strategy that better utilizes the existing capacity of Westerly State Airport and adjacent Airport Industrial Park to enhance commercial business activity and increase job opportunities.
- Action 3.5 Work with RI, MA and CT state agencies and federal officials to support commuter rail service for Westerly.

### **GOAL 4**

*Ensure **economic development** strategies are focused on helping locally-owned businesses prosper and encourage entrepreneurial activities.*

- Objective 1. Seek diversity and sustainability in the economy.
- Objective 2. Focus economic development efforts on helping locally-owned businesses prosper.
- Objective 3. Encourage entrepreneurial activities, especially those with potential for bringing well-paying, knowledge-based jobs to the community.
- Objective 4. Attract and retain high quality workforce and employment opportunities.



- Objective 5. Provide quality public school education and expand opportunities for all residents seeking higher education and technical skills for job advancement and greater earning potential.

#### **GOAL 4: ACTIONS**

- Action 4.1 Adopt an economic development strategy focused on job creation and preservation that provides for specific responsibility within town government for implementation. Provide for annual review of effectiveness as measured by types and numbers of jobs in Westerly.
- Action 4.2 Modify zoning and land use regulations to support adaptive reuse of vacant and underused industrial and commercial buildings and associated areas (for example, mill villages).
- Action 4.3 Obtain financial support from multiple sources for revitalization of downtown and its surrounding areas (zones DC1 and DC2). Modify land use regulations to complement this effort.
- Action 4.4 Recruit the Community College of Rhode Island and/or other educational institutions to provide local businesses and residents with educational and vocational opportunities.
- Action 4.5 Promote the use of the Westerly Downtown Arts District tax benefits and encourage cultural and performing arts as bases for economic development.

#### **GOAL 5**

*Encourage a broad range of **housing** options that meet the needs of all income and age levels and allow citizens to live in, work, retire and contribute to the community.*

- Objective 1. Eliminate substandard and unsafe housing in the community.
- Objective 2. Encourage a broad range of housing options adequate to meet the needs of underserved middle and lower-income and special needs households and individuals.
- Objective 3. Continue support of those organizations that address the short-term needs of the homeless.
- Objective 4. Promote utilization of alternative residential development mechanisms such as conservation development & cluster development which preserve open space and protect important landscape features while creating buffers that enhance neighborhoods.



### **GOAL 5: ACTIONS**

- Action 5.1 Implement the existing affordable housing plan, dated September 2006. Review the affordable housing plan annually to determine whether stated goals are being met and revise as necessary to achieve goals.
- Action 5.2 Develop and implement a program to allow affordable housing credits to be banked and/or transferred and carried forward to promote rehabilitation of existing housing and construction of affordable housing during periods of economic opportunity.
- Action 5.3 Develop and implement a program to focus and coordinate affordable housing initiatives and funding as an integral part of Westerly's efforts in neighborhood revitalization and rehabilitation with priority given to existing housing over new construction.
- Action 5.4 Apply to state and federal housing programs for low- and moderate-income housing rehabilitation and development funds and support efforts of housing groups to secure and use those funds.
- Action 5.5 Accommodate the needs of hospitality and tourism industry employers to provide housing for their seasonal employees with consideration of the potential impact on the local workforce and protection for the affected neighborhoods.
- Action 5.6 Consider additional property tax relief for elderly taxpayers who have made Westerly their primary residence to help them remain in their homes.

### **GOAL 6**

*Support an **infrastructure** that balances growth and development with conservation, specifically as related to water, wastewater treatment, energy and communications.*

- Objective 1. Promote approaches to growth management to better conserve infrastructure, land and natural resources.
- Objective 2. Provide wastewater treatment to prevent unsanitary conditions; and carefully prioritize expansion of the service area of the existing plant.
- Objective 3. Consider the investment in infrastructure to foster economic development including water, waste water treatment and well-site development.
- Objective 4. Decrease Westerly's dependence on petroleum-related energy sources through a municipal strategy of conservation and renewable energy generation.
- Objective 5. Upgrade the town's technological capabilities across all school and municipal departments for greater employee productivity and public accessibility.



## **GOAL 6: ACTIONS**

- Action 6.1      Ensure the town’s program to reduce groundwater infiltration into sewer lines is supported on an annual basis.
- Action 6.2      Recognize that the existing wastewater treatment plant has a finite capacity as detailed in the December 27, 2007 report by the Beta Group.
- Prioritize any sewer service expansion plans based on environmental protection and economic development, with full consideration of the limits of current capacity.
  - Pursue all available state and federal funding to enlarge the wastewater treatment plant consistent with its design capacity.
- Action 6.3      Update land use regulations to address and encourage appropriate renewable energy opportunities.
- Action 6.4      Develop and implement a plan to better protect White Rock #1 well site from the possibility of physical damage or contamination by leaks or accidental spills from motor vehicles.
- Action 6.5      Review the adequacy of security measures (including cameras, lighting, and information technology security) for protection of well heads, pump stations, and water tanks and take appropriate actions.
- Action 6.6      Map the entire stormwater system in concert with the implementation of new GIS capability. Within the next phase of Westerly GIS development, integrate the water, sewer, and stormwater systems into existing GIS coverage.
- Action 6.7      Develop a plan to minimize the effect of drought on public health and safety, economic activity, and environmental resources.
- Action 6.8      Study and develop strategies to address potential sea-level rise, storm surge, and other climate-change impacts on Westerly’s infrastructure.

## **GOAL 7**

*Preserve the **unique character and heritage** of Westerly, the diversity of its historic settlements, and aesthetic qualities of residential and commercial development consistent with our history and culture.*

- Objective 1.    Promote aesthetic qualities of residential and commercial development consistent with the town’s history and culture.
- Objective 2.    Ensure that Westerly’s historic districts develop in accordance with superior design that reflects the historic character of each.
- Objective 3.    Incorporate design principles where appropriate to improve housing choices, transportation, & commuting availability.



- Objective 4. Respect and support the special character and viewpoints of Westerly's constituent neighborhoods.
- Objective 5. Encourage sustainability.
- Objective 6. Discourage further commercial sprawl and promote alternative approaches to mitigate that which exists through redevelopment.
- Objective 7. Work with land owners and other stakeholders to identify and preserve, as appropriate, cultural, archeological, and historic resources.

### **GOAL 7: ACTIONS**

- Action 7.1 Continue to enact development standards for historic districts that are appropriate for each district, similar to what was adopted for the Shoreline Commercial Watch Hill zoning district. Current designated historic districts are Bradford Village, Main Street, the North End, Westerly Downtown, Wilcox Park, and Watch Hill.
- Action 7.2 Protect the structures within existing federally-designated historic districts and other buildings with National Register of Historic Places status with zoning ordinance language similar to that enacted for Watch Hill (260-87.6(B)(5)).
- Action 7.3 Work with existing commercial property owners in the Route 1 corridor to enhance landscaping and green space through incentives such as reduction in required parking area.
- Action 7.4 Develop recommendations for implementation of the Architectural Review Board recently added to Westerly's Town Charter.
- Action 7.5 Increase and maintain urban and community green space in the built areas of town, particularly through street trees; landscaping and buffers in commercial, industrial and multi-family developments; and selective park development to be accomplished through public and private projects and revised development standards.

### **GOAL 8**

*Balance the sometimes competing aspects of Westerly as a **resort community** comprised of four key elements: seasonal homes and residents; a year-round residential community; a short-term tourist destination; and a regional service and retail center.*

- Objective 1. Embrace Westerly's past and future as a resort community by planning better, managing growth, treating our guests with respect, and encouraging positive visitor experiences.
- Objective 2. Establish a strategy to extend the length of stay of vacationers and tourists, increasing their positive economic contribution to the community and reducing their negative impact on infrastructure and municipal services.



- Objective 3. Encourage development that supports a broad spectrum of seasonal residences throughout the community, providing a range of housing alternatives and value and helping to secure Westerly's significant seasonal-resident tax base.
- Objective 4. While making the opportunity to enjoy Westerly's attributes available to tourists and visitors, also protect the interests of local residents and taxpayers in using and enjoying the community's natural and cultural resources.

### **GOAL 8: ACTIONS**

- Action 8.1 Prohibit the expansion of the existing highway commercial district. Encourage redevelopment of existing under-utilized commercial space, particularly in the Route 1 corridor.
- Action 8.2 Review and revise the planned resort development provision in the Westerly zoning ordinance (§260-48) as a strategy to promote longer stays by visitors and tourists while limiting impact on local neighborhoods.
- Action 8.3 Develop a program to proactively work with owners of existing lodging facilities to encourage rehabilitation and updating of facilities to extend tourist use.
- Action 8.4 Evaluate the mix of accommodations in Westerly to determine whether the markets for seasonal vacationers, year-round visitors, and business travelers are being adequately served.
- Action 8.5 Insure that land-use regulations and decision making consider the implications and potential impacts upon the four key elements of our community (tourism, seasonal residents, year-round residents, and regional service and retail) and upon Westerly's quality of life and economy.

### **GOAL 9**

*Ensure **institutions** critical to Westerly's future growth, safety and prosperity are generously supported and sustained.*

- Objective 1. Recognize that Westerly's school system, hospital, the library, and its volunteer ambulance and fire departments are critical to Westerly's future.
- Objective 2. Ensure future school facility decisions are based on intensive student population forecasts and consideration of the capacity and condition of all current facilities, and operating costs.
- Objective 3. Continue to support the activities of non-profit organizations which contribute to Westerly's quality of life.
- Objective 4. Support a quality public school system where enhanced performance by students is sought and monitored.



### **GOAL 9: ACTIONS**

- Action 9.1 Coordinate grant writing between non-profit institutions and the municipality to leverage and enhance total return and mutual benefit.
- Action 9.2 Complete a comprehensive review of all town annual subsidies to insure that the funds are directed to institutions that address the highest-priority needs.
- Action 9.3 Coordinate and consolidate services between the town and critical institutions, especially those supported by tax dollars to share expertise and achieve economies of scale.
- Action 9.4 Require that the Westerly Town Manager meet at least annually with the Westerly Hospital Board of Trustees to determine what municipal efforts are necessary to support the hospital.
- Action 9.5 Establish and fund an annual appropriation to the Westerly Hospital to assist in reimbursement for uncompensated services for Westerly citizens who were unable to pay, to be reviewed and approved annually during the budget process by the Westerly Town Council.
- Action 9.6 The town's elected and appointed officials should assist the Westerly Hospital and the local medical community in advocating for their needs; for example, achieving parity and equality in private insurance and Medicare/Medicaid rates in comparison with facilities in Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut and increasing transparency in the contract negotiations processes.
- Action 9.7 Hold an annual public meeting, attended by the Town Council and School Committee to review progress in improving student performance. Review actions underway in the highest-performing school systems in Rhode Island and Connecticut to determine best practices that appear to be working elsewhere.

### **GOAL 10**

*Encourage **regional solutions** that take advantage of opportunities to improve economic competitiveness, infrastructure, transportation, communications and emergency preparedness.*

- Objective 1. Encourage collaboration and cooperation among all neighboring governments and Westerly.
- Objective 2. Promote recognition of the mutual importance of the Pawcatuck River and other shared resources to Westerly/Stonington and other neighboring communities.
- Objective 3. Work in partnership on a regional basis to coordinate future development efforts and ensure appropriate growth patterns which enhance the character of the town.



## **GOAL 10: ACTIONS**

- Action 10.1 Promote coordination with Stonington on issues of mutual interest, for example Pawcatuck River quality, downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck revitalization, shared water systems, the Westerly train station, emergency management, and economic development.
- Hold a joint meeting of the planning departments, water departments, and emergency management officials to identify opportunities for coordination.
  - After one to two years of coordination at the staff level, sponsor a public forum to report progress.
  - Identify areas where improved coordination between the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut will leverage state and federal funding opportunities.
- Action 10.2 Identify resources of the town of Westerly that could be mutually shared and funded with neighboring Rhode Island communities such as has been accomplished with use of the transfer station by both Westerly and Hopkinton.

### **5.3 Implementation Policies**

The policies for the Comprehensive Plan guide the overall Plan implementation. They are the recommended administrative or management guidelines necessary to facilitate the successful implementation of the Plan. Policies establish the governmental framework for the Plan's actions to be carried out.

- Policy 1. The town's conservation, development and annual and long-term financial choices shall be guided by the basic principle of balancing economic prosperity for all its citizens and preserving its irreplaceable natural and cultural resources.
- Policy 2. Commercial growth and economic progress are important to Westerly's future and should be encouraged in harmony with the town's residential, historic and environmental character.
- Policy 3. The town's ordinances must clearly identify the specific responsibilities of the Town Planner, the Planning Board and the Town Council for developing, implementing and updating the Comprehensive Plan.
- Policy 4. The Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee shall continue to meet at least semi-annually to assess status of recommended actions, advise on priorities, and identify emerging issues and trends that may impact the Plan. The committee shall report, with the Town Planner, to the Planning Board on at least an annual basis.
- Policy 5. The GIS mapping capability currently being developed by the town should be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan process as soon as possible; and the town must continue to allocate adequate resources annually to maintain and improve this capability which is essential to the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan.



- Policy 6. There should be a person within town government charged with executing an economic development strategy, leading an aggressive business development effort, and acting as the single point of coordination for all economic development activities in Westerly.
- Policy 7. On an annual basis, the Town Council should convene a meeting of officials of the seven fire districts to discuss fire district issues and activities with implications for the Comprehensive Plan.
- Policy 8. Recognize that implementation of the Comprehensive Plan requires that the town maintain a sound financial condition and that decisions regarding conservation, development, facility construction and maintenance, and infrastructure shall always be evaluated for future financial impact.
- Policy 9. The town shall encourage on a continuing basis the recycling and conservation of energy, water and other environmental resources.

#### ***5.4 Implementation Matrix***

The Plan's recommended actions are arranged in an Implementation Matrix organized according to each of the 10 goal categories. The matrix is intended as a tool to help manage the Plan implementation. It assigns primary responsibilities, supporting responsibilities, and timeframes to the Plan's actions. Table 5-1 provides specific definitions of each of these terms. Table 5-2 is the Implementation Matrix itself.

Responsibilities indicated in the Implementation Matrix assume the existing organizational structure of town government and management. It is also anticipated that a revitalized Economic Development Committee will be appointed by the Town Council. Where multiple support committees are named, it is expected that they may be organized as a workgroup to provide advice to the primary responsible party. Where a new ordinance or a change to existing ordinances or funding is required, the Town Council is named as the primary responsible party. It is assumed that the Council will delegate much of the preparatory work to the support individuals or committees. Non-governmental organizations may be involved in implementing some actions; however, the primary and secondary responsible parties named in the matrix are primarily town government entities or appointed boards, commissions and committees.

The matrix consists of 57 actions which comprise the essential core of this Comprehensive Plan: 29 actions are short-term in nature; 25 actions are medium-term; and 3 actions are long-term.



**Table 5-1 Definitions of Implementation Matrix Terms  
Primary and Supporting Responsibilities**

Responsibility	The “Responsibility” column indicates the position or agency (board, commission or committee) that has the lead responsibility for ensuring the action is carried out.	Support	Most actions require the cooperation of and action by the Town Council, town staff and other local boards and commissions for successful completion; the “Support” column defines those supporting, contributing or approving agencies.
Timeframes			
ST	Short-term (ST) indicates completion within year 1 of Plan approval.	ST&O	ST&O indicates initial activity in year 1 and ongoing attention thereafter.
MT	Medium-term (MT) indicates completion within years 2 and 3 after Plan approval.	LT	Long-term (LT) indicates completion within years 4 and 5 after Plan approval.

Responsibility/Support Codes			
AESC	Alternate Energy Study Committee	POTF	Peak Oil Task Force
BF	Board of Finance	PWC	Public Works Committee
BO	Building Official	PWS	Public Works Superintendent
BR	Board of Recreation	RIDOT	Rhode Island Department of Transportation
CC	Conservation Commission	SC	School Committee
CES	Code Enforcement Staff	SOS	Superintendent of Schools
DCE	Director of Code Enforcement	TA	Tax Assessor
EDC	Economic Development Commission	TC	Town Council
EMC	Emergency Management Coordinator	TE	Town Engineer
FD	Finance Director	TM	Town Manager
GIS	GIS Implementation Committee	US	Utilities Superintendent
HMC	Harbor Management Commission	WHA	Westerly Housing Authority
PB	Planning Board	WMLT	Westerly Municipal Land Trust
PZS	Planning and Zoning Staff	ZB	Zoning Board



Table 5-2 Implementation Plan Matrix

**GOAL 1: Natural Resources**

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
1.1	Modify the zoning code to adopt a Salt Pond overlay district as specified by the CRMC Special Area Management Plan (SAMP).	TC	PZS, PB	ST
1.2	Enact an ordinance that prevents any increase in zoning density (down-zone) except (A) land within the Urban Services Area which already has water and sewer service and (B) areas that are outside the Urban Services Area and also outside the RI CRMC Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan which could be rezoned from zoning district designation RR-60 to LDR-40 but only after the municipal water system is extended to those areas.	TC	PZS, PB	ST
1.3	Adopt conservation development subdivision regulations applicable to major subdivisions as an alternative subdivision methodology. Require all applications for major subdivisions to include cluster development, conservation development, and conventional subdivision as alternatives for consideration by the Planning Board.	PB	PZS	ST
1.4	Develop a systematic prioritized plan, including potential funding alternatives, to acquire open space for water resources protection, habitat protection, and water-dependent recreation and to protect farmland, forests and natural landscapes.	TC	TM, PZS, CC, WMLT, BR, TE	MT
1.5	Construct a safe bike path that is a loop along Atlantic Avenue to Weekapaug Road to Shore Road west to Crandall Avenue and back to Atlantic Avenue. This is Phase I of the Westerly Bike Trail System; additional parts of the system (Phase II) shall be planned during implementation of Phase I.	TC	TM, PZS, PWS, TE, BR	MT
1.6	Enforce stormwater control and sediment-control ordinances; require best management practices (BMP's) to control non-point pollution; monitor the effects of these steps; and modify pollution-prevention actions as necessary.	DCE	CES	ST&O



No.	Actions (GOAL 1 – continued)	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
1.7	Extend sediment and erosion-control ordinances to include single and two-family houses as part of the building permit process.	TC	PZS, PB, BO	ST&O
1.8	Develop a river corridor overlay district and incorporate it in an updated zoning ordinance.	TC	TM, PZS, PB, HMC, TE, US	MT
1.9	Provide all local land-use decision makers at least one in-service program each year addressing new developments related to contemporary preservation and conservation issues for their consideration and possible implementation.	TM	PZS	ST&O



## GOAL 2: Transportation Strategies

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
2.1	Revise development standards in the zoning ordinance to require shared access to roads for new and redeveloped projects.	TC	PZS, TE, PWS, PB	ST
2.2	Enact an ordinance that regulates the use of the unimproved portion of town streets except for right of access and other permitted uses to reduce unsightly appearance and dangerous traffic situations.	TC	PZS, TE, PWS, PB	MT
2.3	Revise the intersection of Airport Road and Winnapaug Road to improve safety and traffic flow.	TC, RIDOT	TE, PWS	MT
2.4	Continue to fund a program of roadway drainage and sidewalk replacement and maintenance.	TC	TE, PWS	ST&O
2.5	Provide good pedestrian connections through densely-built neighborhoods and non-residential districts through public projects and revised development standards. Work towards a town-wide network of connected sidewalks and trails.	TC, PB	PZS, TE, PWS	LT



**GOAL 3: Transportation Assets**

No.	Action	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
3.1	Work with state and federal officials to increase parking, safe access, and redevelopment planning at and near the railroad station.	TM	PZS, TE	MT
3.2	Work with Amtrak and elected officials to increase the number of daily stops in Westerly during the summer months. Publicize the availability of current Amtrak service.	TM, TC		ST&O
3.3	Initiate a parking shuttle system for under-utilized or new parking space at major retailers for a shuttle bus loop that will include transportation centers (train station and airport), river and shoreline business districts, and beaches.	TM	PZS, PB, BR	MT
3.4	Develop and implement a strategy that better utilizes the existing capacity of Westerly State Airport and adjacent Airport Industrial Park to enhance commercial business activity and increase job opportunities.	TM	PZS	MT
3.5	Work with RI, MA and CT state agencies and federal officials to support commuter rail service for Westerly.	TM, TC		ST&O



### GOAL 4: Economic Development

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
4.1	Adopt an economic development strategy focused on job creation and preservation that provides for specific responsibility within town government for implementation. Provide for annual review of effectiveness as measured by types and numbers of jobs in Westerly.	TC	TM, EDC	ST&O
4.2	Modify zoning and land use regulations to support adaptive reuse of vacant and underused industrial and commercial buildings and associated areas (for example, mill villages).	TC, PB	PZS, EDC	MT
4.3	Obtain financial support from multiple sources for revitalization of downtown and its surrounding areas (zones DC1 and DC2). Modify land use regulations to complement this effort.	TC, PB	PZS, TM, EDC	ST&O
4.4	Recruit the Community College of Rhode Island and/or other educational institutions to provide local businesses and residents with educational and vocational opportunities.	TC	TM, SC, EDC	MT
4.5	Promote the use of the Westerly Downtown Arts District tax benefits and encourage cultural and performing arts as bases for economic development.	TM	EDC	ST&O



**GOAL 5: Housing**

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
5.1	Implement the existing affordable housing plan, dated September 2006. Review the affordable housing plan annually to determine whether stated goals are being met and revise as necessary to achieve goals.	PZS	PB, TM	ST&O
5.2	Develop and implement a program to allow affordable housing credits to be banked and/or transferred and carried forward to promote rehabilitation of existing housing and construction of affordable housing during periods of economic opportunity.	TC	PZS, PB	ST
5.3	Develop and implement a program to focus and coordinate affordable housing initiatives and funding as an integral part of Westerly’s efforts in neighborhood revitalization and rehabilitation with priority given to existing housing over new construction.	PZS	WHA, PB, TM	ST
5.4	Apply to state and federal housing programs for low- and moderate-income housing rehabilitation and development funds and support efforts of housing groups to secure and use those funds.	PZS	WHA, PB, TM	ST&O
5.5	Accommodate the needs of hospitality and tourism industry employers to provide housing for their seasonal employees with consideration of the potential impact on the local workforce and protection for the affected neighborhoods.	TC	PZS, PB, EDC	MT
5.6	Consider additional property tax relief for elderly taxpayers who have made Westerly their primary residence to help them remain in their homes.	TC	TA	MT



### GOAL 6: Infrastructure

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
6.1	Ensure the town's program to reduce groundwater infiltration into sewer lines is supported on an annual basis.	TC	TM, TE, US	ST&O
6.2	<p>Recognize that the existing wastewater treatment plant has a finite capacity as detailed in the December 27, 2007 report by the Beta Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize any sewer service expansion plans based on environmental protection and economic development, with full consideration of the limits of current capacity.</li> <li>Pursue all available state and federal funding to enlarge the wastewater treatment plant consistent with its design capacity.</li> </ul>	TC	RB, CC, EDC, US, TE	MT
6.3	Update land use regulations to address and encourage appropriate renewable energy opportunities.	TC, PB	PZS, POTF, AESC	MT
6.4	Develop and implement a plan to better protect White Rock #1 well site from the possibility of physical damage or contamination by leaks or accidental spills from motor vehicles.	TM	US, TE	ST
6.5	Review the adequacy of security measures (including cameras, lighting, and information technology security) for protection of well heads, pump stations and water tanks and take appropriate actions.	TM	US, TE	ST
6.6	Map the entire stormwater system in concert with the implementation of new GIS capability. Within the next phase of Westerly GIS development, integrate the water, sewer, and stormwater systems into existing GIS coverage.	TC	GIS, TE, US	ST
6.7	Develop a plan to minimize the effect of drought on public health and safety, economic activity, and environmental resources.	TM	TE, US	MT
6.8	Study and develop strategies to address potential sea-level rise, storm surge, and other climate-change impacts on Westerly's infrastructure.	TM	PZS, CC, TE	LT



**GOAL 7: Character & Heritage**

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
7.1	Continue to enact development standards for historic districts that are appropriate for each district, similar to what was adopted for the Shoreline Commercial Watch Hill zoning district. Current designated historic districts are Bradford Village, Main Street, the North End, Westerly Downtown, Wilcox Park, and Watch Hill.	TC	PB, PZS	ST, MT, LT
7.2	Protect the structures within existing federally-designated historic districts and other buildings with National Register of Historic Places status with zoning ordinance language similar to that enacted for Watch Hill (260-87.6(B)(5)).	TC	PB, PZB	MT
7.3	Work with existing commercial property owners in the Route 1 corridor to enhance landscaping and green space through incentives such as reduction in required parking area.	PZS	PB, ZB	ST&O
7.4	Develop recommendations for implementation of the Architectural Review Board recently added to Westerly’s Town Charter.	PZS	PB	MT
7.5	Increase and maintain urban and community green space in the built areas of town, particularly through street trees; landscaping and buffers in commercial, industrial and multi-family developments; and selective park development to be accomplished through public and private projects and revised development standards.	PZS	PB, ZB	MT



### GOAL 8: Resort Community

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
8.1	Prohibit the expansion of the existing highway commercial district. Encourage redevelopment of existing under-utilized commercial space, particularly in the Route 1 corridor.	TC	PZS, PB, ZB, EDC, TM	ST&O
8.2	Review and revise the planned resort development provision in the Westerly zoning ordinance (§260-48) as a strategy to promote longer stays by visitors and tourists while limiting impact on local neighborhoods.	TC	PZS, PB	MT
8.3	Develop a program to proactively work with owners of existing lodging facilities to encourage rehabilitation and updating of facilities to extend tourist use.	PZS	EDC, TM, TA	MT
8.4	Evaluate the mix of accommodations in Westerly to determine whether the markets for seasonal vacationers, year-round visitors, and business travelers are being adequately served.	TM	PZS, EDC	ST
8.5	Insure that land-use regulations and decision making consider the implications and potential impacts upon the four key elements of our community (tourism, seasonal residents, year-round residents, and regional service and retail) and upon Westerly's quality of life and economy.	TC, PB	PZS, ZB	ST&O



**GOAL 9: Institutions**

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
9.1	Coordinate grant writing between non-profit institutions and the municipality to leverage and enhance total return and mutual benefit.	TM	FD, PZS	ST&O
9.2	Complete a comprehensive review of all town annual subsidies to insure that the funds are directed to institutions that address the highest-priority needs.	TC	BF, FD	ST
9.3	Coordinate and consolidate services between the town and critical institutions, especially those supported by tax dollars to share expertise and achieve economies of scale.	TM, SOS	TC, SC, BF	MT
9.4	Require that the Westerly Town Manager meet at least annually with the Westerly Hospital Board of Trustees to determine what municipal efforts are necessary to support the hospital.	TM		ST&O
9.5	Establish and fund an annual appropriation to the Westerly Hospital to assist in reimbursement for uncompensated services for Westerly citizens who were unable to pay, to be reviewed and approved annually during the budget process by the Westerly Town Council.	TC	BF, TM, EDC	LT
9.6	The town’s elected and appointed officials should assist the Westerly Hospital and the local medical community in advocating for their needs; for example, achieving parity and equality in private insurance and Medicare/Medicaid rates in comparison with facilities in Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut and increasing transparency in the contract negotiations processes.	TC, TM		ST&O
9.7	Hold an annual public meeting, attended by the Town Council and School Committee to review progress in improving student performance. Review actions underway in the highest-performing school systems in Rhode Island and Connecticut to determine best practices that appear to be working elsewhere.	TC, SC	TM, SOS	ST&O



### GOAL 10: Regional Solutions

No.	Actions	Responsibility	Support	Timeframe
10.1	<p>Promote coordination with Stonington on issues of mutual interest, for example Pawcatuck River quality, downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck revitalization, shared water systems, the Westerly train station, emergency management, and economic development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hold a joint meeting of the planning departments, water departments, and emergency management officials to identify opportunities for coordination.</li><li>• After one to two years of coordination at the staff level, sponsor a public forum to report progress.</li><li>• Identify areas where improved coordination between the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut will leverage state and federal funding opportunities.</li></ul>	TM	PZS, EDC, US, EMC	MT
10.2	<p>Identify resources of the town of Westerly that could be mutually shared and funded with neighboring Rhode Island communities such as has been accomplished with use of the transfer station by both Westerly and Hopkinton.</p>	TM	PZS, TE, PWS, US, SC	MT



*a plan for conservation and development*



December 2009  
Adopted February 8, 2010

TOWN OF **Westerly**  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN APPENDICES I-II



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*The Westerly Comprehensive Plan*

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# *Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan*

## *Appendices*

This document consists of two appendices to the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan which contain important background information and documentation for the Plan.

Appendix I contains eight inventories of the status of Westerly's resources:

- (1) Existing Land Use and Zoning
- (2) Housing
- (3) Economic Vitality
- (4) Natural Resources
- (5) Services and Facilities
- (6) Open Space and Recreation
- (7) Transportation Network
- (8) Historic and Cultural Resources

The information in these chapters provides a basic understanding of current conditions (mid-2009) on which the Plan for the future is based. The Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee is indebted to many employees of the town who helped check the basic data in this Appendix and assure that the material is as correct as possible.

Appendix II contains summaries of input from approximately 700 Westerly residents who participated in development of the Plan through public meetings, focus groups, letters, email messages, and a statistically-based survey. In the earliest stages of preparing the Plan citizens were asked to share their opinions about what they liked and did not like about Westerly and their hopes for the future. These thoughts were a touchstone for the committee as it prepared the vision, goals, and objectives. These elements of the Plan were then presented at a workshop at which the public was asked to provide feedback on whether or not the Plan was on track. Adjustments were made as appropriate and then specific actions were developed.

Feedback on the actions, which are the core of the Implementation Plan, was provided at another public meeting, and the actions were modified as necessary. These checks on the Plan's content and direction were important keys to preparing a Plan that reflects the wishes of the residents of Westerly.

The committee appreciates the time and energy that many citizens put into providing the information that serves as the foundation for the Comprehensive Plan.



# *Appendix I – Inventory*

## *1.0 Existing Land Use and Zoning*

Land is a limited and precious resource. Land use planning and regulations seek to find an appropriate balance among the rights of property owners, their neighbors and protection of this valuable resource. Land use planning and regulations determine how a community will look, what uses will be allowed and how those uses will be arranged to best meet the needs of the community. This chapter examines the physical characteristics of the land in Westerly, how the land is currently being used, and the environmental qualities and constraints affecting the land. The analysis of existing conditions forms the basis for the future land use plan for the community, the goal of which is to strike the appropriate balance between conservation and development.

In Rhode Island, *Land Use 2025: State Land Use Policies and Plan* is the guiding document for land use planning and regulations at both state and municipal levels, together with a three-prong statutory scheme embodied in:

1. Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, Chapter 45-22.2 RIGL;
2. Rhode Island Zoning Enabling Act of 1991, Chapter 45-24, RIGL; and
3. Rhode Island Land Development and Subdivision Review Enabling Act of 1992, Chapter 45-23, RIGL.

*Land Use 2025* seeks to maintain the distinctions between urban and rural development patterns within the state. To that end, growth is encouraged within identified urban service boundaries and in selected centers in rural and suburban communities throughout the state. These urban service areas are characterized by having a full array of utilities, including public water and sanitary sewer systems, as well as high capacity energy and telecommunications services. Higher density development is encouraged within these areas.

In addition to local regulation, land use and development in substantial areas of Westerly is also subject to other state regulatory authorities (e.g. Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and Coastal Resources Management Council), as well as federal regulatory authorities such as the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).

The Land Use Element for the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan must be consistent with *Land Use 2025*, the other elements of the town's Comprehensive Plan, development in adjacent communities and state and federal regulatory systems.



### 1.1 Existing Land Use

This existing land use inventory was completed using the town’s initial Phase I Geographical Information System (GIS) integrated with data provided by the Assessor’s data system. This analysis combined these categories into the following land uses:

- Agriculture
- Commercial/Mixed Use
- Community Facilities
- Conservation, Recreation & Open Space
- Industrial
- Residential
- Vacant
- Water

Westerly contains approximately 31.2 square miles (19,967 acres) of land area. Research conducted as part of this Comprehensive Plan project found that approximately 78 percent (15,536 acres) of Westerly's land is either developed or permanently committed to conservation.

The flowing table summarizes the area and the proportion of each of the land use categories.

**Table 1-1 Existing Land Use 2009**

Land Use	Acres	Percent of total
<b>Agriculture</b> —includes actively farmed land (cropland, pastures, and orchards). About 248 acres of farmland is being conserved through acquisition of development rights or conservation easements	2,046	10.3%
<b>Commercial-Mixed Use</b> —includes all commercial uses consisting of retail, services and professional uses, and areas with both commercial and residential uses such as the downtown area and part of Watch Hill	728	3.7%
<b>Community Facilities</b> —includes schools, churches, government buildings, community safety facilities, hospitals, airport, rail yard, roads, other transportation uses, public utilities, and the transfer station	2,144	10.7%
<b>Industrial</b> —includes manufacturing and quarrying operations	436	2.2%
<b>Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space</b> —includes golf courses, marinas, beaches, parks and other recreation, cemeteries, and vacant land that is protected from development by conservation easements or other permanent protection	4,112	20.6%
<b>Residential</b> —includes all residential uses	7,193	36.0%
<b>Vacant</b> —most of this land is currently forested; it includes land that is potentially developable and land that would be difficult to develop such as wetlands, inland sandy soils, and rock outcrops	2,385	11.9%
<b>Water</b> —includes inland fresh water and salt ponds; the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are not included	923	4.6%



### Agriculture

The agricultural land use category includes only actively farmed lands within the town. Agricultural uses include croplands, pastures, and orchards. There are 2,046 acres of actively farmed land in Westerly, which accounts for 10.3 percent of the town. The largest concentration of agricultural land is located around Dunn's Corners and Bradford Road in the central portion of the town. There are also several areas of farmland along Shore Road, and additional farmland can be found northwest of the airport. In the north portion of the town, several smaller areas of land are currently used for agriculture. These areas could potentially be used for other purposes. However, under Rhode Island's land use policy preservation of farmland is encouraged. About 248 acres of the 2,046 acres currently farmed are being conserved through acquisition of development rights or conservation easements. Most of the farmland so preserved is in the southern portion of the town.

### Commercial/Mixed Use

Westerly has 728 acres of commercially developed land. Large scale development is located in two areas:

- a. Along the Route 1, the Granite Street/Franklin Street corridor, from the Tower Street intersection to the area immediately around the Route 78 intersection, and
- b. Around the Dunn's Corners intersection on Route 1 at Dunn's Corners-Bradford Road and Langworthy Road.

There is also a defined historic downtown area bounded by the Pawcatuck River and encompassing portions of Main Street, Broad Street, High Street, Canal Street and Railroad Avenue. Two other substantial mixed-use commercial areas exist along the shore; one is on Bay Street in the Watch Hill section and the other is on portions of Atlantic Avenue in the Misquamicut section. Smaller commercial areas are scattered throughout the town.

### Community Facilities

Community Facilities include schools, churches, government buildings and hospitals. Also included are land use areas dedicated to transportation networks, roads, public utilities, and landfills. These uses cover 2,144 acres or 10.7 percent of the town's land area. The airport just south of Route 1 at Westerly Bypass Road is the largest of these areas. The landfill, located between Westerly Bypass Road and Chapman Pond, the rail yards, Westerly Bypass itself and electrical transmission lines are others of significance. Churches and schools exist throughout the town.

### Conservation, Recreation & Open Space

This category includes golf courses, marinas, beaches, parks and other recreation areas, cemeteries, and vacant land protected from development by conservation easements or other permanent protection. The largest single tract of vacant land is the Woody Hill Wildlife Management Area. Other tracts have been acquired and preserved by the Westerly Municipal Land Trust and private conservation organizations. Beaches are located along most of the town's shoreline. There are four golf courses located in the southern portion of the town. Eight marinas are located along the Pawcatuck River. The rest of the parks are located throughout the town. This land use category accounts for 4,112 acres of land or 20.6 percent of the town's area.



### Industrial

Industrial uses include manufacturing establishments and quarrying operations. There are 436 acres of land dedicated to industrial uses in Westerly. The majority of this area is made up of quarrying operations. The largest of these areas is in the Old Hopkinton Road and White Rock area. Other mining operations are present in Bradford. Manufacturing operations are located in the Airport Industrial Park, Bradford, along Canal Street and on Beach Street.

### Residential

Residential land use occupies 7,193 acres of land representing 36 percent of the town's area. These uses are primarily concentrated in the western and southern portions of the town. There is also a pocket of residential development in the northeast corner of town known as Bradford. The highest densities of residential development are found inside the Westerly Bypass loop, which is the Westerly town center. Along the southern shore area, much of the residential development is a combination of year-round and seasonal housing, with an increasing trend toward year-round use. The greatest density along the shore is located in the Misquamicut area.

### Vacant

Nearly 90 percent of this land is currently forested; it includes land that is potentially developable, as well as land that would be difficult to develop such as wetlands, inland sandy soils, and rock outcrops. Almost 12 percent of the town, 2,385 acres, is classified as vacant. Vacant land that is not preserved and has development potential is located north of White Rock and south of Bradford, surrounding the Woody Hill Management Area.

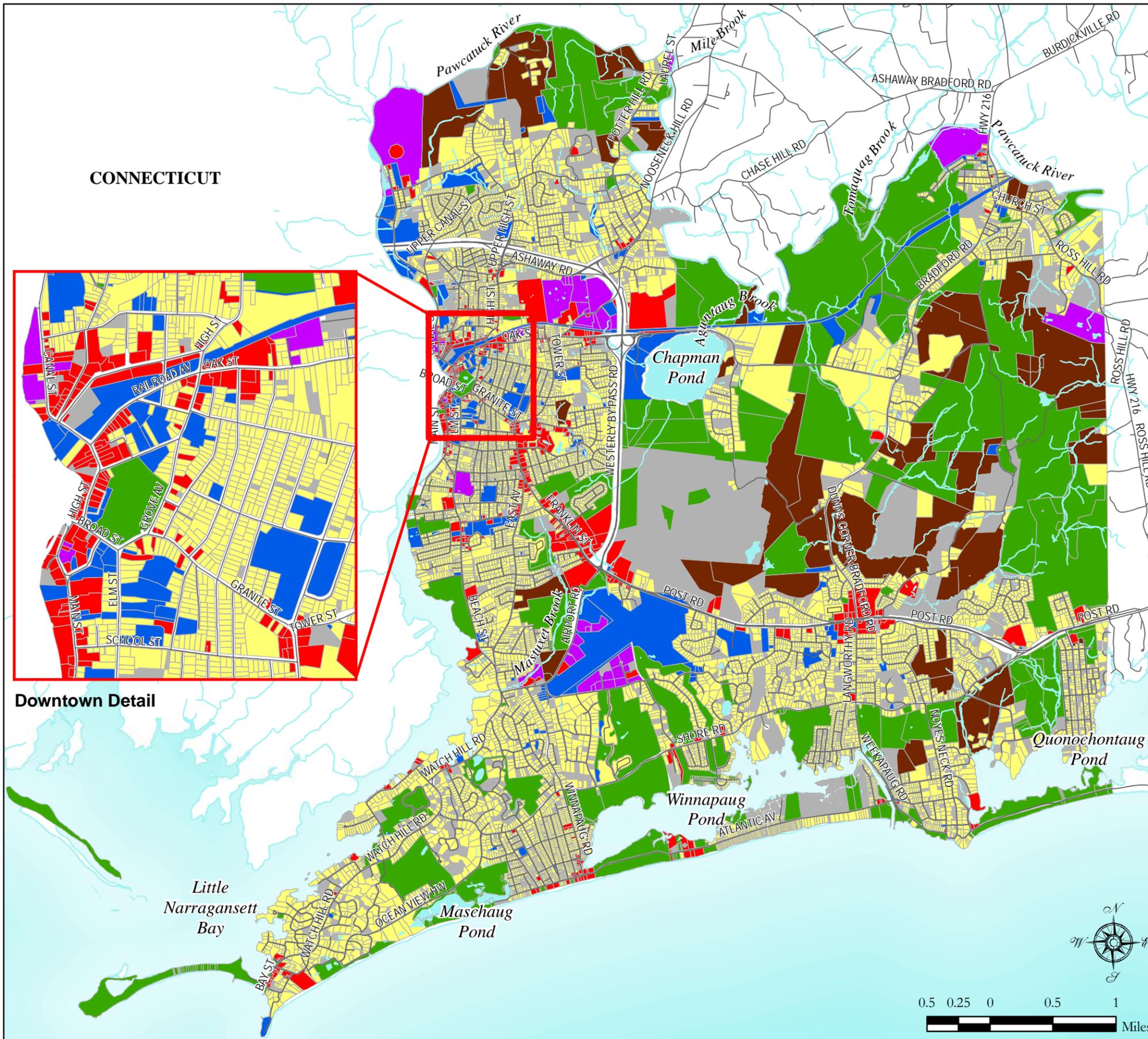
### Water

Areas classified as water include inland fresh water and salt ponds and occupy 923 acres within the town. The largest of these areas are Chapman Pond in central Westerly and the Quonochotaug and Winnapaug salt ponds. The Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are not included.

## ***1.2 State Land Use Policy***

In April of 2006, the Rhode Island Department of Administration completed a statewide land use plan titled *Land Use 2025*. The goal of *Land Use 2025* is to eliminate sprawl and protect the natural resources of the state. The plan encourages an urban/rural model for the state that concentrates new development into established areas, together with some rural centers, and identifies urban service boundaries. Within the urban service boundaries are areas that either provide public sewer and water or are planned to do so in the near future, and where higher density and infill development might be considered.

The *Land Use 2025* plan also designates centers where rural concentrations could be supported. Bradford was designated as one of these centers. The plan encourages the conservation of natural resources through cluster development, conservation development, or transfer of development rights in areas that have development potential.



**Legend**

- Commercial/Mixed Use
- Community Facilities
- Industrial
- Conservation/Recreation/Open Space
- Residential
- Agriculture
- Vacant \*
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

map source: *RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, CDM*

\* Includes land potentially developable as well as wetlands, inland sandy soils and rock outcrops.

## *Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island*

*Figure 1-1  
Existing Land Use*

November 2009



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.





### *1.3 Existing Zoning*

Westerly's last comprehensive update of its Zoning Ordinance was enacted in 1998. There have been multiple updates since, including the Affordable Housing Amendment in 2007. The Zoning Ordinance establishes permitted uses, minimum lot sizes, minimum front, side and rear setbacks for principal and accessory buildings, maximum building heights, maximum building and lot coverage, and minimum floor areas. The Zoning Ordinance is a critical tool for controlling the type, density, and appearance of development within the town.

Westerly adopted its first Zoning Ordinance in 1925 after receiving authority to do so from the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1922. As its provisions evolved over the years, residential lot sizes increased. New minimum lot sizes and setbacks consistent with those lot sizes were provided even for already developed land. For example, the Misquamicut area was fully developed under a predominant lot size of 10,000 square feet. Over time, the Zoning Ordinance increased the lot size to 30,000 square feet with required building set backs appropriate to that size.

The result was the creation of substantial areas of predominately non-conforming lots and buildings. The Zoning Board was besieged by requests for those dimensional variances necessary to permit reasonable use of the land. The 1998 ordinance addressed this issue by creating multiple residential zoning districts which reflect the development which occurred under earlier zoning ordinance provisions. It also provided lot sizes for areas not already developed which reflect the availability or lack of municipal water and/or sewer, and natural constraints upon the land.

Similarly, there were only two commercial zoning districts prior to the 1998 ordinance which did not reflect the unique issues presented by commercial development in discrete areas of the town.

The 1998 Zoning Ordinance established a total of 22 districts: 8 residential districts, 9 commercial districts, 3 industrial districts and 2 special districts. In addition to these districts, there are 5 overlay districts, which were created to protect resources, reduce hazards and permit certain types of prescribed developments which would otherwise not be allowed. The code also contains provisions for the establishment of planned resort developments.



The following table presents a breakdown of the zoning districts by land area. The table was generated using a geographic information system (GIS) program.

**Table 1-2 Existing Zoning 2009**

Zone	Square Feet	Acres	Percent
<b>Residential Districts</b>		<b>12,795.43</b>	<b>67.19</b>
RR-60 Rural Residential	176,913,816	4,061.38	21.33
LDR-43 Low Density Residential	33,126,048	760.47	3.99
LDR-40 Low Density Residential	42,184,944	968.43	5.09
MDR-30 Medium Density Residential	113,235,900	2,599.54	13.65
MDR-20 Medium Density Residential	81,965,544	1,881.67	9.88
HDR-15 High Density Residential	53,837,236	1,235.93	6.49
HDR-10 High Density Residential	17,337,232	398.01	2.09
HDR-6 High Density Residential	38,768,416	890.00	4.67
<b>Commercial Districts</b>		<b>726.46</b>	<b>3.81</b>
P-15 Professional Office	6,164,316	141.51	0.74
DC Downtown Center 1	1,554,707	35.69	0.19
DCII Downtown Center 2	1,585,468	36.40	0.19
NB Neighborhood Business	1,782,974	40.93	0.21
HC Highway Commercial	12,496,463	286.88	1.51
GC General Commercial	2,730,568	62.69	0.33
SC-WH Shore Commercial Watch Hill	1,103,831	25.34	0.13
SC-G Shore Commercial General	3,550,501	81.51	0.43
MC Marine Commercial	675,904	15.52	0.08
<b>Industrial Districts</b>		<b>1,760.09</b>	<b>9.24</b>
GI General Industrial	44,040,175	1,011.02	5.31
LI Light Industrial	26,888,192	617.27	3.24
ORAT Office Research, Assembly and Technology	5,741,206	131.80	0.69
<b>Special Districts</b>		<b>3,740.54</b>	<b>19.64</b>
OS/R Open Space and Recreation	130,564,328	2,997.34	15.74
CR Commercial Recreation	32,373,414	743.19	3.90
<b>Planned Development</b>		<b>21.42</b>	<b>0.11</b>
PUD	932,899	21.42	0.11

Source: Cherenzia & Associates, Ltd. and peter j. smith & company, inc. Residential Districts



### *1.3.1 Residential Districts*

Residential Districts make up 67.2 percent of the land area of the town of Westerly. There are 8 residential districts ranging from rural low density to high density residential development.

#### Rural Residential 60 (RR-60)

The Rural Residential 60 Zoning District is intended for residential areas characterized by very low density development and comprised mostly of land that is currently used for agriculture and/or contains wetlands, other severe soil constraints, or other sensitive environmental characteristics. The rural residential districts are designed to protect many of the town's most valuable natural resources. (Note that within the watershed of the salt ponds, a maximum density of one dwelling unit per two acres is required by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Special Area Management Plan.) Rural Residential 60 is designed for those areas which do not have access to municipal sewers or municipal water. The zone makes up approximately 21 percent of the town.

#### Low Density Residential 43 (LDR-43)

The Low-Density Residential 43 Zoning District is intended for residential areas, such as Watch Hill, which are comprised predominantly of large single-family homes on large lots and which are served by municipal water but not by municipal sewer systems. The minimum one-acre lot size is designed to preserve the existing character of such neighborhoods. There are 760 acres zoned LDR-43.

#### Low Density Residential 40 (LDR-40)

The Low-Density Residential 40 Zoning District is intended to protect and preserve areas of prime agricultural soils for continued agricultural and agriculturally orientated uses. The standards and densities prescribed for this district are intended to preserve the open character of the area and thereby to protect the business of agriculture. Residential use in this district is restricted to a minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet. While the intent of the district is to protect agriculture, very little of the zone is used for agriculture. The LDR-40 zone is located mainly north of Potter Hill Road. Some areas are located east of Chapman Pond.

#### Medium Density Residential 30 (MDR-30)

The Medium-Density Residential 30 Zoning District is generally intended for single-family neighborhoods adjacent to high-density areas. This zoning district is designed to conform to existing development patterns rather than encourage major expansion beyond defined neighborhoods. Most areas within this district are connected to municipal water but not to municipal sewers. Specific provision is provided for alternative residential development of certain property of substantial size in the R-30 Zoning District. The MDR-30 District is located mainly between Shore Road (Route 1-A) and Post Road (Route 1). Weekapaug and several small areas in the north are also zoned MDR-30.

#### Medium Density Residential 20 (MDR-20)

The Medium-Density Residential 20 Zoning District is generally intended for single-family neighborhoods adjacent to high-density areas. This zoning district is designed to conform to existing development patterns rather than encourage major expansion beyond defined neighborhoods. Most areas within this district are connected to municipal water but not to municipal sewers. Minimum lot size in this district is 20,000 square feet. The largest areas zoned MDR-20 are located around Dunn's Corners and between Ashaway Road and Potter Hill Road. Other properties in the MDR-20 district exist in Bradford, Haversham and Avondale.



### High Density Residential 15 (HDR-15)

High-Density Residential 15 Zoning District is intended primarily for areas of existing residential development. This zoning district is designed for areas where existing densities are high, close to saturation. These areas are situated on the outer edges of the Westerly town center. The district permits a variety of housing types with a minimum lot area of 15,000 square feet per dwelling unit. These areas are served by public water and sewer.

### High Density Residential 10 (HDR-10)

High-Density Residential 10 Zoning District is intended primarily for areas of existing residential development. This zoning district is designed for areas where existing densities are high, close to saturation, which include a variety of housing types. The districts are located in Misquamicut and Weekapaug. These areas are served by public water, but not by sewer.

### High Density Residential 6 (HDR-6)

High-Density Residential 6 Zoning District is intended primarily for areas of existing residential development. These zoning districts are designed for areas where existing densities are high, close to saturation, and include a variety of housing types. The zone covers established neighborhoods around the core of the Westerly town center area. The area is serviced by public water and sewer.

## ***1.3.2 Commercial Districts***

There are nine commercial zoning districts which collectively occupy 3.8 percent of the land area within the town of Westerly. These districts vary by types of uses permitted, lot sizes and setback requirements.

### Professional/Office (P-15)

The Professional/Office Zoning District is intended to establish areas within which the town encourages a concentration of professional office and related uses. Property in this district often provides a transitional area between more intensely developed districts and residential districts.

### Downtown Center 1 and 2 (DC-1, DC-2)

Downtown Center Zoning Districts are intended for areas comprising the downtown business core and immediately surrounding areas characterized by mixed uses, high-density residential uses and retail shops. The Downtown Center Zones are intended to preserve the distinct character of the downtown, which has special needs related to its historic mill town origins, in particular the preservation of historic buildings and facades.

### Neighborhood Business (NB)

The Neighborhood Business Zoning District is intended for areas characterized by small retail and personal service operations but surrounded by residential areas. Properties in this district are small. They are scattered around the town, with most of them in the town center area.

### Highway Commercial (HC)

The Highway Commercial Zoning District is intended for areas which are primarily vehicle-oriented because of their location along major roads. An objective of this commercial zoning category is to address existing traffic safety problems associated with excessive curb cuts and to prevent further traffic problems from occurring with future development. This district is located along Route 1. Large lots and 50 foot setbacks are required in this district.



### General Commercial (GC)

The General Commercial District is intended for areas of historic commercial activity outside of the Downtown districts. Minimum lot sizes are smaller than the Highway Commercial District and the Downtown Center 2 District. These areas are scattered throughout the town.

### Shore Commercial – General (SC-G)

Shore Commercial – General Zoning District is intended to promote the use of waterfront locations for servicing local and tourist seasonal businesses and water-related activities. The district also provides for both direct and indirect access to the water by the general public. The zone is intended to allow uses in a manner which limits their impact on abutting residential areas. Most of these areas are located along the coast between Misquamicut and Weekapaug. Some of these areas are not located on the water but on Shore Road and Route 1.

### Shore Commercial – Watch Hill (SC-WH)

Shore Commercial – WH Zoning District is intended to promote the use of waterfront locations for servicing local and tourist seasonal businesses and water-related activities. The district also provides for both direct and indirect access to the water by the general public. The zone is intended to allow uses in a manner which limits their impact on abutting residential areas. There is one SC-WH District, which is located at the western end of the Watch Hill area, primarily along Bay Street. Since this district is located entirely within a historic district, any new development must undergo additional review to see that it conforms in style and mass with existing structures surrounding it.

### Marine Commercial (MC)

The Marine Commercial Zoning District is intended to establish an area dedicated to marine (water-dependent) and marine-related uses. Uses proposed for the portion of the river designated as Class 3, High-Intensity Boating, in the Rhode Island CRMC Program, are consistent with that program. The district is located on the river side of Margin Street between Greenman Avenue and Clark Street.

## ***1.3.3 Industrial Districts***

Industrial districts make up 9.2 percent of the town's land area, and much of the land in these districts is protected by conservation easement. There are three industrial districts which vary in intensity and type of use.

### General Industrial (GI)

The General Industrial Zoning District is intended for manufacturing uses. This zone is intended for industrial uses which must be segregated because of their incompatibility with other land uses; it is designed to provide for the infrastructure and operational requirements of industrial uses. Stone quarries, landfills, the airport, and large factories are uses currently located in the GI District.

### Light Industrial (LI)

The Light Industrial Zoning District is designed for areas which have historically housed industrial development in proximity to businesses and residences, and which would be incompatible with more extensive industrial use. There are two LI Districts located in an urban area, north of Railroad Avenue and Oak Street. Larger LI areas are located in the northeast portion of town. The LI District on Bowling Lane is now under a conservation easement.



### Office, Research, Assembly, and Technology (ORAT)

The Office, Research, Assembly, and Technology District is designed to provide for office research, assembly and technology uses that do not require extensive infrastructure, sewer, water, site development, or present a threat to sensitive environmental resources. There are two ORAT Districts, one located on Canal Street and the other north of the airport.

#### ***1.3.4 Special Districts***

Special districts are those districts which do not fall into any of the previous categories. These districts protect areas for parks and open space or dedicate areas for commercial recreation. More than 19.6 percent of the town's area falls into one of these zoning districts.

### Open Space and Recreation (OS/R)

The Open Space and Recreation Zoning District is intended for areas in use as open space and recreation. This district covers a variety of uses including the town's well fields, major parks and recreation areas, portions of the barrier beaches and cemeteries. This zone covers 16 percent of the town. These districts are scattered across the town. Aside from parks and cemeteries, nearly all of these land areas are protected through state and town-acquired conservation easements.

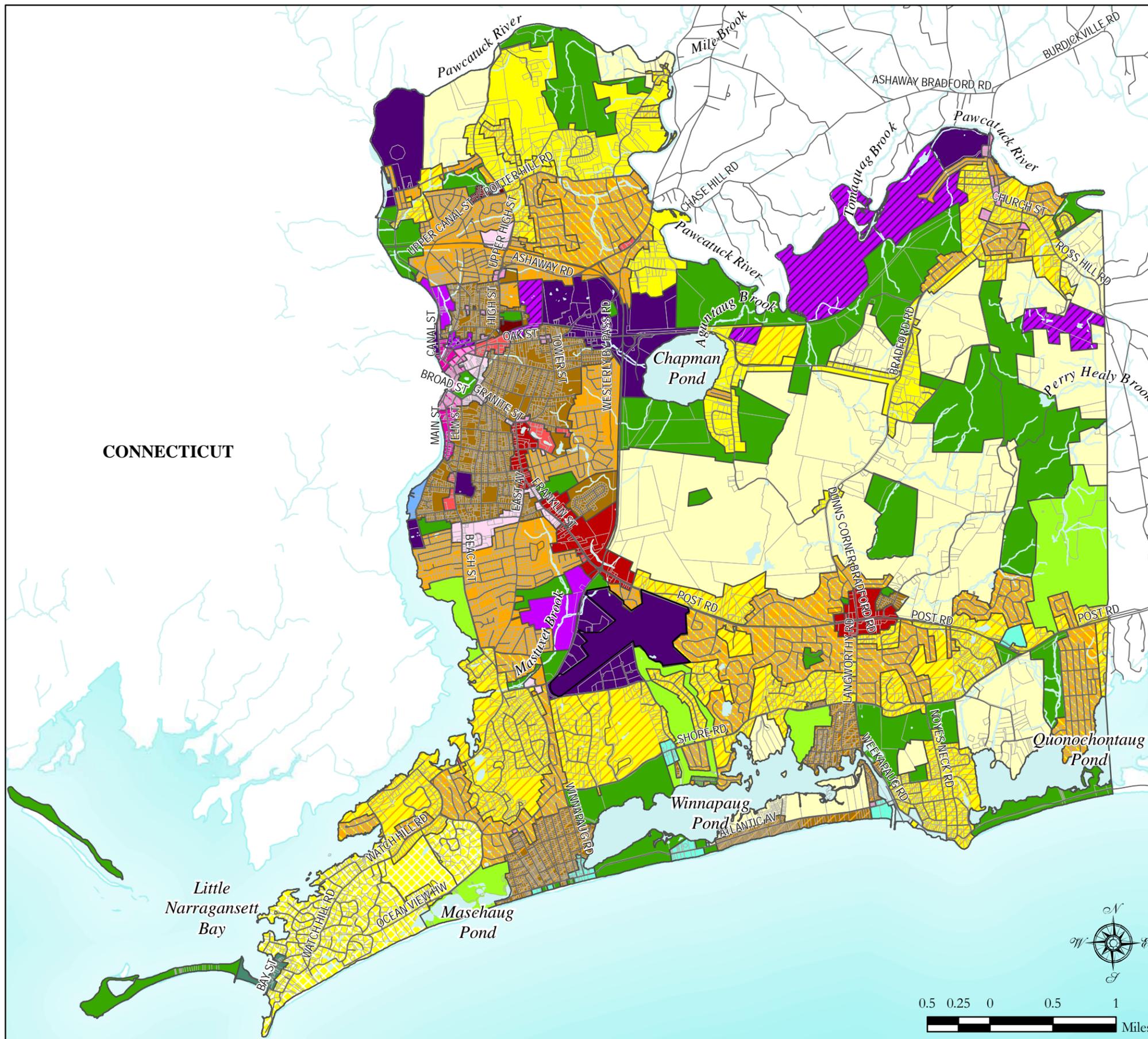
### Commercial Recreation (CR)

The Commercial Recreation Zoning District is intended for areas that have historically housed commercial/recreational facilities although adjacent to residential areas in order to allow their continued existence subject to reasonable regulations and limitations on future expansion. These areas include the three golf courses along Shore Road and a marina along Watch Hill Road at the end of Sosoia Lane. An area was also rezoned to CR to make way for the Shelter Harbor Golf Course.

#### ***1.3.5 Planned Developments***

The Rhode Island Zoning Enabling Act of 1991 specifically permits modern zoning tools such as Planned Development. Planned development districts become mapped for a particular area of land by a zone change granted in conjunction with approval of a master plan of development for that particular area of land which includes requirements and regulations specific to that land. While Westerly once had a process for Planned Unit Development (PUD), it was repealed in 1998 because of the mixed use possibilities in such districts. Reintroduction was deemed too politically sensitive at that time. The existing ordinance has a place reserved for such reintroduction. Such a provision could be the mechanism for development which implements the *Land Use 2025* plan, including its mixed use elements, if limited to areas within the urban services boundary. The planned developments that are identified on the existing zoning map are residential communities which were developed during the period that the PUD provision existed.

The current Zoning Ordinance has an option for Planned Resort Facilities Development. The Planned Resort Facilities Area concept is intended to recognize the town as a tourist resort area and permit the growth of the industry, provided that such facilities are located on substantial tracts of land so as to minimize any impact on neighboring property. This type of planned development has not been used.



### Legend

- RR-60 Rural Residential 60
- LDR-43 Low Density Residential 43
- LDR-40 Low Density Residential 40
- MDR-30 Medium Density Residential 30
- MDR-20 Medium Density Residential 20
- HDR-15 High Density Residential 15
- HDR-10 High Density Residential 10
- HDR-6 High Density Residential 6
- P-15 Professional Office
- NB Neighborhood Business
- DC Downtown Center
- DCII Downtown Center 2
- GC General Commercial
- HC Highway Commercial
- MC Marine Commercial
- SC-G Shore Commercial - General
- SC-WH Shore Commercial - Watch Hill
- ORAT Office, Research, Assembly & Technology
- LI Light Industrial
- GI General Industrial
- CR Commercial Recreation
- OS/R Open Space and Recreation
- PUD Planned Unit Development
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads

map source: RIGIS, Town of Westerly GIS, CDM

## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 1-2  
Zoning Districts

November 2009



This map is intended as an illustrative guide and may be suitable for general planning purposes; however, it is not adequate for legal boundary or regulatory interpretation.



## 2.0 *Housing*

### 2.1 *Overview*

The availability and affordability of housing is a major factor in the livability and prosperity of a community. The diversity of the housing stock in terms of the mix of unit types as well as ownership and rental opportunities are important factors that can help to identify problems and opportunities in the local housing market. These serve as a basis for recommendations to guide housing in the community over the planning horizon.

As one of the required elements of the Comprehensive Plan under RSA 45-44, the Housing Element must identify and analyze existing and forecasted housing needs and objectives. Among other required aspects of the Housing Element are policies to address housing affordability and a plan to implement the policies and goals of housing affordability.

The Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan must be consistent with State Guide Plan Element 421: State Housing Plan. Briefly, the goals of State Guide Element 421 address the following policy areas for housing:

- Quantity
- Quality
- Variety
- Accessibility
- Affordability

The Housing Element of the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan, guided by the State Guide Plan Element 421, provides a framework for developing the policies and implementation strategies to meet the requirements of the state and to preserve and enhance the quality of life for present and future residents of Westerly. This element provides an analysis of housing trends. Along with the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan, it will help to inform and define strategies to:

- Promote diversity of housing types and affordability
- Protect historic and other essential characteristics of neighborhoods, prevent displacement and promote sound water protection and watershed management
- Support the best use and maintenance of the housing stock
- Identify locations for new housing units
- Promote housing affordability, and encourage better planning, neighborhood development and growth management.

These goals are also consistent with Goal 2 of *Land Use 2025: Rhode Island State Land Use Policies and Plan: Achieve Excellence in Community Design*, which includes among its objectives to promote diverse affordable housing.



The inventory and analysis included in this section is primarily based on demographic data from the 2000 U. S. Census with supplemental information from other sources. These include – but are not limited to – information supplied by the town of Westerly, housing data collected by federal and state governments, supplemental information purchased from a market company engaged in tracking and collecting data on the changing population and on additional desktop research.

## 2.2 Population Size and Age Characteristics

The town of Westerly had an estimated year-round population of 23,424 in 2006, 2 percent higher than in 2000. As indicated in the table that follows, between 1990 and 2006, the town grew at a faster rate than the state but at a slower rate than the county. Among comparable towns, Westerly’s growth rate was most similar to those of Stonington, Connecticut and Narragansett.

**Table 2-1 Population Change 1990-2006**

	Westerly	Narragansett	South Kingstown	Stonington, CT	Washington County	Rhode Island
2006*	23,424	16,708	29,457	18,220	127,561	1,067,610
2000	22,966	16,361	27,921	17,906	123,546	1,048,319
1990	21,605	14,985	24,631	16,919	110,006	1,003,464
Percent Change 1990-2000	6.3%	9.2%	13.4%	5.8%	12.3%	4.5%
Percent Change 2000-2006	2.0%	2.1%	5.5%	1.8%	3.2%	1.8%

Source: US Bureau of Census and peter j. smith & company, inc. \*Estimate

Westerly’s population is expected to increase slowly but steadily through 2025, according to population projection figures prepared by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program. A 15 percent population increase is projected between 2000 and 2025 that would result in a population of 26,432 by 2025. The rate of growth for the town is slowing and is predicted to continue to do so. Its 10-year 1990-2000 change, 6.3 percent, is projected to slow to 4.8 percent between 2000 and 2010. During the same time period the county is expected to grow by 19 percent and the state by 7.6 percent.

Growth across the northeast and midwest has slowed significantly. However, Michigan and Rhode Island were the only two states projected to have lost population between July 2006 and July 2007, according to the US Census Bureau.

**Table 2-2 Population Projections 2000-2025**

	*2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	Percent Change 2000-2025
Westerly	22,966	23,578	24,088	24,852	25,704	26,432	15.1%
Washington County	123,546	127,765	131,280	136,542	142,415	147,433	19.3%
Rhode Island	1,048,319	1,062,441	1,074,199	1,091,813	1,111,464	1,128,260	7.6%

Source: Statewide Planning Program, Rhode Island Department of Administration \*Actual



Claritas, a national marketing data company that tracks demographic data, estimates the 2007 population of Westerly at 23,662. It projects the population in 2012 only slightly higher at 23,959. This would track a population growth curve only slightly lower than that projected by the state.

A statistic of at least equal and even possibly greater concern to the community may be the age distribution of its residents. As housing prices have risen in Westerly the population has aged. Most significantly, the proportion of the population over age 65 is growing quickly and is predicted to comprise 19 percent of the population in 2012, as compared with 17 percent in 1990. The proportion of the population over 50 is predicted to comprise 39 percent of the total population in 2012, a 32 percent rate of change between 1990 and 2012. The growth of the elder population is contrasted with a loss of population among younger persons. These characteristics are summarized in the table below.

**Table 2-3 Age Composition of Population 1990-2012**

	1990	2000	2007	2012	1990-2000 Change	1990-2012 Change
Total Population	21,605	22,966	23,662	23,959	6.3%	10.9%
Age 2+	N/A	98%	98%	98%	N/A	N/A
Age 2-11	N/A	13%	12%	11%	N/A	N/A
Age 12 - 24	17%	15%	15%	15%	-11.9%	-13.3%
Age 25 - 49	37%	37%	35%	33%	-1.5%	-10.7%
Age 25 - 54	41%	43%	42%	41%	4.3%	-1.1%
Age 25 - 64	50%	52%	54%	54%	4.5%	7.5%
Age 35 - 64	32%	40%	41%	41%	23.2%	27.3%
Age 25+	67%	69%	71%	73%	3.8%	8.3%
Age 35+	49%	57%	59%	59%	15.9%	21.6%
Age 50+	30%	33%	36%	39%	10.4%	32.0%
Age 65+	17%	17%	17%	19%	1.8%	10.7%

Source: Claritas, Inc., and peter j. smith & company, inc.

As the town’s population has aged, school enrollment has dropped. After increasing incrementally between annually 1999 and 2003, from 3,605 to 3,710, school enrollment in the years following dropped, falling from 3,710 in 2003 to 3,314 in 2007, according to the Rhode Island Department of Education. The school district’s enrollment dropped 8 percent; school enrollment statewide dropped 2 percent over the same period. The table below summarizes the school enrollment.

**Table 2-4 School Enrollment, 1999-2007**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	1999-2007 Change
Westerly	3,605	3,659	3,691	3,692	3,710	3,623	3,529	3,436	3,314	-8%
Rhode Island	154,956	156,632	157,374	158,218	159,205	159,375	156,498	153,417	151,619	-2%

Source: RI Department of Education

Based on most recent estimates from the Westerly School Department, total public school enrollment is projected to be 3,175 students in the fall of 2009. This total consists of 1,067 students at Westerly High School, 967 at Westerly Middle School, and 1,141 at Westerly’s elementary schools.



### *2.3 Housing Availability*

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of housing units (year-round and seasonal) in Westerly increased by 7 percent (from 10,521 to 11,292 units). In 2000, 83 percent of the town's 11,292 housing units were occupied and 64 percent of all occupied housing units were owner-occupied units. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of owner-occupied units in the town increased by 15 percent. Within the state as a whole, the owner occupancy rate increased by 9 percent within the same time period.

In 2000, the town had 1,890 vacant units and 75 percent of those units were seasonal housing units (13 percent of total housing units). It is important to note that most of these units characterized as "vacant" are seasonal units occupied by owners for summer and year-round weekend and holiday activity and therefore not vacant as the term would typically imply. "Vacant" in the traditional sense represents approximately 4 percent of total housing units. County-wide, seasonal homes accounted for 85 percent of vacant units (15 percent of total housing units) but statewide the figure was significantly lower, 43 percent of vacant units (3 percent of total units). Comparison towns also had a significantly higher percentage of seasonal housing units than the state as a whole.

Westerly is a community that includes a high proportion of homes that are occupied on a seasonal basis. However, there is no census of Westerly's seasonal population that would help town leaders better incorporate this population in its planning. It is estimated, however, that seasonal housing in Westerly comprises about 13 percent of units, or about 1,468 units in 2000. Using Westerly's average household size – 2.4 people – and assuming that all the seasonal housing units are occupied, the seasonal population increases the town's year 2000 population by about 3,500, to almost 26,500. This is an increase of about 15 percent.<sup>1</sup> Not having a better gauge of the summer population increase, as well as weather factors, restricts to some extent the town's ability to estimate the demand for its services, including utilities, sanitation and emergency management.

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<sup>1</sup> As an illustration of how little is really known about the level of increase of population in South County towns during the summer months: A 1995 study by the US Army Corps of Engineers on hurricane preparedness estimated the summer population of South County beach communities at 28% higher than the year round population. The local rule of thumb holds that the population doubles in the summer including all residents, seasonal and year-round, tourists and other visitors. The transient population for Misquamicut State Beach is estimated at 280,000 per year by the RI Department of Environmental Management.



**Table 2-5 Housing Characteristics – 2000**

	Westerly	Narragansett	South Kingstown	Stonington, CT	Washington County	Rhode Island
Total housing units	11,292	9,159	11,291	8,591	56,816	439,837
<b>Occupied</b>	<b>83.3%</b>	<b>74.7%</b>	<b>82.1%</b>	<b>89.2%</b>	<b>82.6%</b>	<b>92.9%</b>
Owner occupied	63.8%	61.9%	74.9%	70.7%	72.9%	60.0%
Renter occupied	36.2%	38.1%	25.1%	29.3%	27.1%	40.0%
<b>Vacant</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>25.3%</b>	<b>17.9%</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
For rent	13.8%	1.5%	4.3%	14.3%	5.6%	27.5%
For sale only	8.4%	3.5%	2.3%	8.7%	4.8%	10.8%
Rented or sold, not occupied	1.4%	2.3%	0.2%	3.1%	2.6%	5.8%
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	75.4%	89.8%	90.2%	58.7%	84.5%	43.4%
For migrant workers	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.1%
Other vacant	1.0%	2.9%	3.0%	14.4%	2.5%	12.5%

Source: US Bureau of Census and peter j. smith & company, inc.

Between 2000 and 2004, the number of housing units in Westerly increased by 4 percent to 11,690 units. In 2004, there were 10,229 year-round housing units and 1,461 seasonal housing units.<sup>2</sup> Based on latest U.S. Census estimates, in 2008 there were approximately 12,300 housing units in Westerly.

Between July 2005 and June 2007, 363 building permits for new residential housing units were issued. Of the 363 permits, 301 were for single-family residences and 62 were for multi-family residences. Twenty-eight of these permits were for low and moderate income (LMI) units. Twenty of those 28 LMI units were under construction as of September 2007.

### Units in Structure

In 2000, 67 percent of Westerly’s residential structures included one unit and 33 percent had two or more units. The town had a higher percentage of structures with two or more units than all comparison towns and Washington County overall. The state as a whole, with its larger metropolitan areas, had a higher percentage (41 percent) of structures with two or more units. In 2000, the average household size in Westerly was 2.40 persons, which was slightly lower than both county and state levels.

### Age of Housing

In 2000, Westerly had a housing stock that was relatively newer than the state as a whole but older than the county and most comparison towns. The median year for homes built in the town was 1965, compared to 1958 in the state and 1971 in the county. Since the pace of development accelerated in Westerly in the 2000-2006 period, the median year housing was built is actually likely to be more recent than 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Town of Westerly Affordable Housing Plan – Revised September 11, 2006



Table 2-6 Age of Housing – 2000

	Westerly	Narragansett	South Kingstown	Stonington, CT	Washington County	Rhode Island
Built 1990 to 2000	12.5%	12.9%	18.2%	10.8%	16.5%	8.7%
Built 1980 to 1989	19.4%	18.0%	17.5%	14.6%	18.1%	11.5%
Built 1970 to 1979	13.0%	21.2%	16.8%	11.2%	17.8%	13.4%
Built 1960 to 1969	10.9%	16.0%	10.4%	9.0%	13.1%	13.0%
Built 1950 to 1959	12.8%	14.3%	11.9%	12.4%	11.2%	14.2%
Built 1940 to 1949	5.7%	7.8%	5.6%	7.0%	6.2%	9.8%
Built 1939 or earlier	25.8%	9.8%	19.5%	35.0%	17.1%	29.4%
Median Year Built	1965	1971	1971	1957	1971	1958

Source: US Bureau of Census and peter j. smith & company, inc.

According to the town’s Affordable Housing Plan, between 2000 and 2004, building permits were issued representing 574 units.

### 2.4 Housing Affordability

Through the early to mid part of the current decade (2000-2006), high and rising property values reflected the desirability of Westerly as an attractive community for both year-round and seasonal residents. Prior to the current (2007-2009) downturn in real estate markets, the housing market had been characterized by vibrant construction activity in both new and remodeled homes and strong appreciation of assessed home values which, combined with rising property taxes and energy costs, have significantly impacted housing affordability.

High and rising rent has also been an issue throughout Rhode Island. A 2004 statewide rent survey found the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment was \$1,121 per month.<sup>3</sup> Assuming 30 percent of income was spent on housing, a renter would require an annual income of \$44,840 to be able to afford the average apartment, \$13,000 more than the average renter household has available.<sup>4</sup>

To assist persons in housing crisis, emergency shelter is provided by Westerly Area Rest and Meals, Inc., which in addition to providing meals through its soup kitchen, has 19 emergency shelter beds (13 for men, six for women), five bedrooms for transitional housing and two apartments through Harvest Homes, with the goal of providing four more apartments during 2007.<sup>5</sup>

In 2006, the average rent in the town of Westerly was significantly higher than the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Fair Market Rent for the area. For the period of January to December 2006, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Westerly was \$920. For two- or three-bedroom apartments, average rents were \$1,104 and \$1,306 respectively.<sup>6</sup> The 2006 HUD Fair Market Rent for the Westerly-Hopkinton-New Shoreham area was \$650 for a 1-bedroom, \$760 for a 2-bedroom and \$908 for a 3-bedroom apartment.

<sup>3</sup> Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation Rent Survey, 2004

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey, 2004, US Census Bureau

<sup>5</sup> WARM Shelter.org accessed November 20, 2007

<sup>6</sup> Rhode Island Housing Rent Survey , Year-end 2006 vs. Year-end 2005, www.rihousing.com



Home Value and Rent

Homeowner and Renter Cost Burdens

An analysis of housing in Westerly from the standpoint of its market value, as determined by the Westerly Assessor’s office through three revaluations, shows how volatile property values are in Westerly. Table 2-7 and 2-8 below summarize the 2000, 2003 and 2006 valuations for single-family homes in Westerly by Fire District. Over the six years, the average value of among the 6,499 single-family homes located in Westerly went from a town-wide average of \$210,250 in 2000 to more than \$500,000 in 2006, a 141 percent increase. Assessed valuation of the homes in the Westerly Fire District increased 121 percent while homes in Weekapaug increased more than 200 percent.

In 2006 homes in two fire districts averaged over \$2 million in average assessed valuation. Both districts, Weekapaug and Watch Hill, have a large proportion of vacation and second homes. The tables below show the revaluation for all fire districts in the town.

**Table 2-7 2000-2006 Revaluations**

Fire District	2000			2003			2006		
	Total Assessed Value	Number of Homes	Average	Total Assessed Value	Number of Homes	Average	Total Assessed Value	Number of Homes	Average
Bradford	\$47,174,900	408	\$115,625	\$78,095,300	425	\$183,754	\$116,065,200	434	\$267,431
Dunn's Corners	\$303,979,600	1567	\$193,988	\$545,410,900	1670	\$326,593	\$776,468,700	1723	\$450,649
Misquamicut	\$93,000,900	361	\$257,620	\$256,926,400	536	\$479,340	\$379,955,600	558	\$680,924
Shelter Harbor	\$54,489,300	147	\$370,676	\$110,317,700	151	\$730,581	\$146,207,900	155	\$943,277
Westerly	\$614,535,900	3725	\$164,976	\$1,020,143,600	3816	\$267,333	\$1,421,227,100	3899	\$364,511
Watch Hill	\$185,912,200	195	\$953,396	\$370,138,300	208	\$1,779,511	\$493,036,900	210	\$2,347,795
Weekapaug	\$67,324,600	96	\$701,298	\$177,799,300	112	\$1,587,494	\$263,744,300	118	\$2,235,121
TOTAL	\$1,366,417,400	6499	\$210,250	\$2,558,831,500	6918	\$369,880	\$3,596,705,700	7097	\$506,792

Source: Westerly Office of the Assessor and peter j. smith & company, inc.

**Table 2-8 Average Change in Assessed Valuation, 2000-2006 Revaluations**

Fire District	Change		
	2000-2003 Change	2003-2006 Change	2000-2006 Change
Bradford	58.92%	45.54%	131.29%
Dunn's Corners	68.36%	37.98%	132.31%
Misquamicut	86.06%	42.05%	164.31%
Shelter Harbor	97.09%	29.11%	154.48%
Westerly	62.04%	36.35%	120.95%
Watch Hill	86.65%	31.93%	146.26%
Weekapaug	126.37%	40.80%	218.71%
TOTAL	75.92%	37.02%	141.04%

Source: Westerly Office of the Assessor and peter j. smith & company, inc.

According to the town of Westerly Tax Assessor’s office, the median assessed value of single-family homes as of the December 2006 revaluation was \$336,800 with an average assessed value of \$506,791. Each town in the state of Rhode Island must perform a statistical update every three years and a full revaluation on the ninth year. The town of Westerly has begun its full revaluation as required by state statute and will complete the revaluation in December 2009. There is evidence that the general economic downturn which began in 2008 has affected the value of housing in Westerly.



For example, 57 percent of the houses sold in 2008 were sold for less than the assessed value; in the first half of 2009, 83 percent of houses sold for less than the assessed value. These housing transactions over the 19-month period represent approximately 6 percent of the total number of single-family units in the town. The December 2009 full revaluation should document the extent of any shift in median and average housing values compared to 2006 levels.

### ***2.4.1 Town of Westerly Affordable Housing Plan***

To address issues of housing affordability, the town of Westerly, as mandated by the state of Rhode Island, has developed an Affordable Housing Plan to reach the goal of 10 percent of the town's housing being affordable to low- and moderate-income households.

The following is a summary of the Town of Westerly Affordable Housing Plan, which was locally adopted as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan in September 2006 and approved by RI Housing and Statewide Planning in December 2006.

In 2004, the RI Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (RIHMFC) certified 517 housing units (5 percent of the town's year-round housing units) as meeting the statutory definition of low and moderate income housing.<sup>7</sup> It is anticipated that an additional 718 low or moderate income (LMI) housing units will be needed by 2024 (an average of 30 to 31 more units annually) in order to meet the town's affordable housing goal.

In 2004, 69 percent of existing affordable housing units were for the elderly, 20 percent were for families and 11 percent were for those with special needs. According to the RI Housing Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) database, in 2004, among Westerly's LMI households, 42 percent were elderly, 37 percent were families and 21 percent were single-person or other non-family households. Therefore, an imbalance exists between the existing (in 2004) and anticipated future requirements for affordable housing. To correct this imbalance, 49 percent of the affordable housing units constructed between 2005 and 2024 should be targeted towards family households, 23 percent to elderly households and 28 percent to single-occupant and non-relative households. These goals will need to be monitored to ensure the Plan accommodates future shifts in population demographics.

The Town of Westerly Affordable Housing Plan identifies the following seven strategies to attain the town's 10 percent affordable housing goal within a 20-year timeframe:

- Inclusionary Affordable Housing
- "Scattered Site" Development for Non-Profits and Public Entities
- Historic Mill Adaptive Re-Use & Mill Village Revitalization
- Downtown Arts District Affordable Housing Demonstration Project
- Local Rehabilitation Tax Credits, Revolving Loan Fund & Accessory Apartments
- Support the Washington County Community Development Corporation
- Establish an Affordable Housing Committee

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<sup>7</sup> That definition is: any housing subsidized by the federal or state government under any program to assist the construction or rehabilitation of low or moderate income housing, as defined in the applicable federal or state statute, whether built or operated by any public agency or any nonprofit organization, or by any limited equity housing cooperative or any private developer – Source: Westerly Affordable Housing Plan



A summary of each of these strategies follows.

#### Inclusionary Affordable Housing

The majority of the town's future affordable housing units are expected to be generated through private sector development using inclusionary zoning regulations. Comprehensive Permit procedures established by state of Rhode Island General Law 45-24-46.1 enables municipal zoning ordinances to contain inclusionary zoning as part of a local affordable housing strategy.

#### “Scattered Site” Affordable Housing by Non-Profit & Public Agencies

The development of housing throughout a community, as site-specific opportunities present themselves, is referred to as “scattered site” development. Non-profit organizations and public agencies are encouraged to create affordable housing using scattered site development.

#### Historic Mill Adaptive Re-Use & Mill Village Revitalization

This strategy has several components: encouraging the adaptive reuse of historic mills for mixed-use or residential purposes, targeting infrastructure and redevelopment grant funds to designated state-sanctioned “growth centers” and using historic preservation tax credits as a leverage for private-sector financing.

#### Downtown Arts District Affordable Housing Demonstration Project

Tax incentives are available from the state for artists who live and work in downtown Westerly. This strategy requires that the town approach the statewide artists housing coalition about the potential to create live/work spaces over existing storefronts in downtown Westerly's arts district. A more complete discussion of the Downtown Arts District incentives appears in the Economic Vitality Element.

#### Local Rehabilitation Tax Credits, Revolving Loan Fund & Accessory Affordable Apartments

This strategy involves the adoption of a tax credit and the establishment of a revolving loan fund to encourage the development of accessory apartments. Property owners that substantially rehabilitate existing structures and accessory apartments would be eligible for the tax credit, if they kept those housing units affordable for at least 30 years for people earning 80 percent or less of the Area Median Income.

#### Support the Washington County Community Development Corporation

This strategy encourages the town to work with the Washington County Community Development Corporation (WCCDC) to create affordable housing. The WCCDC provides and promotes decent affordable housing to low and moderate income households in Washington County and surrounding towns.

#### Establish a Local Affordable Housing Committee

The final strategy is the creation of a local Affordable Housing Committee with members who are appointed by the Town Council to serve indefinite terms.

The table that follows shows the cumulative number of low and moderate income housing units that are projected to be provided by the various identified strategies over a 20-year time period.



**Table 2-9 LMI Units to be Produced by Type of Household & Tenure**

Development Strategy	Total Units by Strategy	Elderly Households		Family Households		Other & Special Needs Households	
		Rental	Home Owner	Rental	Home Owner	Rental	Home Owner
Inclusionary Affordable Housing	404	57	32	59	139	70	47
Scattered Site Housing Non-Profit/Public Agency	200	48	0	24	74	38	16
Historic Mill Adaptive Re-Use & Revitalization	39	0	9	0	30	0	0
Downtown Arts District Demonstration Project	15	0	0	0	0	10	5
Local Tax Credits & Accessory Apartments	60	14	0	29	0	17	0
Totals by Household Type & Tenure	Goal: 718 (100%)	119 (74%)	41 (26%)	112 (32%)	243 (68%)	135 (67%)	68 (33%)
Total Units Added	Goal: 718 (100%)	Goal: 160 (23%)		Goal: 355 (49%)		Goal: 203 (28%)	

Source: Town of Westerly Affordable Housing Plan

Relationship of the Affordable Housing Plan and the Town of Westerly Zoning Ordinance

Since the preparation and adoption of the Town of Westerly Affordable Housing Plan, the town has amended its zoning ordinance to incorporate mandatory inclusionary zoning. Inclusionary zoning requirements in the zoning amendments that were adopted by Town Council in April 2007 differ somewhat from those included in the Affordable Housing Plan.

Under the inclusionary zoning, the zoning ordinance requires that affordability be guaranteed for 99 years by a deed restriction or land lease, an increase from the 30 years stipulated by the Affordable Housing Plan. When the Planning Board deems it infeasible to develop inclusionary dwelling units on-site, the developer may use one or more of the following options: payment of a fee in lieu of construction into a restricted account maintained by the town; rehabilitation of existing units; or construction of low and moderate income units at an off-site location. In all developments where inclusionary dwelling units are constructed, a density bonus will be provided that is equal to the number of inclusionary dwelling units provided.

## 3.0 *Economic Vitality*

### 3.1 *Introduction*

The economic vitality of the town of Westerly has been impacted by the current global and national economic downturn. A summary of current local and regional economic development initiatives, a local and regional employment overview, the size of the labor force, industries of employment and occupation types of residents, resident income and business activity are included in this section. This information serves as the foundation for identifying appropriate policies, programs and projects to foster economic development and growth.

### 3.2 *Regional Economic Overview*

#### 3.2.1 *Regional Employers*

Rhode Island based regional employers of significance include the state of Rhode Island, particularly the University of Rhode Island, and Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics at Quonset Point. The economic landscape includes a diversified group of large employers in the health care, financial services, education, defense and manufacturing sectors. The defense industry is of particular importance to Rhode Island's past and future; nearly 50 percent of the state's professional and technical services employment is tied to the defense industry, and the industry represents nearly 50 percent of the state's overall manufacturing base.

Because of its location, Westerly's economy is vitally linked not only to Rhode Island but also to southeastern Connecticut. Moody's estimates that in 2007, nearly 11 percent of Rhode Island's workforce (63,000 individuals) commuted to Connecticut for employment.

The Westerly hospitality and tourism industry is also linked to tourism and entertainment venues in southeastern Connecticut, including Mystic Aquarium and Mystic Seaport. The two native American gaming facilities located nearby in Connecticut are also important to the local and regional economies. They have gaming space as well as hotels, conference centers, concert halls and retail outlets. Rhode Island residents represent nearly 15 percent of the total passenger traffic to Foxwoods resort and nearly 6 percent of the total passenger traffic to Mohegan Sun.

Other Connecticut employers significant to Westerly include a U.S. Naval Submarine Base with 10,500 employees; Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics, 8,800; and Pfizer, 6,000; all are located in New London County. Significant industrial employers in neighboring Stonington include Yardney Electric Battery Company and Davis-Standard. These employers provide high-value research and technical jobs and also provide business to smaller companies in the area.

Dependence on these three major industries leaves the regional economy somewhat vulnerable to shifts in the pharmaceutical, defense, hospitality and tourism industries.



### **3.3 Town Economic Overview**

#### **3.3.1 Overall Financial Health and Stability**

Westerly's credit rating was enhanced in 2007 when the two largest and most prominent bond rating agencies raised the rating on the town's General Obligation or G.O. debt. On August 30, Moody's issued a decision raising the rating of Westerly's existing G.O. debt of \$69.3 million from A1 to Aa3 and at the same time assigned a rating of Aa3 to \$8 million in new bonded debt. Standard & Poor's issued its AA- rating for the town's new bonds and affirmed its AA- rating of the existing debt, characterizing the town's debt-worthiness as stable. The AA- rating is roughly analogous to the Aa3 rating.

In making their determinations, both agencies cited a number of favorable aspects of Westerly's economy. These favorable aspects included the town's good financial position, reserves, modest existing debt burden, recent property appreciation resulting in an expanded tax base, and market value of homes. Standard & Poor's noted the town's tourism-based economy "slightly constrains" the town's rating but that the financial outlook for the town's economy is stable. A discussion of town and school finances appears in the Services & Facilities element.

#### **3.3.2 Distinctions**

Westerly and its surrounding area have achieved significant national and international distinctions in recent years:

- In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Westerly one of its "Dozen Distinctive Destinations."
- In 2006, Money Magazine named South County, R.I. – with Westerly as its centerpiece – as one of the top 12 "Best places to vacation in North America." (The town of Westerly is part of Washington County, which is also known as South County.)
- More recently, on June 30, 2008, Forbes.com named Washington County, RI as 12<sup>th</sup> on its list of "Best Places in America to Raise a Family".

#### **3.3.3 Significant Local Sectors**

Westerly is primarily a town of small employers. Of Rhode Island's top 100 employers, there are two with headquarters in Westerly: the Westerly Hospital and The Washington Trust Company.

There are a number of significant sectors in Westerly's economy. They are summarized below.

##### **Health Care**

The Westerly Hospital and its attendant health care-related facilities are a major force at the core of Westerly's economy. It is one of Rhode Island's top 100 employers. The 125-bed acute care facility is Westerly's largest single private sector employer with 400 total employees. The hospital has 11.5 full-time equivalent physicians and 300 active volunteers.

Traditionally, the quality of life in the region has assisted in recruitment and retention of physicians and other hospital employees. In addition to Westerly, the hospital serves several municipalities in southwestern Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut. The next closest full-service hospital is



Lawrence & Memorial Hospital in New London, Connecticut, about 30 minutes away from Westerly.

All community hospitals in Rhode Island had operating losses in fiscal 2006, with the Westerly Hospital ranking low in terms of profitability. It had a net operating loss in the \$1 million range in 2008. Reimbursement rates by government and health insurers, as well as uncompensated care, contribute to the fiscal problems. The hospital as an employer and its associated economic multiplier together with its high quality, easily accessible health care is among the most vital institutions in the community.

Heartlab, which began as a local start-up has recently been acquired by AGFA HealthCare Corp. It is a designer and supplier of digital cardiology equipment. It employs in excess of 100 people in highly technical and scientific jobs.

### **Finance**

The largest independent bank in Rhode Island is also the oldest community bank in the nation, The Washington Trust Company, established in 1800. It is a \$2.5 billion corporation owned by Washington Trust Bancorp, Inc. The bank employs 475 people company-wide with approximately 190 employees in Westerly. It is one of Rhode Island's top 100 employers. This institution has 15 branches in Rhode Island and also operates in southeastern Connecticut. The main corporate branch is still located in downtown Westerly, and its extensive operations center is located in the Westerly Airport Industrial Park.

Other regional and national financial institutions have an established presence in Westerly, including recently opened branches, indicating confidence in the town's economic vitality.

### **Westerly State Airport**

Westerly State Airport offers scheduled flights to and from Block Island on New England Airlines. No other regular commercial passenger service is available, but the airport tenants include charter companies as well as aviation maintenance companies. There is substantial private aircraft traffic which complements both the local tourism and resident economies. The airport generates economic activities of approximately \$8.4 million according to a 2006 airport economic impact study update.

### **Textiles**

Westerly has a long and significant history of textile manufacturing and finishing. Three of the numerous prior textile facilities continue to operate here. Bradford Printing and Finishing, LLC is the recent successor to Bradford Dyeing Association; while now operating with a reduced workforce, it still provides battle dress uniform products for the U.S. Department of Defense. Darlington Fabrics (a subsidiary of George C. Moore Co., which also maintains corporate offices at its Beach Street, Westerly facility) continues to operate two manufacturing facilities in the center of Westerly. In response to the global and national economy, it has recently reduced its employee work week to four days per week. Griswold Textile Company still operates in the historic White Rock Mill Village.

### **Printing**

Westerly-Pawcatuck also has a long and significant history in the printing machine business, particularly the C.B. Cottrell & Sons Co., which operated on Mechanic Street, Pawcatuck. The work force expertise of the company has spawned two local companies which manufacture and service



the printing equipment industry. Maxson Automatic Machine Co., Inc. currently occupies a site in the Westerly Airport Industrial Park; E.R. Smith Associates also operates from that park. The town has a daily newspaper, *The Westerly Sun*, as well as its associated job printing division, Sun Graphics. *The Westerly Sun* is a seven-day daily newspaper founded in 1857 and covers local communities in Washington County, Rhode Island and New London County, Connecticut.

### **Airport Industrial Park**

Westerly's Airport Industrial Park is located adjacent to the airport. It is serviced by municipal water and sewer, natural gas and large-capacity electrical service. All of the companies operating there have direct access to Route 78 which connects I-95 to Route 1. Expansion capabilities are limited because of surrounding residential neighborhoods. Encompassing 50 acres, it is substantially built out with a 3.33 acre site listed on *Loopnet* with a value of approximately \$200,000 per acre in late 2007. Local tax abatement incentives for up to 20 years are available.

### **Construction**

United Builders Supply Co., Inc. has its corporate headquarters, retail, wholesale and fabrication facilities on Oak Street in Westerly. It is a regional supplier to the construction industry with several facilities in southern Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut.

Cherenzia Excavation, Inc. operates two aggregate stone quarries in Westerly which serve the entire region.

Numerous other contractors serve the local residential and commercial markets. The opportunities afforded by the shoreline community have produced many local master craftsmen of distinction.

### **Local Government**

The town of Westerly through its various municipal departments and its school department is a significant employer of citizens of Westerly and those of neighboring communities. The town budget approved for FY 2009-2010 provides for 717.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, 188.6 in municipal departments and 528.6 in the school department. Staffing is examined carefully during the annual budget process to ensure that the town maintains the capacity to deliver required levels of quality service in key functional areas such as education, public works and utilities, public safety, finance and administration. Employment levels have declined slightly over the past several years, due primarily to a reduction in student enrollment in the school system and the consolidation of certain departmental functions between the school and municipal departments. The town also provides part-time seasonal employment in support of its parks and recreation activities, beaches and other summer programs.

### **Travel and Tourism**

Rhode Island earns its nickname of Ocean State from its miles of coastline along Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, including seven ocean beaches in Westerly. Visitors from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and other northeast locations enjoy the famous beaches from Watch Hill, East Beach, Misquamicut Beach, Westerly Town Beach to Weekapaug.

According to a 2006 study by Global Insight, Washington County has sixty-three percent of the statewide totals of seasonal homes in Rhode Island. The Rhode Island Travel and Tourism Research Report, compiled in 2005 by the University of Rhode Island Office of Travel, Tourism and



Recreation, found that Washington County collected 9 percent of the \$11.9 million generated by the state lodgings tax in 2004.

The U.R.I. report found that tourism comprises 5 percent of the state's economy, and that tourism-related expenditures of \$4.7 billion generate nearly 10 percent of jobs in the state. Tourism industry wages in Westerly in 2002 were seventh highest among the state's cities and towns, generating \$27.88 million in wages and \$101.54 million in impact. An indicator of the interdependence of tourism with the general local economy is the finding that for every one dollar of wages generated by tourism in Westerly, \$3.64 in economic activity was generated. Despite the global and national economic downturn, comparisons of adjusted 2007 and 2008 meal and hotel taxes show a resiliency in this sector in Westerly.

### **Accommodations**

The town of Westerly has been pro-active in allowing the redevelopment of several major coastline properties to assist in this continued economic vitality.

- Ocean House – This is a signature iconic link to the past history of multiple Victorian hotels on the ocean in the Watch Hill section of Westerly which served the rich and famous from across the nation. As the last surviving such hotel, built in 1868, it was threatened at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with demolition and replacement with five single family home sites. At the request of local part-time resident and financier Charles M. Royce, the Town Council adopted zoning ordinance amendments which have permitted the replication of the hotel with oversight by the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission and other historic preservation groups. The ability to allow purchase of some two-bedroom luxury suites in the hotel provided by the amendments contributes to the economic viability of the project. The \$100 million reconstruction is well underway with an April, 2010 anticipated opening.
- Watch Hill Inn – Its original 1845 inn (“The Narragansett Inn”) has been allowed to be converted into spacious bay and ocean view residential units and a restaurant; a new adjacent structure has been added providing motel accommodations.
- Weekapaug Inn – To assist in its restoration the Town Council has allowed this property to add five detached townhomes and luxury suites within the hotel for purchase. The current economic downturn and credit tightening has however delayed progress.

Westerly's economic base also includes many other businesses that cater to the seasonal tourist industries, ranging from bed and breakfast establishments, and other inns and hotels; for example:

- Shelter Harbor Inn – A 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse was transformed into 24 guest rooms in a main farmhouse, cottages and barn. The Shelter Harbor Inn and restaurant are open year round.
- Pleasant View House – With 112 rooms, two dining rooms and pool located directly on the ocean in the Misquamicut section of Westerly, it is the largest local hotel. It operates seasonally.



- Winnapaug Inn and Venice Restaurant – Located adjacent to the Winnapaug Golf Course on Scenic Route 1A, it has 47 rooms and is operated year round.
- Breezeway Inn – Located on Winnapaug Road, the Inn has 55 rooms and is operated seasonally.
- Grandview – A bed and breakfast located on Shore Road, it has 8 guest rooms and is operated year round.

The *Go Westerly* magazine and travel guide published by the Westerly-Pawcatuck Chamber of Commerce, lists approximately 600 guest rooms in the Westerly area.

Although summary information has been compiled, there has been no systematic evaluation of the accommodations available in Westerly to determine whether modern markets for seasonal vacationers, year round visitors and business travelers are being adequately served.

### **Part-time/Seasonal Residences**

An important sector not included in economic impact studies is the impact of second home and part time residents. These residents, whose property accounts for approximately \$1.15 billion in assessed value, or upwards of 21 percent of total assessed residential property, in 2007 resulted in about \$11 million in property tax revenue for Westerly. Second home owners also contribute to construction and trades employment through residential maintenance and additions and marine projects including docks and moorings.

In addition to helping to increase the tax base of the community, seasonal residents' generosity extends to the town and they participate along with full-time residents in funding amenities such as the Westerly Public Library, the Westerly Hospital and numerous charities. They also shop in Westerly, contributing to the vitality of businesses throughout the community.

## ***3.4 Current Economic Development Initiatives and Organizations***

### ***3.4.1 Approved Development Projects***

In 2007, nearly \$154 million in new residential construction projects was underway in Westerly. Townhomes, single-family, and hotel room upgrades are all part of the development mix. In addition to the Watch Hill Inn and Ocean House projects referenced above, there is also nearly \$42 million in new commercial development projects approved along US Route 1. New shopping centers, medical office buildings and restaurants, and adaptive reuse projects contribute to this development total.

#### ***1.4.2 Westerly Landing and Westerly Depot***

In May, 2008 the Westerly Landing & Westerly Depot projects were included among four KeepSpace projects funded statewide. KeepSpace, a program of Rhode Island Housing Mortgage Finance Corporation, brings together a number of state-level regulatory agencies, planning grants and financing. The Westerly Landing site is located along Main Street and the Pawcatuck River; the Depot site is adjacent to the train station. Together they feature river access as well as transit-oriented development aspects by encompassing undeveloped and under-utilized sites at the train station.



Local project partners include the Westerly Land Trust with support of the Royce Family Fund and W. H. Properties, Inc. The Trust and the Royce Family Fund and W.H. Properties, Inc. have actively acquired properties for these projects for some time. The projects, which will go through a public visioning process before reaching final design, have far-reaching positive ramifications for job and economic development, housing, transportation and environmental protection. The development of downtown housing will help the community preserve open space. The Depot site may also provide a new opportunity for Westerly to take advantage of the Tax Free Arts District designation.

### ***3.4.2 Westerly as a Statewide Growth Center***

The state *Land Use 2025* plan identifies the center core of Westerly with its municipal utilities and services as a potential urban growth center. Concentration of growth in this area is intended to conserve state and municipal resources by making better use of the existing infrastructure, transportation alternatives, and providing a variety of housing options. This area has a unique and historic character, significant existing infrastructure, is a short walk from a strong and active downtown, conveniently located near I-95 and the Amtrak Station. This area is prime location for in-fill and redevelopment; it will benefit from updated land-use regulations to achieve this potential.

### ***Revitalization Plan for the North End of Westerly***

A 2003 North End revitalization plan supported Westerly's three-year Small Cities CDBG funding request for the North End and enabled a cohesive approach to encouraging both public and private reinvestment. Phased housing rehabilitation, the provision of four neighborhood gateways, a new neighborhood service building, adaptive reuse of the Providence Gas Company property on Canal Street, and the designation of the North End as an official Rhode Island Enterprise Zone were all recommended as a part of the revitalization strategy.

### ***3.4.3 Washington County Regional Planning Council Recommendations***

In 2007, the Washington County Regional Planning Council supported specific economic development initiatives in Westerly. Specifically, the Council recommended encouraging Downtown redevelopment along the Pawcatuck River and investigating the potentials for new transit-oriented development around the Westerly Train Station. An enhancement of Route 78 near the intersection of Route 1 was also encouraged since it is one of the primary entry points to Westerly.

### ***3.4.4 Downtown Westerly Revitalization***

Westerly's economic base is further enhanced by its charming, historic downtown which caters to both residents and visitors seeking culture and commerce. Downtown Westerly is a substantial retail service, professional and financial center. It is also the civic and cultural center of Westerly and is the focus of a number of efforts to sustain its vitality. These activities are summarized below.

#### ***3.4.4.1 Westerly Land Trust***

The Westerly Land Trust, founded in 1987 to preserve open space and natural resources, has expanded its mission and changed its articles of incorporation to embrace community renewal. In addition to the KeepSpace initiative discussed above, between 2005 and 2007 it acquired other downtown properties. The initial renovation of the former Industrial Trust building has been accomplished. It is being used to host cultural and community events and the offices of the Land Trust. The Trust also acquired the former United Theater, and obtained input on the needs of cultural and performing arts organizations to develop a schematic design. The adjacent former



Montgomery Ward building was acquired based upon these identified space needs; it also now houses a local RIPBS studio. The theatre interior has been gutted and structurally enhanced to accommodate its future renovation.

#### ***3.4.4.2 Westerly-Pawcatuck Downtown Business Association (DBA)***

The mission statement of this important agency is to foster economic growth and to promote and enhance the Westerly-Pawcatuck downtown area. DBA lobbies for legislation necessary to sustain and improve the downtown economy. Its reach is furthered through its connections with organizations such as The Greater Westerly-Pawcatuck Area Chamber of Commerce and the Westerly-Pawcatuck Task Force. DBA members are kept informed of downtown events attracting shoppers, marketing efforts to promote the area, and political activities affecting the downtown.

#### ***3.4.4.3 Tax-Free Arts District***

In 1998, the Rhode Island General Assembly designated nine communities in the state, including Westerly, as arts districts and outlined special incentives for artists to live and work there. The Westerly District is located in the historic downtown. The Assembly's intent was to spur economic development and revitalization, job and business development and tourism. Sales and personal tax exemptions are provided for artists who live and work in the district and for artwork created within the district. The sale of original, one-of-a-kind works of art are exempt from state sales tax whether or not they were created in the arts district. Of the nine designated districts, Westerly's is the least developed.

### ***3.5 Economic Data***

#### ***3.5.1 Employment Rate Comparison***

According to the standards of the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, the labor force consists of all residents 16 years or older who are employed or are seeking employment. The unemployment rate is the proportion of members of the labor force who are unemployed, which is defined as jobless, available and looking for work. Westerly traditionally has had an unemployment rate approximately 20 percent lower than the statewide rate. For example, the average unemployment rate in Westerly 2005 to 2007 was approximately 4.3 percent, which is generally recognized as near full employment, while the state rate was 5.1 percent. In the midst of the current 2008-2009 economic downturn, the local rate is approximately 10 percent compared to a state rate of 12.1 percent.



### 3.5.2 Westerly Industry Overview

An examination of the industries and the types of occupations in which residents are employed can provide an indication of the quality of jobs residents hold and translate to their potential buying power. (However, the “buying power” in the local economy is significantly affected not only by tourism but also by the impact on the local economy of the part-time and seasonal residents who significantly increase the population in summer months and most weekends throughout the year.)

**Table 3-1 Westerly Industry Overview 2002-2008**

Average Employment	2002	2005	2008
Total Private & Government	9,576	10,296	9,918
Total Private Only	8,618	9,249	8,786
Construction	349	338	368
Manufacturing	837	961	728
Wholesale Trade	58	58	84
Retail Trade	2,033	2,255	2,000
Transportation & Warehousing	47	47	48
Information	237	304	158
Finance, & Insurance, Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	654	426	422
Professional, Scientific, Management & Administrative Services	329	641	386
Educational, Health & Social Services	1,989	1,975	2,064
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation & Food Services	1,614	1,715	1,905
Other Services (except public administration)	473	529	622
Public Administration	956	1,047	1,133

Source: Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, State and Community Profiles; Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training.



### 3.5.3 Number of Establishments 2002-2008

The number of private businesses in the town of Westerly has remained relatively stable over the past several years despite significant changes in the local and statewide economies.

**Table 3-2 Number of Establishments 2002-2008**

Number of Establishments	2002	2005	2008
Total Private & Government	820	865	892
Total Private Only	796	845	873
Construction	106	108	112
Manufacturing	32	32	28
Wholesale Trade	24	28	34
Retail Trade	133	137	136
Transportation & Warehousing	11	13	15
Information	10	14	15
Finance & Insurance, Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	49	57	59
Professional, Scientific, Management & Administrative Services	106	117	120
Educational, Health & Social Services	105	112	116
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation & Food Services	124	136	136
Other Services (except Public Administration)	96	91	102
Government	24	20	19

Source: Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, State and Community Profiles; Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training.



### 3.5.4 Income

Over the period 2000 to 2007, median household income increased from approximately \$44,824 to \$54,694, an increase of 22 percent. The following table summarizes household income in Westerly from 2000 to 2007; the data are in current (2007) dollars.

**Table 3-3 Household Income 2000-2007**

Household Income Ranges	Households 2000	Households 2007	2000-2007 Rate of Change (%)
Household Income: <\$34,999	3,624	3,269	-10%
Household income \$35,000- \$74,999	3,621	3,798	5%
Household income \$75,000- \$149,999	1,822	2,363	30%
Household income \$150,000- \$249,999	235	301	28%
Household income \$250,000+	107	162	51%

Source: Claritas Inc. and peter j. smith & company, inc.

Note: No income data is collected by the US Census from seasonal residents of Westerly (or any community for that matter) and so it is impossible to know seasonal residents' economic and demographic characteristics. Despite the lack of specific data the positive impact of seasonal and part-time residents is recognized.

### 3.5.5 Statewide Business Incentives

Like its New England neighbors and other northeastern states, Rhode Island suffers from a level of taxation that is recognized as hindering business. However, the state has recently created new incentives focused on industry clusters to develop jobs and lure business to the state. These include:

- Innovation Tax Credit – Up to 50 percent on investment in accredited innovation industries such as biotechnology, communications, marine and defense manufacturing and others.
- Corporate Tax Rate Reduction – Incremental reduction for companies that create new employment over a three-year period.
- Manufacturing Incentive Tax Credit – 4 percent credit against state corporate income tax and personal income tax on buildings and structures.
- Numerous tax exemptions for research and development investments.
- Job training and education tax credits.
- The establishment of State Enterprise Zones and Foreign Trade Zones that reduce taxes and expenses to qualified business.
- Historic preservation tax credits for rehabilitating land mark buildings and historic homeowner tax credits for exterior restoration work on qualified residences. The Rhode Island Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit Program has generated jobs, nearly \$2.5 billion in economic activity and more than \$400 million dollars in additional tax revenues. To help close a budget gap, the program was eliminated in 2008 except for projects already approved. Among such “grandfathered” projects are the United Theater, Miceli Furniture building retrofit and rehabilitation in Westerly’s downtown and at the Weekapaug Inn.
- Small business credits for venture capital partnerships that invest in the state.



## 4.0 *Natural Resources*

### 4.1 *Physical Setting*

The meandering Pawcatuck River separates Westerly from Hopkinton, and North Stonington, Connecticut, to the north, and Stonington, Connecticut, to the west. Westerly's eastern border with Charlestown is a straight line running north/south five miles or so. To the south, the town borders the Atlantic Ocean (Block Island Sound) for approximately eight miles between Napatree Point (the westernmost place in Rhode Island) and the Charlestown border. The town's size is 31.2 square miles.

The topography rises from sea level along the beaches to the town's highest elevation, Mt. Moriah, at 249 feet, in the northwestern corner of the town. On the west side of the town, the elevation of downtown Westerly rises from approximately 10 feet along the river to 150 feet near Westerly High School. At the center of the town is a large wetland complex, including the Crandall Swamp and Chapman Pond, which are between 30-40 feet above sea level. Woody Hill, in the east-central part of town, rises to 200 feet.

### 4.2 *Hydrology*

#### 4.2.1 *Watersheds*

Because water is not confined to political boundaries, it is important to consider water resources and management from a wider perspective, often the watershed level. The majority of Westerly's water supply comes from the Pawcatuck Watershed. The Salt Pond Region in the southern section of Westerly contains three additional watersheds, one for each of the three salt ponds in Westerly. See Figure 4-1, Watershed Boundaries.

The Pawcatuck Watershed encompasses approximately 300 square miles in southeastern Connecticut and southwestern Rhode Island. (See note.)<sup>8</sup> Within the watershed, seven major rivers and their tributaries drain to a common outlet: the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay. These rivers, along with lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, serve as important wildlife habitat, recreational resources, and water supply for agricultural production. Significant groundwater resources underlie the watershed and are the sole source of drinking water for people within the watershed. Groundwater and surface waters are interconnected and the watershed is noted for having some of the highest quality groundwater and surface water in the area.<sup>9</sup> Several organizations are active in the stewardship of the Pawcatuck Watershed. These include the Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, the University of Rhode Island Watershed Watch Program, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association, and the Nature Conservancy.

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<sup>8</sup> NOTE: The *Pawcatuck Watershed* encompasses approximately 300 square miles in southeastern Connecticut and southwestern Rhode Island. The portion of the watershed solely within Rhode Island is referred to, in Rhode Island state policy documents, as the *Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed*.

<sup>9</sup> ...Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, *The Pawcatuck Watershed Report*, p. 1



The Salt Pond Region includes 45 square miles around the nine coastal salt ponds of southern Rhode Island. This region lies within portions of the towns of Westerly, Charlestown, South Kingstown and Narragansett. Three salt pond watersheds are wholly or partially within Westerly: Maschaug, Winnapaug and Quonochontaug. The Salt Ponds are coastal lagoons: shallow, productive embayments separated from the ocean by barrier spits. They provide important ecosystem and habitat functions, are an important factor in the quality of life for local residents, and are a prime recreational attraction for tourists in the region.<sup>10</sup> The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is responsible for the management, protection and enhancement of resources within the Salt Pond watersheds and along coastal waters. Other organizations active in the stewardship of the Salt Pond watersheds include the non-profit Salt Ponds Coalition.

#### ***4.2.2 Surface Water***

Rivers, streams, fresh water ponds, fresh water and coastal wetlands, coastal waters and salt ponds make up the surface waters of the town. The Pawcatuck River flows along the entire northern and western boundaries of the town. Other named streams include Aguntaug Brook, Mastuxet Brook, McGowen Brook and Perry Healy Brook. Chapman Pond, in the north central section of Westerly, is the town's largest freshwater pond; other named freshwater ponds include Dr. Lewis Pond, Long Pond, Spring Pond, No Bottom Pond and Mickill Pond. Freshwater wetlands are scattered throughout the town (a result of the area's glacial past and resultant soils and topography) and along the Pawcatuck River. Crandall Swamp (also known as Chapman or Aguntaug Swamp) is one of the largest freshwater wetland systems in the state. Coastal wetlands include salt marshes and any contiguous freshwater or brackish wetlands. Coastal waters border the entire southern shoreline of the town and include the tidal portion of the Pawcatuck River. The salt ponds include Maschaug Pond, Winnapaug Pond and Quonochontaug Pond.

#### ***4.2.3 Groundwater***

Westerly's groundwater resources exist within three aquifers: Westerly, Ashaway and Bradford. These aquifers are located within the Pawcatuck River Aquifer Region, which was designated a sole source aquifer system by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1988. The sole source aquifer designation signifies that an aquifer supplies at least 50 percent of the drinking water to persons living over the aquifer and that there can be no feasible alternate source of drinking water, such as surface water reservoirs. In the Pawcatuck River Aquifer Region, groundwater is recharged by rainfall within the watershed. Groundwater is stored within aquifers as well as discharged into surface waters. During severe drought conditions, streams and rivers can conversely recharge groundwater.

### ***4.3 Water Quality***

Preserving and improving water quality are vital to Westerly's natural resources. High-quality drinking water supplies are critical to public health. Habitat areas are essential to biological diversity. As a practical matter, both drinking water supply and habitat quality depend on the maintenance of water quality at the highest possible level. Furthermore, good water quality is necessary for recreation, since contact with polluted water is a health risk.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ...Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, pp. 1-2

<sup>11</sup> ...Rhode Island Rivers Council and State Planning Council, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, January 1998 (amended May 2004), Rivers Policy and Classification Plan, p. 1.1



Water quality is affected by both point and nonpoint pollution sources. Point source pollution originates from a specific place or location, such as a discharge pipe from a factory. Nonpoint source pollution originates over a widespread area of the landscape and may include: malfunctioning septic systems, soil erosion, leaking underground fuel storage tanks, stormwater runoff, fertilizers, pesticides and road salt. Unlike point source discharges, comprehensive management of nonpoint source discharges is beyond the authorities of the EPA, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and other federal and state agencies. Increasingly, these agencies and other stakeholders believe that many problems can, and should, be addressed locally through land use planning, education and, where appropriate, regulation.<sup>12</sup>

Table 4-1 Summary of Water Quality, Management and Protection summarizes information presented in sections 3 through 5.

### 4.3.1 Stressors

#### Domestic and Industrial Waste Water

Domestic wastewater contains high levels of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, some synthetic organic chemicals and heavy metals, all of which can affect aquatic habitat and groundwater quality. Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus may stimulate growth of algae in coastal ponds and in the Pawcatuck River, leading eventually to declining levels of oxygen and adverse impacts on habitat. Some synthetic organic chemicals and heavy metals are toxic to humans and other organisms. Domestic wastewater also contains bacteria and viruses which may threaten human health if viable microorganisms enter drinking water. Industrial wastewater can have the same contaminants as domestic sewage; however, concentrations of synthetic organic chemicals and heavy metals may be much higher in industrial waste.

Westerly has a municipal sewage collection and treatment system that primarily serves the downtown area. An industrial treatment system in Bradford also receives a small amount of domestic wastewater. The rest of the town is served by onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS), also known as septic systems. Presently, over 5,000 developed properties in Westerly rely on septic systems for wastewater disposal.<sup>13</sup> Onsite wastewater treatment will continue to be the primary source of wastewater disposal for areas outside the current sewer district.<sup>14</sup> Proper function and treatment of an onsite system depend on the properties of the surrounding soil as well as on proper system maintenance. RIDEM regulates onsite wastewater treatment systems and has established minimum standards for siting, design and installation of these systems (*Rules Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems: January 1, 2008*).

The typical lifespan of a septic system is 20 years and many existing septic systems have outlived their usefulness.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, many of these systems in Westerly were installed prior to current RIDEM standards; this includes cesspools, a type of wastewater treatment that RIDEM considers to be substandard. Improperly designed or failing systems can contribute pollutants, in the form of nitrates, excessive nutrients and fecal coliform bacteria, to nearby surface waters or groundwater.

<sup>12</sup> ...Ibid. pp. 6-11

<sup>13</sup> ...BETA Group, Inc., January 2005 (Revised May 2007), Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan, p. 2

<sup>14</sup> ...Ibid. p. 51

<sup>15</sup> ...Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Office of Water Resources, February 2007, Summary of Municipal Onsite Wastewater Programs, p. 13



The Rhode Island Cesspool Act of 2007 (effective June 1, 2008) phases out all cesspools by 2013 that present the highest risks to public health and/or the environment – namely, cesspools located in close proximity to tidal water areas and public drinking waters. In Westerly, this act affects any cesspools located within 200 feet of the shore or within 200 feet of a public drinking water well. The town of Westerly Engineering Department is currently developing a program to address this mandate.

Once an onsite wastewater treatment system is installed, regular maintenance is essential to ensure its proper function. Rhode Island municipalities are responsible for making sure these systems are properly maintained.<sup>16</sup> Westerly does not have a program to ensure that routine inspection and maintenance of these systems is performed, although the development of such a program has been recommended in the town's *Wastewater Facilities Plan* and the draft *Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan January 2005 (revised 2007)* as well as the *Wastewater Facilities Plan* (November 1998, BETA Group, Inc.).

#### Land Use Near Wellheads

The primary issue facing the quality of Westerly's water supply is the lack of protective measures to ensure its integrity. The Westerly Aquifer contains 75 percent of the active wells in the water system. Westerly's zoning code permits commercial, manufacturing and high density residential uses over much of the aquifer; this presents a substantial risk of contamination from the dense concentration of septic systems and other factors such as hazardous waste spills, leaking underground storage tanks and road salt runoff.<sup>17</sup>

Protection of groundwater quality is facilitated through the protection of the source water supply. Source water protection *areas*, such as wellhead protection areas and aquifer recharge areas, have been identified by the *state*. However, protection *strategies* for the source water supply are accomplished through *local* plans, ordinances and development standards related to wellhead protection areas, aquifer recharge areas, and other critical areas.

State agencies involved in the protection of groundwater and drinking water include RIDEM, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RI Health), and the Water Resources Board. The RIDEM administers the *Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality*, which classifies the state's groundwaters and established groundwater quality standards for each class; this regulation also includes the state's wellhead protection program. RI Health is responsible for ensuring proper operation and maintenance of the public water systems to ensure a safe drinking water supply. RI Health is also responsible for the *Source Water Assessment Program*. The Water Resources Board is an executive board in the state government charged with managing the proper development, conservation and utilization of the state's water resources.

Groundwater reservoirs, groundwater recharge areas and wellhead protection areas are established by RIDEM. These areas are critical for the protection of drinking water quality. Groundwater reservoirs contain the highest potential yield of drinking water. Recharge areas include surface lands that drain into the groundwater reservoir. A wellhead protection area (WHPA) is the portion of an aquifer through which groundwater moves to a well. The town of Westerly operates 11 water supply wells at seven pumping stations. Town wells are located in four separate WHPAs: the

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<sup>16</sup> ...University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, p. 69

<sup>17</sup> ...BETA Group, Inc., January 2005 (Revised May 2007), Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan, p. 10



Bradford and Crandall WHPAs, which are located entirely within Westerly, and the White Rock and Noyes Avenue WHPAs, which extend into Stonington, Connecticut. The RIDEM requires municipalities to develop management plans for wellhead protection areas. RI Health inspectors conduct a detailed inspection of these areas at least once every five years.

### Stormwater Management

During a rain event, rainwater either soaks into the ground or runs across it. As areas become more developed, a larger amount of stormwater runs off of paved surfaces, roofs, compacted soils and lawns, rather than soaking into the ground. As stormwater drains into local waterways, it carries with it sediment, as well as other pollutants including fertilizers, pesticides, road salt, oil, heavy metals, and pathogenic bacteria and viruses. Large stormwater flows within streams and creeks causes erosion and degradation of riparian habitat. Stormwater management can help reduce these effects.

Phases I and II of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), administered by the EPA, require the control of polluted discharges from large construction sites, certain industrial activities and operators of municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s). These requirements include the establishment of a stormwater management program that is intended to improve water bodies by reducing the quality of pollutants that can enter storm sewer systems during storm events. They also require the use of best management practices (BMPs) intended to reduce the negative impacts of stormwater. The RIDEM implements the NPDES requirements through the *Rhode Island Pollution Discharge Elimination System (RIPDES)*. In order to address requirements of RIPDES, as well as requirements of the NPDES Phase II permitting process, the town of Westerly has implemented its *Phase II Storm Water Management Plan*. Implementation of the plan is a five-year process that began in 2004.

The town of Westerly's zoning code includes an Erosion and Sedimentation Control ordinance, which requires installation and maintenance of control measures and BMPs to control erosion and sedimentation for land development and subdivision activities. In addition, the town has enacted a Bioretention and Stormwater Management ordinance. This ordinance requires the construction of bioretention areas (including rain or recharge gardens and grass swales) in order to reduce volume and velocity of stormwater runoff and increase pollutant filtering and groundwater recharge.

In addition to federal and state NPDES regulations, there are other management measures designed to reduce pollution threats from stormwater runoff. The *Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP)*, administered by the state Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), requires stormwater management plans and the use of BMPs for the reduction of pollutant loadings associated with development activities. CRMC in partnership with RIDEM implements the *Rhode Island Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program*. The town of Westerly's *Land Development and Subdivision Regulations* require the preparation of a soil erosion and sediment control plan for all major development. Details of stormwater management measures to be installed to control erosion must be included.

### Flooding

Westerly is subject to damage from flooding of both inland surface waters and from coastal storm-surges. Development in wetlands and flood storage areas reduces the land's natural ability to store floodwaters. Hurricanes, tidal flooding and Nor'easters, which appear in the winter and spring on an even more regular basis than hurricanes, all cause severe coastal flooding and erosion. These



hazards are thoroughly documented in the town's Natural Hazard Risk Assessment & Mitigation Strategy.

Westerly participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) by adopting and enforcing floodplain management ordinances to reduce future flood damage. In exchange, the NFIP makes federally backed flood insurance available to homeowners, renters, and business owners in these communities. In addition to providing flood insurance and reducing flood damages through floodplain management regulations, the NFIP identifies and maps the nation's floodplains. Within Westerly, there are two general zones of high flood danger: Zone A areas are within the 1 percent annual chance floodplain (100-year flood); and zone V areas are also within the 1 percent chance floodplain but have additional hazards associated with wave action. Mandatory flood insurance purchases apply for developments within zones A and V. Quonochontaug, Winnapaug and Maschaug Ponds and the low lands around them, Napatree Beach, Sandy Point Island and the coves in Little Narragansett Bay are particularly vulnerable to storm-surge flooding. Flood Hazards shows how extensive the highest hazard flood zones are within Westerly.

#### ***4.3.1 Quality of Surface Waters***

Water quality in the Pawcatuck Watershed, which includes a significant part of western Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut, is generally described as excellent; however, in Westerly much of the river is listed as impaired. Threats in the Pawcatuck Watershed are due chiefly to agricultural and nonpoint source pollution impacts.<sup>18</sup> In the Salt Pond Region, failing and substandard onsite wastewater systems are the single most important nonpoint source of bacteria and nutritional contamination to the region's coastal waters.<sup>19</sup>

The federal Clean Water Act section 303(d) requires states to prepare a list of water bodies that do not meet water quality standards for ensuring that the water is healthy for such uses as fish and wildlife habitat, domestic and agricultural water supplies, and recreation in and on the water. All water bodies identified on the list must attain water quality standards within a reasonable period, either through a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study (Water Cleanup Plan) or other pollution control mechanisms. Within the Westerly area, the RIDEM 2006 List of Impaired Waters includes Little Narragansett Bay, the tidal portion of the Pawcatuck River, the upstream portions of the Pawcatuck River and its tributaries from the Bradford Dyeing Associates wastewater treatment facility discharge point to the Route 3 bridge crossing, and Chapman Pond. TMDL studies and BMPs are used to return water bodies to a healthy condition. Studies to develop TMDLs for the tidal portion of the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are in progress. Development of TMDLs for the upstream section of the Pawcatuck River and Chapman Pond is targeted for 2012-2016.

#### **Water Quality of Lakes and Freshwater Ponds**

Since 1988, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association has sponsored volunteer monitoring of a significant number of water bodies in the watershed, including Chapman Pond in Westerly, as part of the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch Program. Results have shown that Chapman Pond has moderate to above average levels of phosphorus, giving it a eutrophic classification.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> ...Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 5

<sup>19</sup> ...Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, p. 3

<sup>20</sup> ...Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 6



Chapman Pond is included in the RIDEM 2006 List of Impaired Waters due to lead concentrations and noxious aquatic plants. The source of nutrients and other pollutants can generally be traced to the surrounding land uses, including an adjacent road salt storage facility and the inactive municipal landfill.

### Water Quality of Rivers and Streams

The rivers and streams in the Pawcatuck watershed are now in generally good condition, but there are threats actively eroding the environmental quality of the watershed. Recent monitoring on the Pawcatuck River and its tributaries suggests that the river is threatened by lead levels, which may occasionally exceed the national EPA chronic aquatic life standards. Elevated nutrients, particularly nitrate levels, have also been measured in the Pawcatuck River. Fecal coliform bacteria is another important nonpoint source contaminant, originating from farm and wild animals and failing septic systems. Several measurements are routinely taken in the watershed to assess the health of aquatic communities. Results of the assessment tests indicate that several rivers and streams within the watershed are stressed, including portions of the Pawcatuck River.<sup>21</sup>

### Water Quality of Coastal Waters and Salt Ponds

In the salt pond region, failing or sub-standard septic systems have been identified as the single most important nonpoint source of bacterial and nutrient contamination to the coastal waters.<sup>22</sup> The tidal portions of the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are listed as impaired water bodies in both Rhode Island and Connecticut as a result of elevated bacteria levels. Currently, the direct harvesting of shell fish is prohibited at all times in Little Narragansett Bay due to pollution closures.<sup>23</sup> Shell fishing is not permitted in the tidal portions of the Pawcatuck River, from the Main Street highway bridge in Westerly south to the mouth of the Pawcatuck at Pawcatuck and Rhodes Point. This reach is assessed as partially supporting aquatic life.

Oxygen levels are very low because of nutrient over-enrichment. Metals and pathogens are also threats in the upper tidal reach. The Westerly wastewater treatment facility is considered to be a relatively minor loading source in comparison to the nonpoint source inputs (urban runoff, storm sewers, etc.) along this stretch of shoreline.<sup>24</sup>

The salt ponds are considered valuable parts of the coastal wetlands. Of the three major coastal salt ponds within the town of Westerly, Quonochontaug Pond (733 acres) is the largest salt pond; its eastern half is within Charlestown and the western end is at Weekapaug Point in Westerly. It is particularly sensitive to threats of nonpoint source pollution due to prevalent soil types that result in slow permeability and high runoff rates. Water quality in the eastern section is generally good. In the western end, restricted tidal flow can result in depleted oxygen levels and, in some restricted coves, higher bacteria levels.<sup>25</sup> Bacterial water quality surveys of the pond from 1977 to present indicate somewhat higher coliform counts adjacent to developed areas, although overall bacterial water quality remains good.<sup>26</sup> Although there is limited data, it appears that the total average nitrogen concentration is increasing with time.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> ...Ibid. p. 5

<sup>22</sup> ...BETA Group, Inc., January 2005 (Revised May 2007), Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan, pp. 1-6

<sup>23</sup> ...Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, May 2007, Quality Assurance Project Plan: Little Narragansett Bay and Pawcatuck River Bacteria Sampling Plan, p. 9

<sup>24</sup> ...Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 6

<sup>25</sup> ...www.saltpondscoalition.org/quonny%20pond.html, Pond Profiles: Quonochontaug Pond.

<sup>26</sup> ...BETA Group, Inc., January 2005 (Revised May 2007), Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan, p. 6

<sup>27</sup> ...Callender, Ted. October 2006, Water Quality and Nutrient Status of Quonochontaug Pond – May to October 2006, p. 1



The second largest of the Westerly ponds is Winnapaug (446 acres), between the Misquamicut and Weekapaug areas of the town. Dense development, particularly in Misquamicut and Weekapaug, has produced high runoff rates from these areas. In some cases, stormwater drainage carries effluent from failing septic systems. Safe shell fishing limits for bacteria have been exceeded in the pond. It appears that dissolved phosphorus concentrations there have decreased threefold during the last 10 years; however, nitrate concentrations in Golf Course Cove and adjacent waters have remained very high.<sup>28</sup>

The third and smallest Westerly pond is Maschaug Pond (42 acres), located between the areas of Misquamicut and Watch Hill, unique in that it is completely land-locked, although major storm events periodically result in influx of salt water. The *Town of Westerly Onsite Wastewater Management Plan* reports that Maschaug Pond is well protected from runoff generated in Misquamicut by an earthen dike and, subsequently, there are few threats to water quality in the pond. However, there are no water quality monitoring data to support this assertion.

### ***4.3.2 Quality of Groundwater***

The town of Westerly withdraws water from the Bradford and Westerly Aquifers through seven large community supply wells: Bradford Wells I and II, the Crandall Well, and the three White Rock Wells. The Noyes Avenue Well is currently not approved by the RIDEM.

The quality of the Pawcatuck Basin's groundwater is generally good to excellent, but there are isolated sources of contamination. Hazardous waste spills have been documented in the Crandall, Noyes Avenue and White Rock wellhead protection areas.<sup>29</sup> As of 2006, the RIDEM had inventoried 38 leaking underground storage tanks, several of which are located within Westerly's aquifer recharge and wellhead protection areas.

Elevated levels of nitrates and bacteria, which can result from failing septic systems, have been detected in the system.<sup>30</sup> Research at the University of Rhode Island estimates that septic systems account for more than 50 percent of all nitrogen entering the watershed as recharge groundwater.<sup>31</sup> The Noyes Avenue and White Rock well head protection areas have both experienced chemical contamination events from fuel spills. The wells in the system have also exhibited elevated levels of sodium, resulting from winter road salting.<sup>32</sup>

## ***4.4 Management and Protection of Surface Waters***

### ***4.4.1 Watershed Level***

Entities responsible for management and protection of surface waters include the RIDEM Office of Water Resources (groundwater quality, stormwater management, onsite wastewater, and wetlands regulations), the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) (preservation, protection, development and restoration of coastal areas, including coastal wetlands) and the Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC) (oversight, planning and coordination).

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<sup>28</sup> ...Ibid. p. 5

<sup>29</sup> ...University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, Appendix E, pp. 1-4  
...James J. Geremia & Associates, Inc., March 2001 (revised December 2001), Water Supply System Management Plan Update for Westerly Department of Public Works Water Supply Division: Volume I – (Part 1 of 2), p. 5-5

<sup>30</sup> ...University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, pp. 2-6

<sup>31</sup> ...Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 13

<sup>32</sup> ...University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, pp. 2-6



General oversight for Rhode Island's surface waters is provided by RIRC. RIRC has the authority to designate Watershed Councils and to create a *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* (RPCP). The Council's function is planning, coordination and empowerment; it is not a regulatory body. The Rivers Council has designated the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association as the watershed council for the Pawcatuck Watershed. The Salt Ponds Coalition is the designated watershed council for the Salt Ponds watersheds.

The RPCP, developed by the Council, is a guide for action to protect and enhance the quality and the use of Rhode Island's fresh and estuarine waters and their watersheds. It endeavors to integrate water quality planning with land use planning and with planning for activities such as recreation and habitat preservation. Its broad objectives are to protect drinking water supplies and pristine rivers, to encourage recreational use of rivers, to foster the creation of greenways, and to provide for the clean-up of rivers. Primary objectives for the Wood-Pawcatuck Subbasin (the portion of the larger Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed that includes Westerly) include (in order of importance):

- Preserve its quality as the state's premier freshwater recreational resource
- Maintain wildlife habitat quality
- Keep groundwater quality high
- Preserve agriculture

#### **4.4.2 Coastal Waters and Salt Ponds**

CRMC is responsible for the management, protection and enhancement of coastal areas. The regulatory authority of the CRMC is generally defined as encompassing the areas extending from three miles offshore to 250 feet inland from any coastal feature. In addition, natural coastal features (such as coastal beaches, dunes, barriers, coastal wetlands, bluffs and salt ponds) all have an *extended* contiguous area of 200 feet from their inland borders that is under the authority of CRMC.

CRMC administers the *Coastal Resources Management Program* (CRMP), which includes specific regulatory requirements for buffers, setbacks, subdivisions, recreational docks, barrier beach development, beach replenishment and any other activities that occur within the CRMC's jurisdiction.

CRMC in partnership with RIDEM is also responsible for implementing the *Rhode Island Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program*. Other management programs of the CRMC are the *Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast* (see the Wetlands section of this chapter) and the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). The SAMP is an ecosystem-based management strategy designed to address a diversity of issues on a watershed scale. The SAMP for the Salt Pond Region, *Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds)*, was the first SAMP developed by the CRMC. The Salt Pond Region SAMP focuses on managing the potential development of the salt ponds watersheds and establishes regulatory standards to protect and improve salt pond water quality. It also identifies pollution sources, wildlife habitat and prudent development strategies to effectuate restoration and preservation of salt pond resources. The approved five-year update to the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan requires changes to the existing Zoning Ordinance and subdivision regulations to comply with the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council Salt Pond Region Special Area Management Plan (maximum density, setbacks, buffers, requirements for nitrogen-reducing technologies for onsite wastewater treatment, and CRMC participation at an early stage of municipal land-use regulatory review).



### 4.4.3 Non-Coastal Surface Waters

The RIDEM Office of Water Resources is responsible for the protection of surface water quality inland of coastal areas. The department maintains regulations regarding: groundwater quality (see next section), stormwater management (see Stormwater section), onsite wastewater treatment (see Onsite Sewage Disposal section), and wetlands (see Wetlands section).

The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA), the RIRC's designated watershed council for the Pawcatuck Watershed, is active in the stewardship of surface water in the Pawcatuck Watershed. The WPWA developed the *Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Action Plan*. Some achievements of the WPWA include the identification and prioritization of opportunities to protect and restore riparian corridors, and participation in the development of the *South County Greenspace Protection Strategy* (see Open Space and Conservation Land section of this report).

## 4.5 Management and Protection of Groundwater

### 4.5.1 Source Water Protection Strategies

#### Wellhead Protection Plan

Management of wellhead protection areas (WHPAs) is facilitated through the *Rhode Island Wellhead Protection Program*, which requires municipalities and large water suppliers with a groundwater source(s) of supply to inventory potential pollution threats in the wellhead protection areas and develop a *Wellhead Protection Plan*. Wellhead Protection Plans must include, at minimum:

- a pollution threat assessment
- identification of protection strategies
- coordination with neighboring states, communities and water suppliers (where appropriate)
- a procedure for implementing the chosen strategies.<sup>33</sup>

The first two requirements have been addressed by Westerly in the *Water Supply System Management Plan Update (2001)* and, more recently, through a joint effort between the University of Rhode Island (URI) and RI Health. In 2003, URI and RI Health completed assessments of all public water supplies in the state, including the town of Westerly Water District. Westerly's results are published in the report, *Westerly Source Water Assessment*, by the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension in cooperation with RI Health. The assessments identify known and potential sources of pollution in drinking water supplies and rank their susceptibility to future contamination.

General protection strategies have been identified in the *Westerly Source Water Assessment* report and protection strategies specific to Westerly are presented in the *Water Supply System Management Plan Update*. Because municipal decision makers have primary authority over land use and the responsibility to control associated impacts, recommendations focus on protection measures that can be implemented through local plans, ordinances and development standards.<sup>34</sup> Protection strategies specific to Westerly, presented in the *Water Supply System Management Plan Update (2001)*, include the adoption of a wastewater management district, a public education program, land acquisitions along the Pawcatuck River, and strengthening of Westerly's aquifer protection

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<sup>33</sup> ...Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Office of Water Resources, March 2005, Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality, pp. 32-34

<sup>34</sup> ...University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, p. 51



ordinance to prohibit new underground storage tanks for either hazardous materials or home heating oil.

The final two requirements of a Wellhead Protection Plan still need to be completed by Westerly. These include the identification of which protection strategies will be implemented for the protection of the groundwater supply and the development of an implementation procedure for the chosen strategies, as well as the coordination with neighboring states, communities and water suppliers.

#### Inner Protective Radius Around Wells

The town of Westerly addresses RI Health’s requirement of an inner protective radius around public water supply wells in chapter 251-27 of the municipal code, entitled, Protection of public water supply wells. The code defines a 400 foot radius around public water supply wells located in the town, in which any development that would change the state of the area (e.g. dwellings, barns, etc.) and/or the introduction or deposit of contaminating substances (e.g. liquid or solid waste, stormwater drainage, pesticides, etc.) are prohibited. Westerly’s *Water Supply System Management Plan Update (2001)* indicates that the town “owns and controls” the land around each well head and that the town has acquired land within the 400 foot radius.

#### Aquifer Recharge Overlay District

One source water protection tool is a groundwater zoning overlay district (aquifer recharge overlay zone). The value of such an overlay district depends on the permitted uses and performance standards within the zone, the standards for review and approval of variances and special exceptions, and enforcement procedures.<sup>35</sup> Both Stonington, Connecticut, and Westerly have established groundwater zoning overlay districts in their zoning codes.

The Westerly zoning code includes an Aquifer Protection Overlay District. This overlay district was designed to encompass the four WHPAs as well as the identified aquifer recharge areas within the town. However, the footprint of the overlay district does not fully correspond to footprint of the current RIDEM WHPAs. See Figure 4-3 Source Water Protection. Westerly’s ordinance (1999) prohibits some high risk land uses within the overlay district, such as gas stations, dry cleaners and photo processing and requires an Aquifer Protection Permit for certain other land uses. The permit application requires that more detailed information be provided about the proposed project by the applicant. Westerly’s ordinance does not include performance measures. The town of Stonington includes a Groundwater Protection Overlay District in its zoning code. The Stonington ordinance (2005) prohibits the siting of high-risk land uses and new underground storage tanks in groundwater protection areas. It also includes performance measures.

Acquisition of open space lands in the town’s designated aquifer protection area began in 1989, with the acquisition of a 229-acre Town Forest. Since 1991, the town’s Utility Department has acquired several tracts in the vicinity of the Bradford Wellfield. In 2004, the Westerly Land Trust purchased the 500-acre Grills open space preserve, which is comprised almost entirely of stratified drift aquifer adjacent to the Pawcatuck River.

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<sup>35</sup> ...Ibid. p. 51





**Table 4-1 Summary of Water Quality, Management and Protection**

Resource	Water Quality Status	Issues/Problems	Stressors	References/Organizations
<b>Coastal Ponds</b>				
<b>Quonochontaug</b>	Good	Increasing bacteria, increasing nutrients, low DO***	Failing or substandard septic systems, stormwater runoff, development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP)</li> <li>○ RI Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program</li> <li>○ Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast</li> <li>○ The SAMP for the Salt Pond Region, <i>Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds)</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ RI Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Salt Ponds Coalition</li> <li>• Town of Westerly                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Town of Westerly Onsite Wastewater Management Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Winnapaug</b>	Somewhat impaired	High bacteria, and nitrate concentrations		
<b>Maschaug</b>	Unknown	Unknown		
<b>Pawcatuck River</b>				
<b>*Upper Pawcatuck (From Bradford Dye to Bridge at Rt 3)</b>	Impaired	High bacteria, elevated lead and nitrate concentrations	Bradford Dye Sewage Treatment Facility  Stormwater runoff, failing septic systems, farm and wild animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Protection Agency                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Federal Clean Water Act section 303(d)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• RIDEM Office of Water Resources                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 2006 List of Impaired Waters</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rivers Policy and Classification Plan (RPCP)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pawcatuck River Estuary</li> <li>• Little Narragansett Bay Interstate Management Plan</li> <li>• Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association</li> <li>• Salt Ponds Coalition</li> <li>• Nature Conservancy</li> <li>• University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch Program.</li> </ul>
<b>**Lower Pawcatuck (tidal)</b>	Impaired	High lead levels, heavy metal pollutants, high bacteria, low DO***, no shellfishing	Urban runoff, Stormwater runoff	



Resource	Water Quality Status	Issues/Problems	Stressors	References/Organizations
<b>Wetlands</b>	Unknown	Large wetland areas protected by conservation groups, small wetland area are subject to encroachment by development	Stormwater runoff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RIDEM Office of Water Resources               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rules and Regulations Governing the Administration and Enforcement of Freshwater Wetlands Act</li> <li>○ RI Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP)</li> <li>○ Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast</li> <li>○ The SAMP for the Salt Pond Region, <i>Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds)</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Groundwater</b>				
Westerly Aquifer	Good	Localized contamination, elevated levels of nitrates and bacteria, spills	Development in recharge zones, failing septic systems, road salt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RIDEM Office of Water Resources               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality</li> <li>○ Rules and Regulations Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems</li> <li>○ RIDEM establishes footprint of groundwater reservoirs, groundwater recharge areas and wellhead protection areas</li> <li>○ Rhode Island Wellhead Protection Program (<i>Wellhead Protection Plan</i>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• RI Department of Health</li> <li>• US Environmental Protection Agency</li> <li>• USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service</li> <li>• Town of Westerly               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Westerly Water Facilities Plan (1998, Beta Group Inc)</li> <li>○ Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan January 2005 (revised 2007)</li> <li>○ Water Supply System Management Plan Update (2001)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>University of Rhode Island (URI) Cooperative Extension</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Westerly Source Water Assessment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Ashaway Aquifer	Good			
Bradford Aquifer	Good			
<b>Beaches</b>	N/A	Storm erosion, flooding	Population pressure, Storms (hurricanes and Northeasters)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)</li> </ul>

\* includes Chapman Pond (severely impaired water body)  
 \*\* includes Little Narragansett Bay  
 \*\*\* DO=Dissolved Oxygen



## 4.6 Farmland, Natural Vegetation Systems and Habitats

### 4.6.1 Farmland

While agriculture is not a significant land use within the town, it is valued for its contribution to the rural atmosphere and open space. According to the town Assessor's office, there are three large-scale working farms within the town: Manfredi Farm, Panciera Ocean-Breeze and Panciera Ever-Breeze.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) classifies soil within the U.S. The information is compiled in Soil Surveys. The USDA Soil Survey identifies soil types that are considered *prime farmland* or *farmland of statewide importance*. Identification of prime and important farmland is useful to land use planning. When prime and important farmlands are lost to industrial and urban uses, agriculture becomes relegated to marginal lands which may be more erodible, more prone to drought, less productive, or less easily cultivated. Of the 65 soil types within the town, 18 types (2,212 acres or 11 percent of the town) are considered *prime farmland*, as defined by the USDA. Additionally, 11 types (2,008 acres or 10 percent of the town) are considered *farmland of statewide importance*. The three large-scale working farms in Westerly are located on soils considered to be prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance.

Rhode Island's Farmland Preservation Act allows the state to identify and acquire development rights in order to maintain farming, productive open space, and groundwater recharge areas. Two of the farms in Westerly, Panciera Ever-Breeze and Panciera Ocean-Breeze, are protected from future development through the purchase of agricultural development rights. A third area, Silver Farm, is protected by agricultural development rights, but is not in active farming use. Figure 4-4, Prime and Important Farmland, shows the relationship between agricultural land use, prime and important soils for agriculture, and agricultural conservation land.

### 4.6.1 Wetlands

Wetlands perform valuable ecological functions. They remove nutrients, pollutants and sediments from surface water runoff; recharge water supplies; reduce shoreline erosion and flood risks; and provide fish and wildlife habitat. In addition, wetlands provide recreational opportunities, aesthetic benefits, sites for research and education, and commercial fishery benefits.

The Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS) maintains a geographical database of wetlands in Rhode Island. These wetlands are classified according to the *US Fish and Wildlife Service's Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States*. Wetlands are classified based on their overall wetness and the characteristics of their soils and plants. The most abundant freshwater wetland type in the state and also within the town of Westerly is forested wetlands, dominated by the presence of woody vegetation 20 feet or taller in height. Westerly has approximately 2,905 acres of forested wetlands (approximately 15 percent of the town). Additionally, within Westerly, there are approximately 608 acres of scrub-shrub wetland (3 percent of the town), 151 acres of freshwater emergent wetlands (0.75 percent of the town), and 303 acres of estuarine emergent wetlands (1.5 percent of the town). See Figure 4-5 Wetlands.

Legislation to protect and regulate the use of wetlands exists at the federal, state and local levels of government. RIDEM regulates freshwater wetlands through the *Rules and Regulations Governing the*



*Administration and Enforcement of Fresh Water Wetlands Act.* Coastal wetlands are regulated by the CRMC through the *Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast*, as well as through the *Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP)* and the Salt Pond Region SAMP. Freshwater wetlands include bogs, flood plains, ponds, marshes, riverbanks, rivers, streams, and other areas as defined in the regulations. The CRMC addresses coastal wetlands including salt marshes and coastal freshwater or brackish wetlands contiguous to salt marshes. RIDEM and CRMC prohibit filling of, or other alterations to wetlands. RIDEM and CRMC require permits for and evaluate all proposed projects that may alter the natural character of wetlands and their functions and/or values. Westerly does not have any additional wetland regulations or requirements besides those of RIDEM and CRMC.

In addition to government regulation, some of the best protection for wetlands has been provided through acquisition and conservation easements by private and public land protection programs.<sup>36</sup> Figure 4-6, Wetlands, shows the location of state owned or locally owned conservation land with respect to wetlands. Approximately 1,356 acres, or 34 percent of the total wetlands in Westerly, fall within these conservation areas. These areas include private land, state- and town-owned land, and private and public land trust holdings. The purpose of the acquisitions include preservation of open spaces, habitat conservation, agricultural land preservation, recreation and well head protection. Given these varied purposes, the location of a wetland within a conservation area doesn't guarantee its stewardship or the protection of wetland functions. The wetlands will still be affected by land use activities within the conservation land as well as by adjacent land uses.

In an effort to monitor and assess the ecological health of freshwater wetlands, the RIDEM recently initiated the *Rhode Island Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan*. The goal of the wetland monitoring and assessment is to improve wetland protection and management by understanding the cumulative impacts of human activities on wetland condition. This RIDEM program is in the development phase and the wetland monitoring and assessment activities will be phased in over the next five years.

#### **4.6.2 Buffer Zones**

Buffer zones, or vegetated areas adjacent to rivers, streams, ponds, wetlands and coastal waters, are important landscape features that help to prevent erosion and control the transport of sediment into the adjacent wetlands and water bodies. Buffer zones are valuable for removing pollutants and excess nutrients from surface water runoff and, in some cases, from the underlying groundwater. They also provide valuable wildlife habitat. Residential and commercial development removes considerable areas of vegetation from the landscape and increases impervious areas. The cumulative effects of many individual unvegetated areas can result in increased sedimentation to surface waters, and less removal of pollutants from surface and groundwater.<sup>37</sup> RIDEM and the CRMC have programs in place to protect riparian buffers. RIDEM wetlands include a 50-foot perimeter wetland area and 100- and 200-foot riverbank wetlands adjacent to rivers and streams depending on the width of the watercourse. For coastal areas, CRMC policy requires coastal buffer zones for certain new/improved residential development and proposed commercial and industrial development.

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<sup>36</sup> ...Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 3

<sup>37</sup> ...Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, Chapter 8, p. 5



The Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC) published a report in January 2005 entitled, *Establishment of Riparian and Shoreline Buffers and the Taxation of Property Included in the Buffers: A Report to the Governor, President of the Senate and Speaker of the House*. The findings and recommendations in the report identify weaknesses in the RIDEM and CRMC buffer regulatory programs. Failure to enforce compliance with these existing regulations due to staffing and other constraints was identified as a major obstacle for buffer protection. Additionally, existing programs do not restore buffers in already built and urban areas. The report outlines a series of recommendations for the improved protection of riparian and shoreline buffers. Some of the recommendations relevant to the development of this Westerly Comprehensive Plan include:

- Private land owners, watershed councils, land trusts and municipalities are encouraged to protect critical riparian areas through the following programs:
  - Land conservation and acquisition
  - Flexible urban development standards and tax incentives to encourage restoration of riparian vegetation during the redevelopment of urban parcels
  - Conservation development strategies
- Provide tax incentives to encourage protection of buffer areas:
  - Designation by municipalities of riparian buffer corridors as open space land in their community comprehensive plans, which would open up the opportunity to provide temporary buffer protection through the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act
- Promote education as to the importance of buffers and the tax benefits of donating conservation easements
- Seek state bond monies through RIDEM for riparian buffer restoration

In September 2005 (revised March 2006), the RIDEM initiated a new effort to monitor and assess the ecological health of freshwater wetlands, *the Rhode Island Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan*. Some of the objectives in this plan seem to be designed to address concerns outlined in RIRC's buffer report. This RIDEM program is in the development phase and will hopefully contribute to the protection and restoration of riparian and shoreline buffers. The wetland monitoring and assessment activities will be phased in over the next five years.

### 4.6.3 Terrestrial Habitat

Trees and woody shrubs are an essential component of wildlife habitat, producing vegetative materials in the form of nuts, seeds, fruits, twigs, buds and foliage for consumption by herbivorous wildlife. In addition, trees and shrubs themselves provide habitat for insects and other prey animals that are consumed by many other forms of wildlife. The diversity and pattern of forests is one of the primary factors determining which types and where wildlife live in a terrestrial environment. The structure and form of the vegetation in the forest and other early successional habitats is the critical component of habitat for wildlife. Few wildlife species live exclusively in terrestrial upland. Most utilize adjacent wetlands in some way that may include a source of drinking water, a travel corridor, or an escape cover when disturbed by predators.<sup>38</sup>

Forested conservation areas in Westerly include the Town Forest, Riverwood, Bradford Dye/Grills Preserve, Newton Swamp Management Area and Woody Hill Management Area. Management and

<sup>38</sup> ...Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, Chapter 5, p. 25



planning efforts for the conservation of terrestrial habitat include those discussed in the Wetlands and Open Space and Recreation sections of this Plan.

#### 4.6.4 Coastal Features

##### Barriers, Beaches and Dunes

The southern coast of Westerly includes a string of salt ponds, wetlands, barrier beaches and dunes, rocky shores and bluffs. The barriers are narrow strips of land that occur parallel to the coastline and are separated from the mainland by a coastal salt pond or tidal wetland feature. They are comprised of unconsolidated materials, mostly sands and gravel, and contain a vegetated dune. These habitats are dynamic and change in shape and extent along with extremes in tides and catastrophic storm events. Vegetation is generally sparse and scattered along upper zones of the beach. Trapping of wind blown sands by dune grass or artificial fencing contribute to the growth and development of dunes.<sup>39</sup> The Salt Pond SAMP explains that the natural cyclical patterns of sand placement and dune/beach shape and profile is dynamic and that is not feasible, desirable nor appropriate to attempt to “stabilize” or fight the constantly changing barrier beach shoreline.<sup>40</sup>

Figure 4-6, Coastal Features, shows the location of these important coastal resources. Westerly’s beaches include:

- Sandy Point Island
- Napatree Point Conservation Area and Beach
- Watch Hill Bathing Beach
- East or Maschaug Beach
- Misquamicut State Beach
- Westerly Town Beach
- New Town Beach (Wuskenau Beach)
- Dunes Park Beach
- Quonochontaug Beach
- Fenway Beach (Weekapaug)

Westerly’s coastal areas are highly prized for their recreational opportunities, as places to establish residences, and for the habitat functions they provide. These values are often conflicting, which presents challenges for the management and protection of these resources. The preservation of this land as public or private open space has the benefits of providing public recreation opportunities and protecting the visual character of the area for residents, while also conserving critical wildlife habitat and minimizing economic losses associated with storm damage. Barrier beaches, however, have proved difficult to police and maintain, and, with several notable exceptions, there have not been sufficient funds available for appropriate walkover structures, foredune zone management, beach replenishment and education.<sup>41</sup>

Sandy Point Island is managed as a conservation area by the Avalonia Land Conservancy, and is accessible only by boat or kayak. Napatree Point and Napatree Beach are managed as the Napatree Point Conservation Area by the Watch Hill Fire District and the Watch Hill Conservancy (both owners) and are managed in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for protection of the federally-threatened piping plover. Maschaug Beach, owned by the Misquamicut Club, is managed in cooperation with the Service, also for piping plover protection. Significant areas around Winnapaug Pond are held in public or private conservation: Lathrop Wildlife Refuge and

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<sup>39</sup> ...Ibid. Chapter 5, p. 24

<sup>40</sup> ...Ibid. Chapter 6, p. 6

<sup>41</sup> ...Ibid.



Winnapaug Salt Marsh on the northern shore are managed by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island; . Misquamicut State Beach and Westerly's two town beaches are public beaches located on the barrier that forms the southern side of Winnapaug Pond in an area that is heavily developed. Dunes Park Beach and Watch Hill beach are also public beaches. The Quonochontaug barrier within Westerly, includes conservation areas managed by the Weekapaug Fire District, the Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation, and the Nopes Island Conservation Association. Fenway Beach is managed by the Weekapaug Fire District.

### Bluffs and Rocky Shores

In addition to beaches and dunes, Westerly's south shore is characterized by areas of coastal bluffs and rocky shores. Two areas of coastal bluffs include Watch Hill, where more than a mile of low profile bluffs extend east toward Maschaug Pond, and at Weekapaug Point. Small areas of rocky shoreline occur at Napatree Point, Watch Hill Point and Weekapaug Point.

#### *4.6.1 Rare Species and Unique Habitats*

The town of Westerly covers an area with many varied habitats ranging from barriers, salt water and brackish ponds, tidal marshes, freshwater wetlands, rivers and streams, upland fields and woodlands. A number of valuable water resources in the watershed provide unique habitats for numerous rare and endangered species. About 70 percent of Rhode Island's globally rare (generally found at fewer than 100 sites worldwide) and 63 percent of the state rare species and natural community occurrences (i.e. rare plants and animals) are found within the Pawcatuck Watershed.<sup>42</sup> RIDEM's *Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program* (RINHP) tracks the state's rare species and natural communities of conservation concern. The RINHP has developed lists of species, both plant and animal, considered to be endangered or threatened at the federal level, endangered or threatened at the state level, or of special concern in the state. These data sources are used to prioritize land protection activities throughout the public and private sectors. The RINHP has identified several sites in Westerly that are natural communities of conservation concern and where rare species are known to exist.

### Pawcatuck River

The Pawcatuck River and its tributaries support 40 species of fish including freshwater, anadromous (live in salt water and return to fresh water to spawn) and catadromous (live in fresh water and enter salt water to spawn) species. These species include striped bass, white perch, bluefish, smelt, alewives, shad and salmon, and wild and stocked populations of brook trout. The anadromous Atlantic salmon is listed as a federal endangered species. Fish passage restoration projects have restored anadromous alewife, American shad, sea-run brown trout and rainbow smelt to the river. Small returns of adult Atlantic salmon have also been achieved.<sup>43</sup> Phantom Bog, located along the north shore of the Pawcatuck River at the northeast corner of Westerly, is the site of several rare species and communities of special emphasis or concern in the region.

### Crandall Swamp

Crandall Swamp is a major wetland complex dominated by Atlantic white cedar and red maple swamps, but also containing a number of marsh, bog and open water habitats. The boundary of Crandall Swamp includes Chapman Pond and adjacent wetlands, Phantom Bog, and adjoining portions of the Pawcatuck River. It is one of the largest freshwater wetlands in Rhode Island, about

<sup>42</sup> ...Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 4

<sup>43</sup> ...Dillingham, Timothy P., et al, July 1993, The Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay: An Interstate Management Plan, pp. 70-72



2,000 acres in size, and contains one of the most extensive stands of Atlantic white cedar in the state, along with a great diversity of wetland vegetation.

Crandall Swamp is also important as a groundwater resource and flood control area for the Pawcatuck River. A variety of mammals, amphibians, waterfowl and other waterbirds frequently utilize this pond and swamp complex including several rare species. Bird species nesting here include osprey, bitterns (state endangered and state threatened) and herons (state species of concern). The osprey population is of special significance.<sup>44</sup>

### The Coastal Environment

The Salt Ponds provide important ecosystem and habitat functions. These include: prime habitat for commercial and recreational fin and shellfish; resting and feeding stops for waterfowl migrating along the Atlantic flyway; and nursery areas for fish that spend the remainder of their life cycle at sea or in fresh waters. Many wildlife species found elsewhere in the state are present in the salt ponds region, in addition to the many species that are dependent upon the salt ponds' specialized habitats, such as salt marsh or brackish wetlands.<sup>45</sup> Habitat fragmentation occurs within the salt pond watersheds and is impacting wildlife species.

There are over 100 species of finfish and shellfish that utilize the salt ponds at some stage of their life cycle. The most popular species, the quahogs, oysters and flounder, are all declining. The available information suggests that the habitat on which these fish and shellfish species depend is also declining.<sup>46</sup>

The diversity of habitats found within the salt pond watersheds supports a variety of birds, both year round residents and migratory species. Shorebirds are one group that depends significantly on the salt ponds habitats. The piping plover, which nests along the south shore barriers, is a federally threatened species. Documented nesting occurs at several sites along the south shore, including Maschaug Pond and Napatree Point. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains lists of bird species classified as Nongame Migratory Bird Species of Management Concern in the Continental United States. Species from this list that occur in the Salt Ponds Region include the Seaside Sparrow, Northern Harrier, American Bittern and Black Rail. The first three species are state listed rare species. Waterfowl (ducks and geese) are common inhabitants of the salt ponds but use the area most heavily during migration and wintering periods. The American Black Duck is considered a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Numbers of waterfowl recorded during counts made within the past five years pale when compared to historical accounts made prior to man-made impacts, such as breachways, that have affected the food source for many of these birds.<sup>47</sup>

Many species of mammals can be found within the diverse habitats of the Salt Ponds Region. These include: small mammals, such as meadow voles, white-footed mice, rabbits, chipmunks, squirrels, skunks and bats; furbearing mammals, such as red and gray fox, raccoon, muskrat, mink, ermine and

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<sup>44</sup> ...Ibid. pp. 70-72

<sup>45</sup> ...Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, Chapter 1, p. 1 and Chapter 5, pp. 1,11

<sup>46</sup> ...Ibid. Chapter 5, p. 1 and Chapter 9, p. 31

<sup>47</sup> ...Ibid. Chapter 5, pp. 11-15



river otter; large mammals, such as white-tailed deer and coyote; and a small but increasing winter population of seals.<sup>48</sup>

#### ***4.6.2 Habitat Protection***

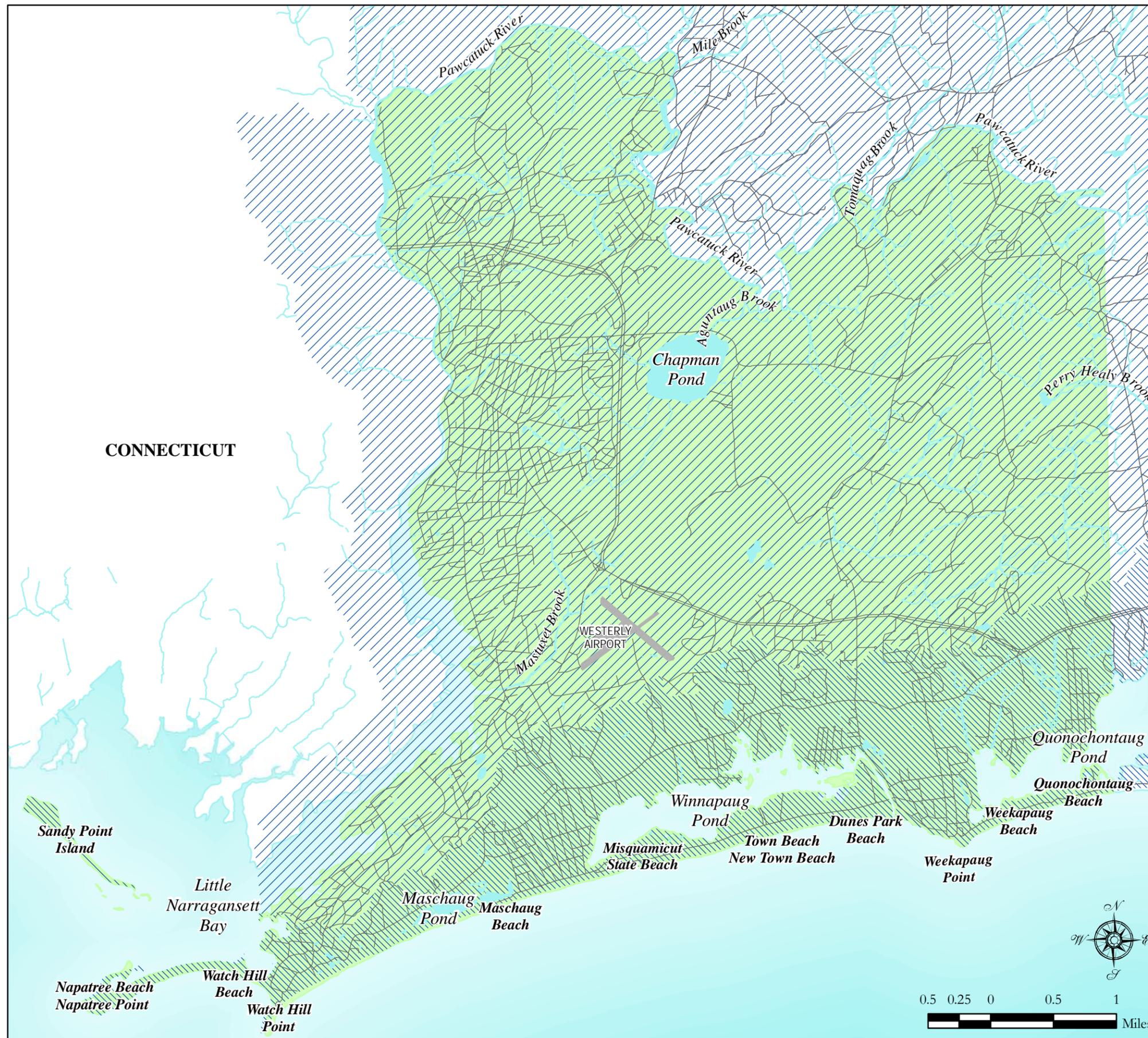
The main threat to wildlife habitat is the development of land for human uses. Natural threats such as hurricanes and invasive species can also contribute to the loss of quality wildlife habitat. The clearing of land for construction and development destroys native vegetation and its natural moderating effects, resulting in increased velocity and quantity of water runoff. Wetland filling and alteration impacts the ecological function of the remaining wetlands. Constructions of breachways and associated dredging have changed the ecology, chemistry and biology of the salt ponds by increasing the rate at which sand accumulates within them and altering their salinity and flushing characteristics.

Numerous regulations and planning documents have been developed with the goal of protecting wildlife habitat. Many of these have already been discussed in previous sections of this Natural Resources chapter. Regulations at the state level include the RIDEM and CRMC wetlands regulations mentioned in the Wetlands section of this chapter. Regulations specific to the Westerly area include the CRMC's Salt Pond Region SAMP. Within the SAMP, policies to protect fish and wildlife habitat include: prohibiting the disturbance of winter flounder spawning grounds during the December – May spawning season; and prohibiting the alteration or disturbance of piping plover habitats during nesting. Planning efforts at the state and watershed level include the RIDEM's *Rhode Island Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan*, the RIRC's *River Policy and Classification Plan*, and the *South County Greenspace Protection Strategy* (see Open Space and Conservation Land section of this Plan).

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<sup>48</sup> ...Ibid. Chapter 5, pp. 15-16





**Legend**

-  Salt Pond Watersheds
-  Pawcatuck Watershed
-  Ponds
-  Streams
-  Roads
-  Town Boundary
-  Roads

map source: RIGIS, peter j. smith & company, inc.

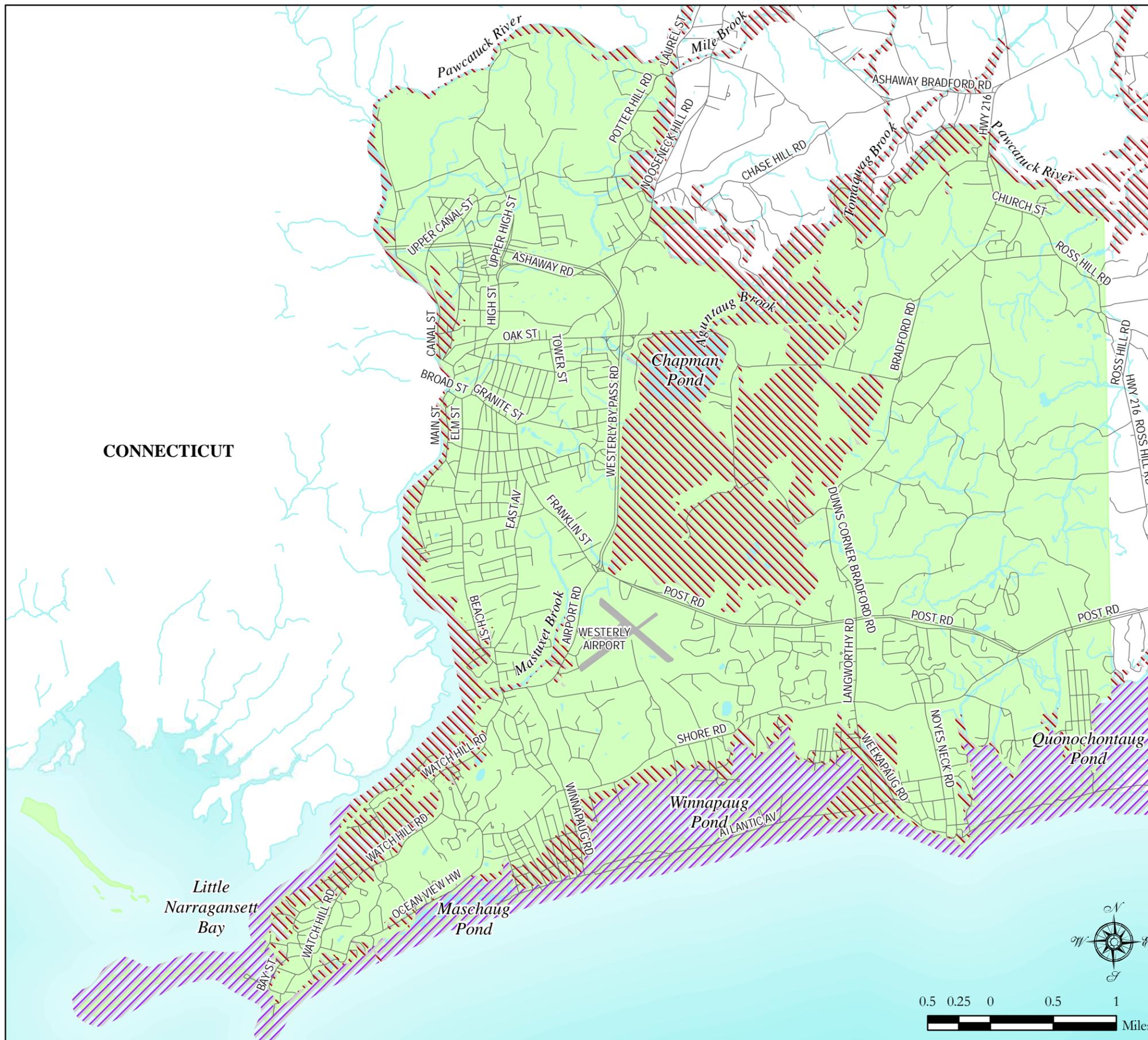
# Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 4-1  
Watershed Boundaries and  
Coastal Features

August 2009







CONNECTICUT

**Legend**

**FEMA Flood Zone**

-  A
-  V
-  Ponds
-  Streams
-  Roads
-  Town Boundary

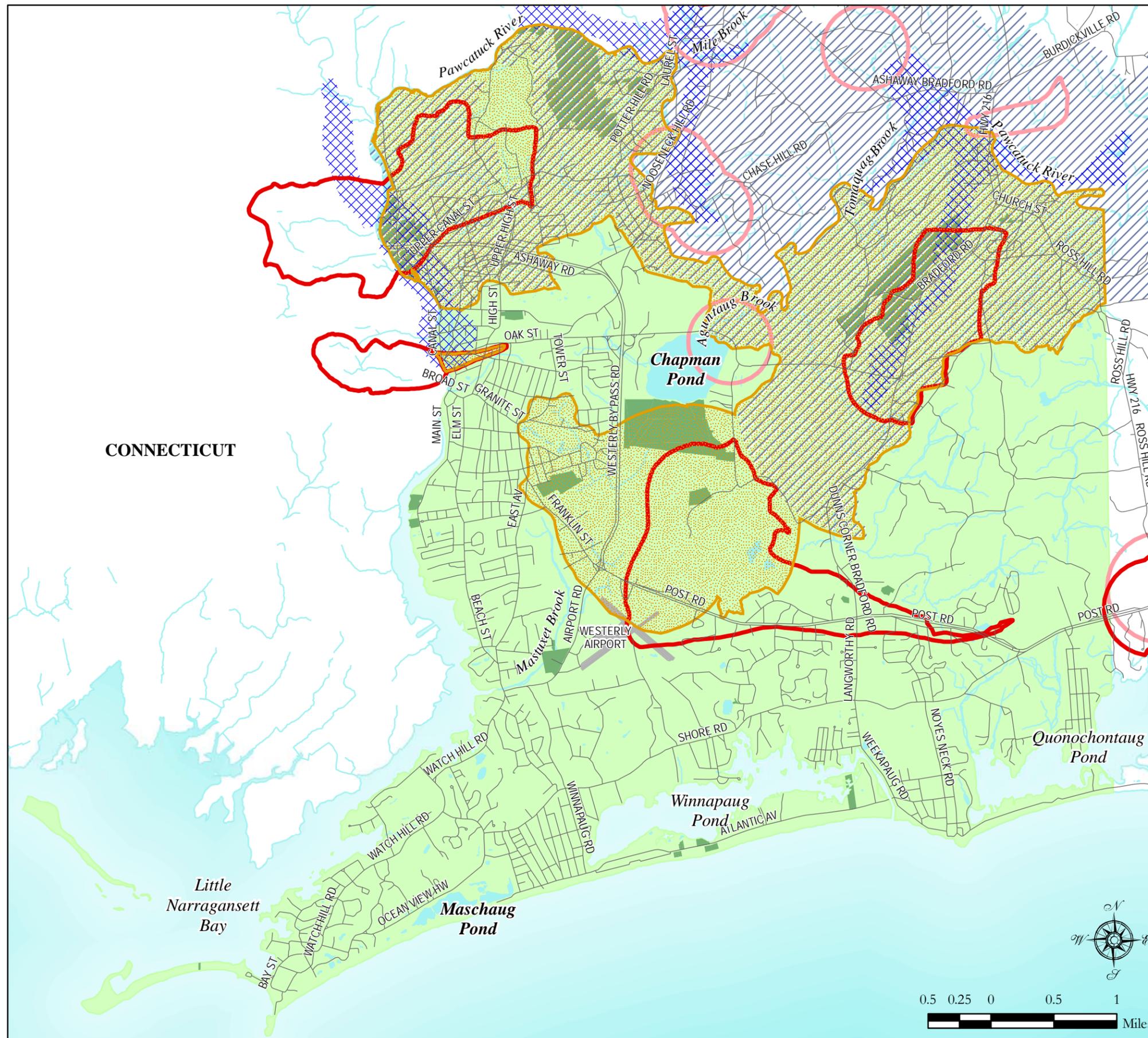
map source: RIGIS, peter j. smith & company, inc.

**Comprehensive Plan  
Town of Westerly, Rhode Island**

Figure 4-2  
Flood Hazards  
May 2008







**Legend**

- Aquifer Protection Overlay District
- Wellhead Protection Area (Community Wells)
- Wellhead Protection Area (Non-Community Wells)
- Groundwater Recharge Area
- Groundwater Reservoir
- Town-Owned Conservation Land
- Ponds
- Streams
- Roads
- Town Boundary

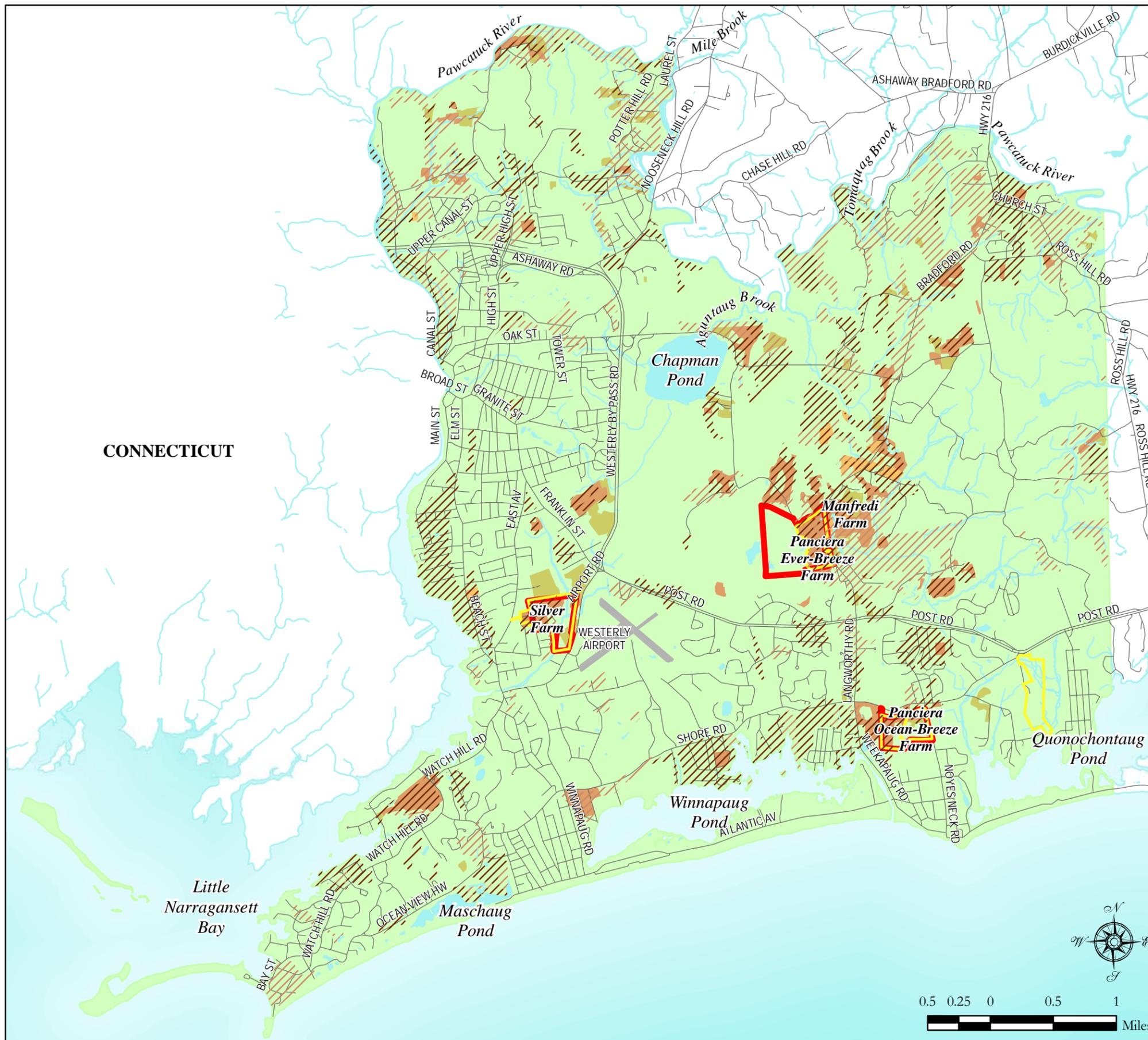
map source: *RIGIS, peter j. smith & company, inc.*

## *Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island*

*Figure 4-3  
Source Water Protection  
May 2008*







### Legend

**Farmland**

- Prime (diagonal hatching)
- Statewide Importance (cross-hatching)

**Agricultural Conservation (NGO)**

- Agricultural Land Preservation (yellow outline)

**Agricultural Conservation (State)**

- Agricultural Development Rights (red outline)

**Agricultural Land Use (1995)**

- Cropland (brown)
- Orchard, Grove, Nursery (orange)
- Pasture (unsuitable for tillage) (green)

**Other Features**

- Ponds (light blue)
- Streams (light blue line)
- Roads (black line)
- Town Boundary (light green background)

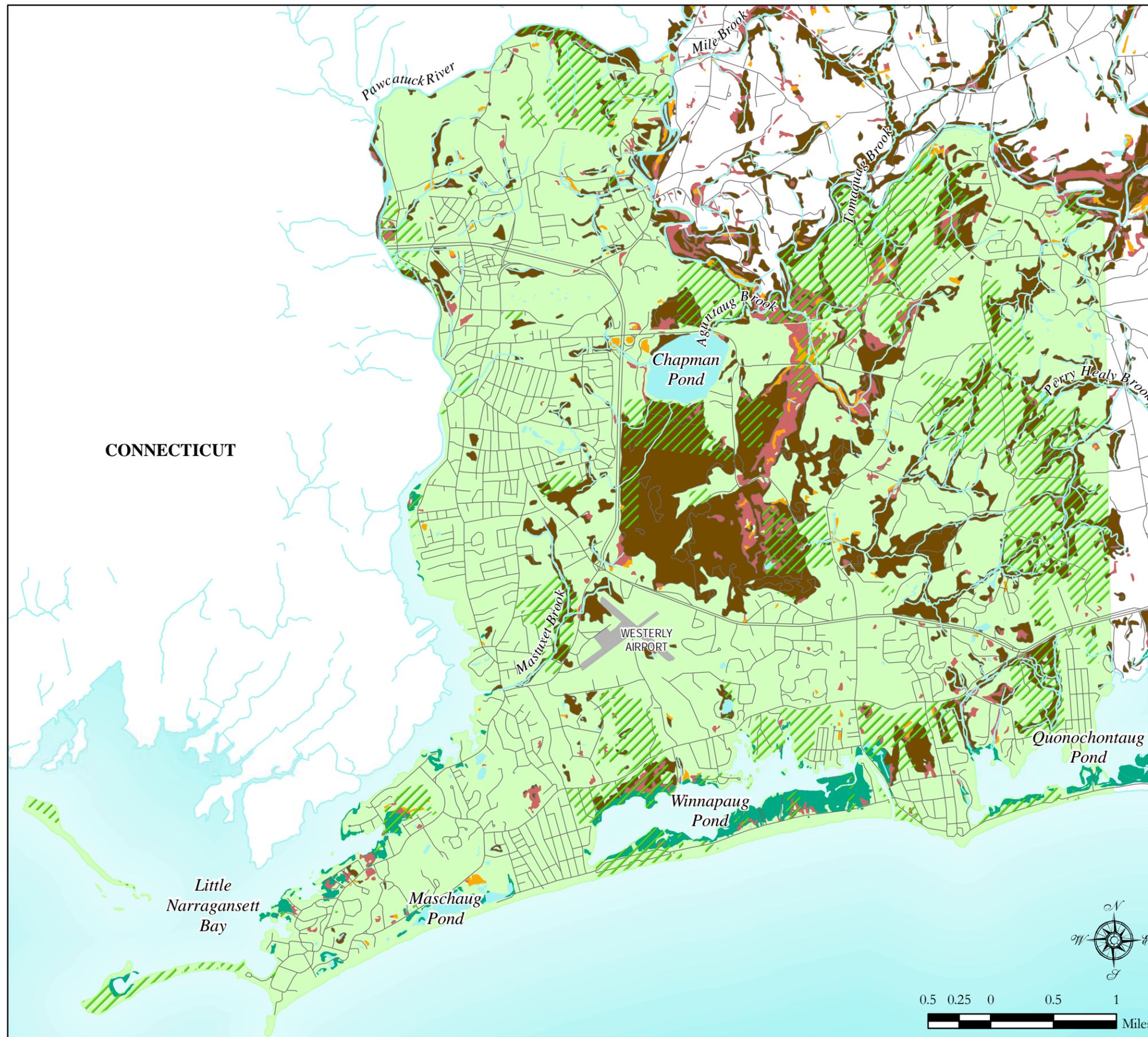
map source: *RIGIS, peter j. smith & company, inc.*

## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 4-4  
Prime and Important Farmland  
May 2008







**Legend**

-  Conservation Land
-  Forested Wetlands
-  Scrub-Shrub Wetlands
-  Emergent Freshwater Wetlands
-  Emergent Estuarine Wetlands
-  Open water
-  Streams
-  Roads
-  Town Boundary

map source: *RIGIS, peter j. smith & company, inc.*

***Comprehensive Plan  
Town of Westerly, Rhode Island***

*Figure 4-5  
Wetlands  
May 2008*





## 5.0 *Services & Facilities*

### 5.1 *Introduction*

This element of the Comprehensive Plan contains “an inventory of existing and forecasted needs for the public such as, but not limited to, educational facilities, public safety, water, sanitary sewers, libraries and community facilities.”<sup>49</sup> This element should be consistent with the state Guide Plan Element 110: Goals and Policies and the State Land Use Policies and Plan and other elements of the State Guide Plan that cover these facilities. The element also must be consistent with Goal 1 of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act: *To promote orderly growth and development that recognizes the natural characteristics of the land, its suitability for use and the availability of existing and proposed public and/ or private facilities.*

State Guide Plan Element 110 establishes goals and policies for the physical, economic and social development of Rhode Island including Human Resources, Economic Development, Physical Development and Facilities and Services. The Facilities and Services goals germane to the Westerly Comprehensive Plan are:

*Goal 1: improvement of the quality of public educational facilities at all levels*

*Goal 2: coordinated development and use of the state's public water resources*

*Goal 6: adequate and diverse recreational opportunities and facilities to meet the needs of the state's citizens and to attract and serve tourists*

*Goal 8: achievement of the highest possible standards of public health and safety in public facilities and services*

*Goal 10: improved law enforcement and correction services and facilities*

Figure 5-1, below, shows the locations of Westerly's public facilities.

### 5.2 *Emergency Services*

#### 5.2.1 *Police*

The Westerly Police Department (WPD) has 61 full-time employees, 48 of whom are sworn officers. A new, 28,000 square foot Police Headquarters was opened September 2007 at 60 Airport Road. The new facility houses all police operations including patrol, dispatch, investigations, detention of prisoners and administration. The facility also serves as a regional emergency operations center in the event of a disaster. The former police station on Union Street presents many opportunities to enhance the downtown/ government center. In February 2009, the town signed a seven-year lease with Westerly Adult Day Services for the agency to use the second floor of the facility.

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<sup>49</sup> Handbook on the Local Comprehensive Plan for the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, Update 2003



In 2006 the WPD received 28,869 calls for service. Between 2003 and 2006 the call volume increased by 61 percent, with the greatest call volume occurring in 2004. Since 2004, the call volume has decreased slightly each year. The call volume increase between 2003 and 2006 was primarily due to an increased use of services but part of the increase was due to a change in how information was tracked. For example, in 2003 homeland security checks were not included in the total call volume for the department. Homeland security checks include daily inspections of sites such as wellheads, sewer treatment plants and gas systems that are now required by department policy. In 2006, the following five categories accounted for the largest percentage of calls:

- Homeland Security Check (36%)
- Motor Vehicle Stops (10%)
- Motor Vehicle Accidents (3%)
- Suspicious Activity (3%)
- Disturbances (3%)

Through 2012, updates to equipment are anticipated in order to keep pace with changes in technology but no additional facility increases are anticipated.

### 5.2.2 Fire and Ambulance

#### 5.2.2.1 Fire Protection Services

The town of Westerly is divided into seven fire districts: Westerly, Bradford, Misquamicut, Watch Hill, Dunn’s Corners, Shelter Harbor and Weekapaug. Each fire district is incorporated to provide services within its boundaries and also provides services, upon request, to neighboring districts with which it has mutual aid agreements. Fire districts in Rhode Island have taxation powers and do not rely on appropriations from their towns. Services provided by the districts include: fire prevention and extinguishment, protection and preservation of life and property endangered by fire and related emergencies, and maintenance of fire district property such as beaches and facilities. The Shelter Harbor and Weekapaug Fire Districts have contracted with the Dunn’s Corners and Misquamicut Fire Departments, respectively, to provide fire protection services.

All fire departments within the town provide ongoing training programs. Training standards are consistent within all the fire districts and meet National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) Standards 150. The table that follows indicates the location and major characteristics of each fire department that is located in the town of Westerly.

Table 5-1 Town of Westerly Fire Departments

Fire Departments	Location of Stations	Service Area	Number of Firefighters	Equipment	Annual Service Calls
Bradford	5 N. Main Street 460 Bradford Road	3 sq. mi	52 volunteers	3 pumpers, 1 brush truck	200
Dunn’s Corners	1 Langworthy Road 5664 Post Road, Charlestown	22 sq. mi	20-25 volunteers	1 tanker, 2 brush trucks, 3 pumpers, utility trailer, water rescue trailer, 1 rescue boat	300
Misquamicut	65 Crandall Avenue	5 sq. mi.	35 volunteers	2 engines, 1 service pickup, 1 ATV, 1 jetski with rescue sled	100-125
Watch Hill	222 Watch Hill Road	2 sq. mi.	35 volunteers	2 pumpers, 1 quint, 1 ATV, 1 pickup, 1 squad, 1 van, 3 boats, 3 trailers	125
Westerly	7 Union Street 180 Beach Street	17.5 sq. mi.	90 volunteers, 2 paid	4 pumpers, 1 ladder truck, 1 decontamination trailer, 1 foam trailer	500

Source: Westerly Fire Departments



The fire departments have established working relationships that allow them to provide back up support as needed. The Misquamicut and Dunn's Corners Fire Departments have mutual aid agreements with the other fire departments in Westerly. The Watch Hill Fire Department (WHFD) has mutual aid agreements with the Misquamicut and Dunn's Corners Fire Departments. The Westerly Fire Department (WFD) has mutual aid agreements with the state of Rhode Island, Southern Firemen's League (includes all Westerly fire districts and those in Hopkinton and Charlestown) and the New London County Fire Chiefs Association. The Bradford Fire Department also has a mutual aid agreement with the state of Rhode Island, Southern Firemen's League.

### ***5.2.2.2 Ambulance Services***

The Westerly Ambulance Corps, established in 1917, is a private, non-profit, organization that provides basic life support (BLS) and advanced life support (ALS) emergency medical services to Westerly, Pawcatuck, Connecticut, and parts of Stonington, Connecticut. Other services include: routine medical transportation, a Rescue Squad, 911 Emergency Dispatching (upgraded and automated in 2009) and first aid training courses. Ambulance services are provided by paid staff (8 full time) and volunteers (20 active members). The all volunteer Rescue Squad (20-30 active members) specializes in vehicle extrication, dive rescue, swift-water rescue, ice rescue, rope rescue and emergency scene lighting.

In 2002, a new headquarters building was opened at 30 Chestnut Street that houses the Corps' equipment: four Type III ambulances, two four-wheel drive rescue vehicles, two rescue boats and a heavy rescue truck. Members and employees of the Westerly Ambulance Corps are required to attend training programs and to keep their certifications updated. The Rescue Squad attends training programs sponsored by the Rhode Island Fire Academy and private Rescue Teaching Corporations.

Mutual aid agreements for rescue services exist with Charlestown Ambulance Services and the Ashaway and Pawcatuck Fire Departments. Mutual aid agreement for ambulance services exist with ambulance corps in Charlestown (2 ambulances), Ashaway (2 ambulances), Stonington (2 ambulances), North Stonington (2 ambulances) and Hope Valley (3 ambulances).

### ***5.2.3 Medical Facilities and Services***

#### The Westerly Hospital

The non-profit Westerly Hospital is located at 25 Wells Street. It has been serving residents since 1925. With a total active medical staff of 100, the hospital provides medical and surgical care to a service area that includes all or part of five communities in Rhode Island and four communities in Connecticut (approximately 40,000 residents). The licensed capacity is 125 beds with the staff capacity of 56-60 beds. In addition to 24-hour emergency services, this hospital provides inpatient and outpatient surgical services, diagnostic laboratory services, imaging services, a variety of therapeutic services and several support groups. In 2007, the Westerly Hospital successfully completed the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) re-accreditation process.

Similar to other hospitals in the state, the major issues impacting the Westerly Hospital are unpaid consumer debt and differences in reimbursement rates. The hospital has three representatives who serve on a task force appointed by the governor to improve conditions for the state's hospitals. In



2008, the task force has recommended that the state legislature reform payment and reimbursements and that community hospitals collaborate to provide services and even consider mergers.

During fiscal year 2007, this facility provided \$1.3 million in charity care and had an operating loss of \$4.6 million, requiring use of its endowment funds. In early 2008, the Westerly Hospital began a program directly engaging “hospitalists” and reports initial positive budgetary and census impacts.

#### Visiting Nurse Services (VNS) Home Health Services of Rhode Island

The Visiting Nurse Services (VNS) Home Health Services, a not-for-profit affiliate of the South County Hospital Healthcare System (SCHHS), provides visiting nurses, rehabilitation therapists and other home healthcare nursing professionals to residents in southern Rhode Island. Licensed by the state and accredited by JCAHO, it is certified by Medicare and Medicaid and a member of the Visiting Nurse Associations of America and the National Association for Home Care. The main VNS facility in the region is located at 14 Woodruff Ave., Narragansett. A satellite office is located at 11 Wells St., Westerly, which serves the southwest quadrant of the State. In 2006, 644 patients in Westerly (11,933 visits) were served by 89 staff members.

Low levels of insurance reimbursement from Medicare and other insurance companies and increasing documentation requirements to receive those reimbursements are issues that this and other medical facilities are struggling to address.

#### Nursing Homes and Retirement/Assisted Living Facilities

Elderly residents of Westerly have access to several nursing homes that are located in the town. These include:

- Westerly Nursing Home – 66-bed facility located at 79 Beach Street
- Watch Hill Care and Rehab – 60-bed facility located at 79 Watch Hill Road
- Westerly Health Center – 108-bed facility located at 280 High Street
- The Clipper Home – 60-bed facility located at 161 Post Road

For individuals who do not need the level of care offered in a nursing home, there is the Elms Retirement Residence, an assisted living facility located at 22 Elm Street with a capacity of 75.

### ***5.3 Public Schools***

Since the preparation of the 1991 Comprehensive Plan, significant improvements have been made to the town’s public school facilities. Through a collaborative effort between the Town Council and the Westerly School Committee, two new facilities have been constructed and strategies to maintain and repair schools have been identified and implemented. In 1995, land was acquired for Springbrook Elementary School and construction was completed in 1996. The site for Westerly Middle School was acquired in 2001 and construction was completed in 2005. Many of school facilities are old and will require significant renovation or replacement over the next 15 to 20 years.



### 5.3.1 Enrollment

The majority of the town’s school-aged children (93%) attend public school. Projected enrollment for the 2009-2010 school year is 3,175 students including 1,067 in Westerly High School, 967 in Westerly Middle School, and 1,141 in Westerly’s four elementary schools. Approximately 200 students attend the one Catholic school (St. Pius X School, grades K-8) in the town, about 30 students are sent by the District to the nearby Chariho Regional Vocational School and about 125 students are educated at independent schools in Rhode Island and Connecticut.<sup>50</sup>

The Westerly School District had a total enrollment of 3,384 for the 2007-2008 school year. Enrollment in the district has been slowly decreasing (about 2% annually) since 2003. Enrollment projections prepared by the school department indicate that this trend is expected to continue for the next five years.

**Table 5-2 Historical and Projected Enrollment – Westerly School District**

Historical Enrollment						Projected Enrollment					
Year	Grades PK-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12	Grades PK to 12 Total	Annual percentage Change	Year	Grades PK-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12	Grades PK to 12 Total	Annual percentage Change
2002-03	1,634	930	1,088	3,652		2007-08	1,426	815	1,099	3,340	
2003-04	1,664	902	1,128	3,694	1.20%	2008-09	1,393	797	1,064	3,254	-2.60%
2004-05	1,600	855	1,168	3,623	-1.90%	2009-10	1,383	762	1,036	3,181	-2.20%
2005-06	1,516	856	1,159	3,531	-2.50%	2010-11	1,387	729	1,019	3,135	-1.40%
2006-07	1,473	850	1,121	3,444	-2.50%	2011-12	1,413	651	1,007	3,071	-2.00%

Source: New England School Development Council -Marlborough, MA 1/11/07

### 5.3.2 School Facilities

At the conclusion of the 2008-2009 academic year, the Westerly School Department closed one of its five elementary schools and moved all 5<sup>th</sup> grade students to Westerly Middle School. This change was due primarily to a decade-long trend of declining enrollment. The District is now comprised of six public schools: four elementary schools, one middle school and one senior high school. The District’s administrative offices are located at 15 Highland Avenue. Prior to the closing of Tower Street School in June of 2009, enrollment distribution was as indicated in the following table.

**Table 5-3 Public School Facilities**

School	Grades	Location	Enrollment 2006-2007	Building Capacity	Construction Date
Bradford Elementary School	K-5	15 Church Street, Bradford	208	219	1932
Dunn’s Corners School	K-5	81/2 Plateau Road	301	393	1964
Springbrook Elementary School	K-5	39 Springbrook Road	304	337	1996
State Street School	PK-5	35 State Street	355	381	1955
Tower Street School	K-5	93 Tower Street	331	350	1955
Westerly Middle School	6-8	23 Ward Avenue	842	900	2005
Westerly High School	9-12	10 Sandy Hill Road	1096	1128	1934

Source: Westerly Public Schools

<sup>50</sup> Westerly Public Schools FY 2007-2008 Budget Request



A \$30 million bond referendum to fund renovations of Westerly High School was approved by the voters in November 2008. This will be Phase II of the district's Vision 2020 facilities plan. Phase I of the plan, which has been implemented, created the new middle school and a high school campus incorporating the Ward Building and Babcock Hall.

A pattern of declining enrollment since 2002 and downward future projections indicate that some school facilities will be significantly under capacity in the near future, which requires examination of programs and/or the need for facility closures and a reallocation of students and staff. As noted above, the Westerly School Committee decided to close Tower Street elementary school at the end of the 2008-2009 school year, and to allocate students and staff among the town's four other elementary schools, as well as to move the 5<sup>th</sup> grades from all elementary schools to Westerly Middle School.

### ***5.3.3 Performance Measures***

Rhode Island measures school and district performance through performance classifications and the ability to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards as defined by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) has established annual baseline targets in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics for state assessment tests, which would bring all students to proficiency by 2014, in compliance with the NCLB Act.

Schools and districts are measured by an index-proficiency score (based on an aggregate of eligible students test performance) and the yearly progress of all students in the aggregate and by disaggregate groups (race, ethnicity, poverty status and education program status). Other RIDE targets that affect school classification are, with Westerly percentages indicated: assessment test participation rate (95%), attendance rate for elementary and middle schools (90%), and target high-school graduation rate (75.3% in 2007). The graduation rate target will steadily increase to reach 95% by 2014.

For 2007, schools meeting 2011 targets are classified as "high performing", those meeting 2007 targets are classified as "moderately performing" and those that miss targets are classified as "insufficient progress." High performing and moderately performing schools that miss three or fewer targets (other than school-wide ELA and mathematics targets) are classified as "with caution" for one year. High performing and moderately performing schools that attain exceptionally high school-wide index scores or make substantial improvement in both ELA and mathematics are designated as "commended schools."



The table that follows indicates ratings based on 2006-2007 test scores.

**Table 5-4 School and District Performance Measures**

School	RIDE	
	Classification 2006-2007	Met AYP
Bradford Elementary School	High Performing	Yes
Dunn's Corners School	High Performing	Yes
Springbrook Elementary School	High Performing	Yes
State Street School	High Performing	Yes
Tower Street School	High Performing	Yes
Westerly High School	Caution (16/17)	No
Westerly Middle School	High Performing	Yes
District		Yes

Source: Rhode Island School Performance and Accountability System, www.ride.ri.gov – 2007

During the 2006-07 school year the district had a student-teacher ratio of 11.5, a 94 percent attendance rate and a student drop-out rate of less than 10 percent. The average teacher had over 10 years of teaching experience and over 50 percent of teachers had a master's degree.

## 5.4 Municipal Administration

### 5.4.1 Town Budget

#### Town of Westerly Consolidated (Municipal and School) Budget – FY 2009-2010

In April 2009, the Westerly Town Council approved a consolidated budget for fiscal year 2009-2010 of \$76,617,640 consisting of \$27,247,640 for municipal departments and \$49,370,000 for the school department. The budget provided for 717.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, 188.6 in municipal departments and 528.6 in the school department. The tax rate for FY 2010 was set at \$8.87 per thousand after finalization of the Grand List by the Assessor's office. This is no change from the current year rate.

At the close of the FY 2008-2009 budget year, the town had a reserve fund of nearly \$9.0 million, approximately 11.5 percent of its operating budget. The FY 2009-2010 budget will use \$800,000 of this reserve to partially offset nearly \$2.0 million in expected revenue shortfalls due to reduced state aid and lower local revenues from building permits and other fees. The table below summarizes the town's budgeted expenditures for FY 2009-2010.

**Table 5-5 Municipal Expenditures**

FY 2009-2010 Expenditures	\$ Budget	% Budget
<b>General Government</b>	7,339,852	<b>9.6%</b>
<b>Education</b>	49,370,000	<b>64.4%</b>
<b>Debt Service*</b>	7,954,903	<b>10.4%</b>
<b>Public Safety</b>	4,522,287	<b>5.9%</b>
<b>Public Works</b>	5,430,766	<b>7.1%</b>
<b>Capital Improvements*</b>	566,132	<b>0.7%</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	1,433,700	<b>1.9%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76,617,640</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Town of Westerly

\*Note: Debt Service and Capital Improvement budgets include total amounts for both municipal government and school department.



At the conclusion of the 2008-2009 school year, the Westerly School Department closed one of its five elementary schools due to a decade-long trend of declining enrollment. Projected enrollment for the FY 2009-2010 budget year is 3,175 students including 1,067 in Westerly High School, 967 in Westerly Middle School, and 1,141 in Westerly’s four remaining elementary schools. The table below summarizes the School Department budgeted expenditures by function for FY 2009-2010. Allocation among functions may be adjusted periodically as needed at the discretion of the Westerly School Committee.

**Table 5-6 School Department Expenditures**

Function	\$ Budget	% Budget
<b>Instruction</b>	28,458,157	<b>57.6%</b>
<b>Instructional Support</b>	5,134,603	<b>10.4%</b>
<b>Operations</b>	7,689,149	<b>15.6%</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	5,455,593	<b>11.1%</b>
<b>Other Commitments</b>	2,632,498	<b>5.3%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49,370,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

In addition to the municipal and school budgets, the town also maintains three Enterprise Funds: a Water Fund, a Sewer Fund, and a Town Beach Fund. The enterprise funds are designed to be self-sustaining by providing services to the public for usage fees. The total approved amount budgeted for the three enterprise funds for FY 2009-2010 is \$9,271,051.

The FY 2009-2010 budget accommodates debt service which reflects the town’s strong commitment to investment in its infrastructure over the past several years. In 2005 voters approved a bond issue for \$16,575,000 to build a new police station and public works highway facility, both of which have been completed; and in 2007 voters approved an \$8,000,000 issue for road improvements and open space acquisition. Currently the town is in the midst of a \$70 million school improvement program, \$40 million of which has already been spent while an additional \$30 million was approved by the voters in November 2008. These additional funds will be used for the renovation and upgrading of the Westerly High School facilities. Debt service for this bond will need to be accommodated in future budgets beginning in FY 2011.

Under Rhode Island law, the town may not incur aggregate indebtedness greater than 3 percent of full assessed value of taxable property within the town. The current 3 percent debt limit of the town is approximately \$195 million based on a current net assessed valuation of \$6.49 billion. The town currently has \$78 million of debt outstanding or 40 percent of its 3 percent debt limit. When issued, the additional \$30 million school bond will bring this amount up to approximately \$108 million or 56 percent of the state-imposed debt limit. The table below summarizes the approximate outstanding debt amounts by category.

**Table 5-7 Westerly Outstanding Debt**

Category	\$ Debt	% Total
<b>Municipal</b>	25,027,000	<b>32.0%</b>
<b>School</b>	43,035,000	<b>55.1%</b>
<b>Sewer</b>	7,826,000	<b>10.0%</b>
<b>Town Beach</b>	2,225,000	<b>2.9%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>78,113,000</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Town of Westerly



Despite the current uncertain economic environment, Westerly's financial position remains strong as evidenced by the investment grade bond rating upgrades to AA- by S&P and Aa3 by Moody's in August of 2007. Maintaining these desirable ratings depends on disciplined financial management of both municipal and school departments, continuing to maintain a strong reserve fund, and careful prioritization of any future debt offerings.

#### ***5.4.2 Part-Time Resident and Tourist Season***

The town's daily population is estimated to double in the summer to about 50,000. This is due to the presence of seasonal residents and the large number of daily visitors to Westerly's beaches. Increased needs for water and sewer are paid for through the *ad valorem* taxes. Seasonal employees are added to the town's 185 full-time equivalent employees, and extra summer needs are accommodated through respective departments' overtime budgets. Overtime and seasonal employee needs are highest at the town transfer station and the town beaches. In addition to transfer station workers and lifeguards, increased needs in the summer months include public safety, public works and fire department/emergency response coverage. In addition to the increased traffic, the town also sponsors events including Blues at the Beach and fireworks displays that increase the burden on safety and clean-up workers.<sup>51</sup>

#### ***5.4.3 Recent Developments***

To ensure efficiency in government operations and responsiveness to its citizens, the town of Westerly has made the upgrading of personnel, equipment, technology and facilities a high priority. In addition to the new police station, the town has also built a new 18,000 square-foot Department of Public Works Highway facility. This facility replaces the aging structure on Beach Street and various small storage facilities. The new facility is located on a site owned by the town adjacent to the Westerly Transfer Station and Recycling Center with access from Route 91.

Under the leadership of Stand Up For Animals (SUFA), an independent non-profit organization, a new animal control facility and shelter opened in August of 2009. Working collaboratively with the town, SUFA built and is now operating a state-of-the-art animal shelter, adoption center and regional outreach facility to promote the health and welfare of abandoned or lost pets and to educate and assist those who care for them. The facility is adjacent to the new Department of Public Works Highway facility.

Asset Management Plans are being employed by the Police Department, the Utilities Department and the Department of Public Works. These annual plans specify priorities for updating fleets and equipment and assist employees in carrying out their job responsibilities. Investments in computer technology are also being made to improve productivity and responsiveness to citizens. The town has contracted for a parcel-based Geographic Information System (GIS), which is now operational and undergoing testing, and will be on-line and accessible to municipal staff and the public by early 2010.

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<sup>51</sup> Telephone interview, Chief of Staff Sharon Ahern, May 27, 2008



## 5.5 Water

Westerly's water system is owned by the town and operated by the Public Works Utilities Department. This system serves portions of Westerly and the Pawcatuck section of Stonington, Connecticut. A small portion of town (approximately 6 percent) depends on private wells. Most of the properties so served are residences remote from the town water system. A study titled *Westerly Water Division – Water Supply Management Plan*, prepared by the Maguire Group in July 2007, describes existing conditions and includes a long range program to improve the quality and quantity of water.

Water studies are conducted on five-year cycles and results are submitted to both Rhode Island and Connecticut state agencies (Departments of Health) for evaluation. In addition to the information below, refer to the Natural Resources element for a description of wellhead and aquifer protection.

### Water Source

Westerly's drinking water is obtained from wells that tap into groundwater reservoirs. The water is pumped from eleven supply wells at seven pumping stations. Generators are provided at several wells to assure a constant supply of water in the event of a power failure. Pumping stations each have their own chemical feed pits where potassium hydroxide (KOH) is added to the raw water to adjust the pH. Water is stored in six storage facilities before being distributed for use. Generally the quality of the water is good; however, in three separate incidents in 1994, 1998 and 2000, respectively, the water became contaminated with fecal coliform, prompting the state to mandate some form of disinfection.

The town has successfully completed a pilot program for a MIOX ("mixed oxidants") disinfection system and is transitioning to full implementation in fall of 2009. Westerly was the first town in Rhode Island authorized to conduct a year-long, full system test on water supply using the MIOX technology.

### Supply

The town has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of its groundwater reserves. The conclusion has been that its existing White Rock sites, combined with its Bradford II and III sites and the Crandall well sites, provide sufficient capacity. However, to enhance the town's reserves, a new well is being developed ("Bradford IV"). This well, with a half million gallon per day capacity, was permitted in 2007 and will be operational once the acquisition of adjacent land required to protect the site is completed. The town has implemented a program for hydraulic modeling which is used to ensure that expected results are occurring within the water supply system.

The volume of water that the town pumps into the system varies widely during seasons of the year depending on the influx of seasonal residents and tourists and other summer requirements. According to a representative of the Water Division, the town pumps the following volumes expressed in millions of gallons per day (mgd):

- November to March 3 mgd
- April to October 4-6 mgd

The town continues to actively acquire land for aquifer protection; the bulk of a recent \$3 million bond issue for open space acquisition was targeted for this purpose.



Westerly currently provides some water service to Stonington, its neighboring town in Connecticut. While this has generally been a mutually beneficial arrangement, the level of future demand from Stonington is unknown and could possibly pose significant future implications. Westerly also owns water rights on land in North Stonington with proven water capacity of about 1 million gallons per day; it would be important for the town to preserve this critically important resource.

### Drought Management

The State Planning Council adopted Element 724: Rhode Island Drought Management Plan in 2002 to establish coordinated procedures for a statewide response to severe drought episodes. It outlines the responsibility of state, federal and local entities and defines the roles these entities are to play in response to long-term drought conditions.

The Drought Management Plan policies, goals and strategies should be viewed within the context of the four over-arching goals of the Water Emergency Response Plan, which seeks to assure:

1. Protection of public health, safety and welfare
2. Conservation of essential drinking water resources
3. Reasonable allocation of water supply
4. Support of essential and high priority water uses

One requirement of the Rhode Island Drought Management Plan is that water suppliers, such as Westerly, that obtain, transport, purchase, or sell more than 50 million gallons of water per year are classified as large water suppliers and must develop a Water Supply Systems Management Plan (WSSMP). Westerly's WSSMP is the previously mentioned study titled, Westerly Water Division – Water Supply Management Plan prepared by the Maguire Group in July of 2007.

This study functions as the master plan for the water system, addressing adequacy of water supply, the water distribution system, conservation measures, watershed protection, capital improvements and emergency preparedness. In the emergency operations management section of their WSSMP's, water suppliers are required to address drought contingencies and appropriate response. In addition, the Regulations of the Water Resources Board require that a WSSMP include an emergency component to assess system risks and response capabilities, and to describe a contingency plan for all foreseeable water supply emergencies. Suppliers are required to identify system risks, including droughts, that exceed the water supply system's design capacity. They are also required to identify their response to specific water supply emergencies.

Specific drought response activities described in Volume II of the Westerly WSSMP include procedures for the designation of a water supply alert followed by criteria and procedures for several drought phases including a:

- Drought Watch/Advisory Phase
- Conservation Phase
- Expanded Restriction Phase
- Emergency Phase

### Distribution System

Domestic water is pumped through an extensive network of pipes that is approximately 202 miles in length. Pipe sizes range from 1¼ inch to 20 inches and all are maintained by the town. Pipe materials vary by age and include recent materials such as PVC and ductile iron to older materials



such as asbestos-cement, and cast iron. The current distribution system has limited the town's ability to access the full capacity of the White Rock wells; therefore a new 20-inch water main was constructed over a distance of 2.6 miles from the White Rock pumping station to Granite Street. The improvement adds 2 million gallons per day to distribution system capacity, a full one-third increase to current capacity. Construction began in mid-2008 and was completed in the spring of 2009. There are approximately 900 hydrants distributed throughout the town, almost all of which have been replaced and upgraded over the past 25 years.

### System Improvements

Some sections of the water distribution system in Westerly are over 125 years old. Extensive investments have been made and are being made to extend the system's useful life. Improvements are funded in the Westerly Water Division's Capital Improvement Program (CIP), which is a list of all known upcoming capital improvements for a five-year period. Ongoing improvement projects include the construction of the new one million gallon Winnapaug Tank, the Winnapaug Tank site lead remediation, permitting of a new pump station and well in Bradford, design of a new main extension on Westerly-Bradford Road, the Tower Street Tank rehabilitation and lead soil remediation and the new White Rock Transmission Main. There is also a major pipeline rehabilitation study underway, including hydraulic analysis, in order to establish priorities for upgrading and establishing a long-term replacement schedule. All of these projects were designed to ensure that Westerly has an ample supply of good clean water into the future.

### Services

There are currently 14,215 service connections to the Westerly water system. Every residential, commercial, industrial and governmental service connection is metered, and bills are sent out based on the volume of water used. The budget for the town's Water Department is prepared to incorporate all of the costs of operating the department and the water rates set by the town are calculated to ensure that the users pay for all costs of the department.

## ***5.6 Sanitary Sewer System***

Westerly owns and operates a wastewater treatment collection and treatment system that services approximately 45 percent of the parcels in the town. In terms of residential parcels only, 39 percent have public sewers and 61% use individual septic systems. The town has not extended sewer service in several years. Developers of some projects have extended sewers in conjunction with completing the projects. The wastewater in areas not serviced by sewers has been accommodated in many ways including cesspools and septic systems installed during time periods where no regulations existed or where there were minimal local regulations. Later systems were installed under regulations of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) relating to Individual Septic Disposal Systems including, effective January 1, 2008, the new RIDEM 'Rules Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems'.

Westerly has one wastewater treatment plant that discharges effluent through a 24 inch diameter outfall pipe into the Pawcatuck River. The plant's discharge is regulated by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) through its Rhode Island Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (RIPDES) program. Effluent standards are based on the water quality classification of the receiving water body (i.e., Pawcatuck River) and are regulated by RIDEM's Water Quality Regulations. A 'Wastewater Facilities Plan' was prepared for the town in November of 1998 (revised December 1999) by BETA Engineering, Inc. The plan addresses



deficiencies with the existing sewer collection system and sewage treatment plant as well as any deficiencies or problems with the unsewered areas of the community.

### Capacity

The wastewater treatment plant was built in 1920 and has had modifications and upgrades made in the late 1950's, 1979, 1986 and 1992. There was also major upgrade in 2003 for biological nutrient removal and replacement of 1970's era equipment.

The plant is now designed to treat an average flow of 3.3 million gallons per day and a peak hourly flow of 7.8 million gallons per day. The plant is near the threshold of treating 80% of its capacity for 90 consecutive days, which will cause RIDEM to require Westerly to report on how the town will maintain compliance until capacity is reached. The plant currently has capacity for all currently proposed and approved subdivisions within the sewer district, normal build-out within the district and the Misquamicut section of the sewer district between Winnapaug Pond and Maplewood. The town is also trying to limit the amount of groundwater that infiltrates the system. Town staff have been using video cameras that are inserted into sewer pipes to look for broken pipe, and these pipes are lined, sealed or replaced to seal off inflow.

There are nine active wastewater pumping stations in the town. All four major sewer pump stations have been rebuilt since 2003; they are located at Beach Street., Margin Street., Old Canal and New Canal Streets. Each is capable of handling current incoming flows even though minor upgrades and repairs are necessary. The plant property has room for and was planned for an expansion to about 4.4 million gallons per day if the town decides to expand the boundaries of the existing sewer district.

### Individual Sewage Disposal Systems

Individual Sewage Disposal Systems (ISDS) will likely continue to play an important role in the future of wastewater treatment in Westerly due to the limitations of the town's sewage treatment system. Unfortunately, negligence, or improper operation or unsatisfactory site conditions can lead to failure of an ISDS. Such failures are a potential threat to the health of residents because they contaminate groundwater and cause other environmental damage. One future consideration is whether the town should consider extending the sanitary sewers to areas not currently served; this has been a contentious issue in the community and one which will require considerable informed dialogue among all the interested parties.

In addition to the regulations referenced above, wastewater systems may also be subject to RIDEM regulations for groundwater quality titled 'Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality', but they are not currently regulated by the town. These state regulations are designed to protect and restore groundwater resources for drinking water purposes and other beneficial uses and to assure protection of public health, welfare and the environment. BETA Engineering, Inc. prepared an 'On-Site Wastewater Management Plan' in January 2005 (revised May 2007) that addresses many of the questions regarding the ISDS. Additional information on this issue is also available from a University of Rhode Island sponsored website titled the Onsite Wastewater Resource Center at <http://www.uri.edu/ce/wq/RESOURCES/wastewater/index.htm>.

ISDS can have a direct impact on the integrity of both groundwater and surface water sources. Improperly functioning systems can contribute pollutants to the town's water resources. Therefore, proper septic system function and maintenance is of long term importance for Westerly. Please



refer to the chapter titled Natural and Cultural Resources for a description on the ISDS relationship to water quality.

Advances in relatively inexpensive treatment systems and effluent fields have made property formerly undevelopable, now potentially developable, and property of limited development capacity now capable of supporting greater development. Additionally, recent changes in state law have imposed requirements mandating the use of these technologies in vulnerable coastal areas.

## ***5.1 Stormwater System***

The town of Westerly owns and maintains a stormwater sewer system. Most of the system flows into the river or wetlands rather than into the ocean. There are no combined sewer overflow (CSO) connections between the sanitary sewer and storm sewer. Most of the system flows by gravity with only a single pump station. There are several new developments in the town that have created their own storm retention basins or ponds in order to comply with newer stormwater regulations. After private developers build the basins, the town assumes the responsibility for maintenance. The town has an ongoing maintenance program for the storm system that includes cleaning catch basins and pipes and replacing aging pipes and structures.

In 2007, the town received approval from Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) to install a municipal storm drainage collection and treatment system serving the Misquamicut area. This system is operational and successfully addressing serious flooding problems that occur in Misquamicut neighborhoods during moderate to heavy storms.

### Stormwater Pollution Prevention

Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) stormwater pollution regulations are applied locally through the RIDEM. Communities that operate Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) as defined by population of the community were required in 2003 to obtain permits and establish storm water management programs that reduce the quantity of pollutants that can enter storm sewer systems during storm events. The permit or Notice of Intent (NOI) must include a Storm Water Management Program Plan that describes the Best Management Practices for each of the following six measures:

- Public Education and Outreach
- Public Involvement/Participation
- Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
- Construction Site Runoff Control
- Post Construction Runoff Control
- Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping

Westerly has submitted its NOI to RIDEM for MS4 approval. There were major actions required for the permit – the town had to map the storm water system and all outfall points, inspect and clean all catch basins and structural BMPs, schedule maintenance and repairs, sample all outfalls and identify and eliminate all improper connections.. Another stormwater pollution related study completed since the last comprehensive plan is the 'Phase II Storm Water Management Plan', Westerly – March 2004, prepared by Fuss & O'Neill Inc., Consulting Engineers.



## ***5.2 Solid Waste Disposal***

Westerly owns and operates a solid waste transfer station located at 39 Larry Hirsh Way. The town does not provide curbside pickup but rather sells orange trash bags at \$1.25 per bag (or five large 33 gallon bags for \$6.00 or five small 15 gallon bags for \$3.00) that residents fill and return to the transfer station on their own. Special charges are applied to items that do not fit in the designated bags.

There is also a recycling facility directly adjacent to the transfer station where residents bring recyclables at no charge. This system has been in place for several years and, according to the Public Works Director, works well since residents have an incentive to separate recyclables to save money. The town compacts the trash at the transfer station, loads and trucks it to the state's central facility in Johnston, Rhode Island where it is landfilled. If residents choose not to haul their trash, there are a number of licensed private haulers that will collect it for a fee. If residents use a private hauler, they are not required to use the specially designated bags. It is estimated that slightly more than half of the residents hire a private hauler.

## ***5.3 Natural Gas and Electric***

Both gas and electric service in Westerly are provided by National Grid. The utility also owns and maintains the town's utility poles and electric lines. Some of the newer developments have buried their utilities. There has been some call by residents to bury existing lines, and while the cost of doing so has restricted these operations, a number of private individuals have paid to accomplish it in their immediate neighborhoods. In Watch Hill, the Watch Hill Conservancy has completed a nearly \$600,000 engineering study to prepare for the undergrounding of utility lines in a mile-long section of its commercial district. It is now seeking funding of approximately \$8.5 million needed to enable construction to move forward.

Gas service is available in some areas of town; however, the main transmission line is not adequate to provide broad town-wide service. There are reported to be approximately 4,000 gas service connections in Westerly. National Grid owns and maintains the gas lines in Westerly. Lines run along many of the major roads and can be extended to meet demand. There is a major gate station along a large gas pipeline in Westerly that can supply a significant number of new services as the need arises.

## ***5.4 Public Library***

The Westerly Public Library and Wilcox Park are located on approximately 15 acres at 44 Broad Street in the center of town. The library and adjacent park are owned and operated by the Memorial and Library Association of Westerly. Located in Westerly's historic district, this facility serves all of Washington County, as well as neighboring communities in Connecticut. The library receives funding from state, local and other sources. In 2006, 57% of the library's funding came from non-public sources, 22% came from the State and 21% came from local sources (Westerly and Stonington and North Stonington, Connecticut).

In addition to books and periodicals, the Library offers public-access computers, books-on-tape, DVDs and compact discs. Public programs include plays, concerts, lectures and civic discussions. The Library is ranked among the top 10 in the State for number of items in circulation, number of



library visits, number of programs offered, and program attendance. The table that follows presents selected library statistics for a five-year period.

**Table 5-8 Selected Library Statistics 2002-2006**

Fiscal Year	Items Circulated	Size of Collection	Total Staff (Full-time)	Patron Visits	Programming Number	Attendance	Annual Budget
2006	252,440	297,885	22.7	252,100	527	17,826	\$1,668,063
2005	259,659	303,199		248,500	481	16,167	\$1,674,753
2004	255,250	302,008	20.8	248,500	508	13,562	\$1,676,396
2003	264,763	381,674	21.8	245,000	477	22,830	\$1,700,312
2002	259,141	334,130	21.9	244,000	478	18,819	\$1,831,433

Source: Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS) – [www.olis.state.ri.us](http://www.olis.state.ri.us)

The Library has had three additions since it was first constructed in 1894, the most recent occurring in 1992. Expansion of services since that time has necessitated additional space. In order to address that and other needs, the Library is conducting an \$8 million capital campaign. Roughly half of the “hard” construction costs will be provided by the Rhode Island Office of Library Services, which provides grants for library construction. Funds will be used for space reallocation in the Library and renovations to the Park.

Interior renovations are expected to provide a 20 percent increase in floor space for each of the Library’s four floors without increasing the 50,000 sq. ft. footprint. Most of the funds for this project are coming from private donations, but the project will require the combined efforts of federal, state, town, foundation, corporate and community supporters. Renovation work on the library structure was started in August of 2009.

### **5.5 Social Service Agencies**

A number of private, public and quasi-public local agencies provide social services to Westerly residents. Among these are:

- Bradford Johnny Cake Center
- Community Life Center
- Literacy Volunteers of Washington County
- Living Supplies Closet
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Westerly/Chariho
- St. Vincent DePaul Society
- South County Community Action (SCCA)
- South County H.I.V. Task Force
- Westerly Area Warm Meals (W. A. R. M.) Shelter
- Westerly Adult Day Services
- Westerly Senior Citizens Center Association
- Women, Infants & Children (WIC)

Across the state line, the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center also provides services to Westerly residents.

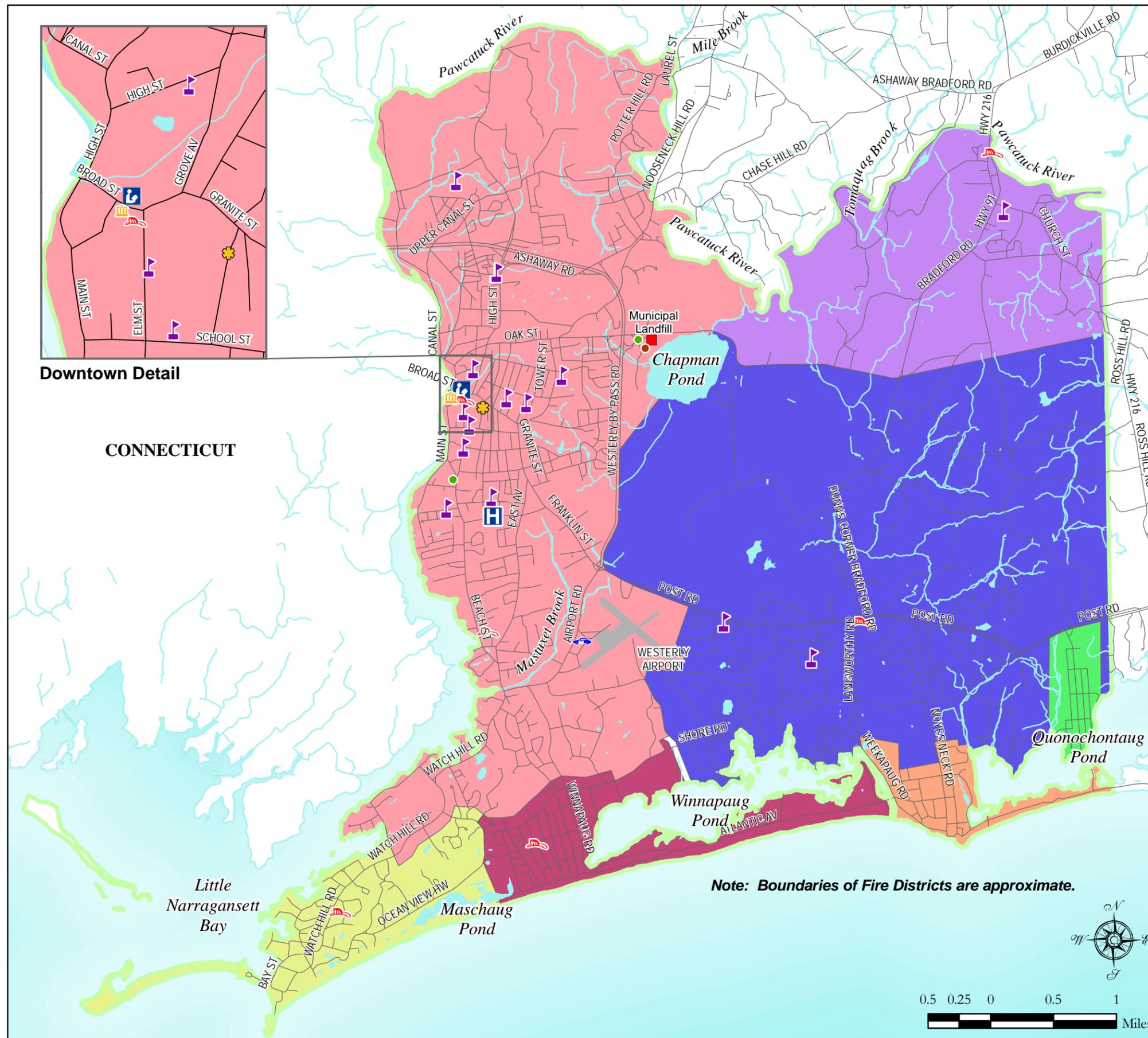


According to a representative from the South County Community Action Family Opportunity Center, major areas of concern within the community include: lack of affordable housing, increasing use of food pantries by working families (sometimes even with two incomes they still need help), and limited public transportation.

### ***5.6 Telecommunications***

There are a number of telecommunications providers in Westerly whose services range from land lines to cellular phone service. This is a dynamic market and new suppliers are being added at a rapid rate. Cellular coverage is reported to be good but variable depending on the individual provider. Most of the electric and telephone infrastructure in Westerly is overhead. Verizon owns the physical phone lines in Westerly.





### Legend

- |  |                                  |  |                    |
|--|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|
|  | Town Hall                        |  | Fire Station       |
|  | Library                          |  | Ambulance          |
|  | School                           |  | Hospital           |
|  | Dept. of Public Works Facilities |  | Police Station     |
|  | Animal Shelter                   |  | Municipal Landfill |
|  | Westerly Fire District           |  |                    |
|  | Bradford Fire District           |  |                    |
|  | Dunn's Corners Fire District     |  |                    |
|  | Shelter Harbor Fire District     |  |                    |
|  | Weekapaug Fire District          |  |                    |
|  | Misquamicut Fire District        |  |                    |
|  | Watch Hill Fire District         |  |                    |
|  | Roads                            |  |                    |
|  | Streams                          |  |                    |
|  | Ponds                            |  |                    |
|  | Town Boundary                    |  |                    |

map source: RIGIS, peter j. smith & company, inc.

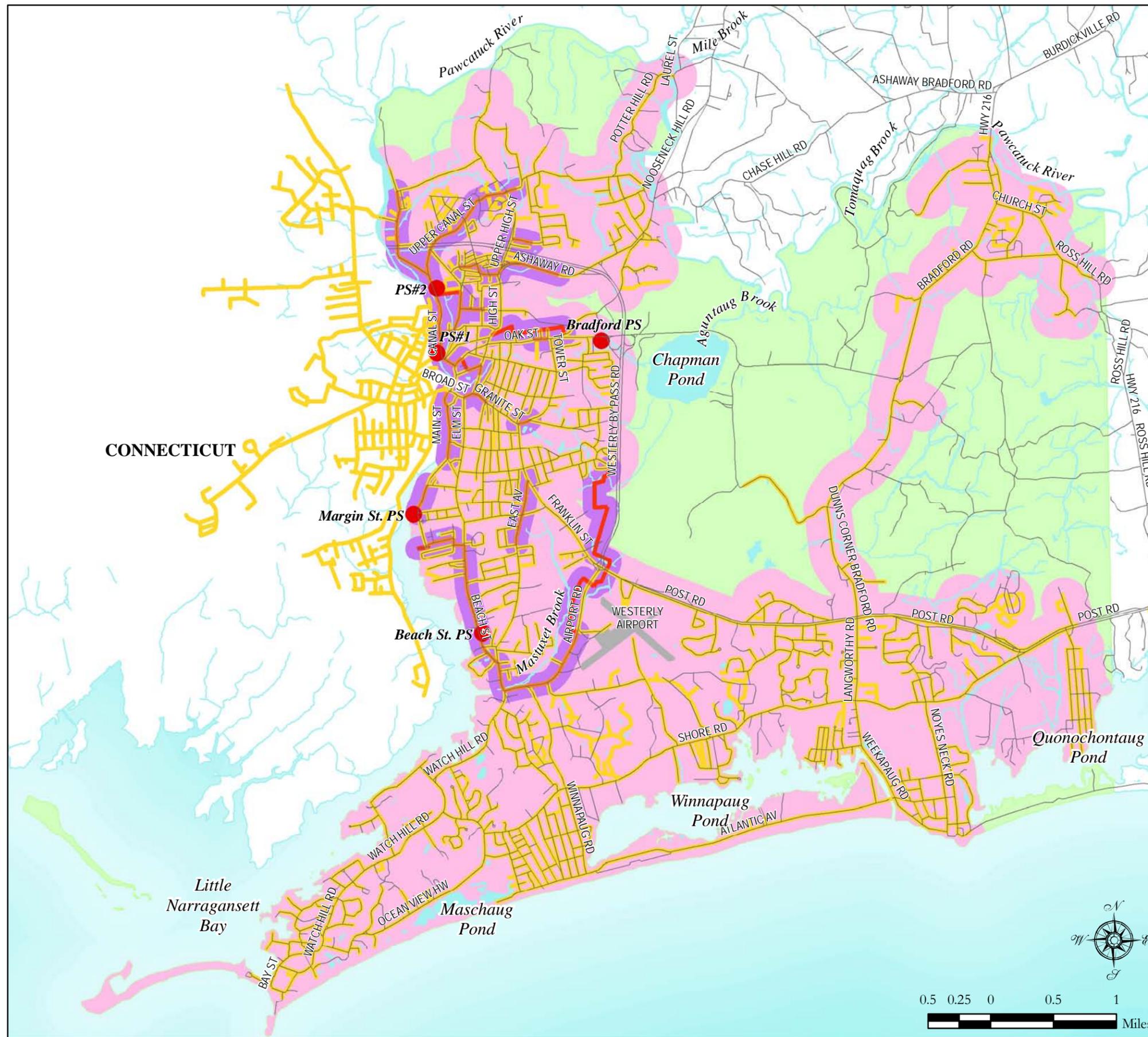
## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 5-1  
Public Facilities

May 2008







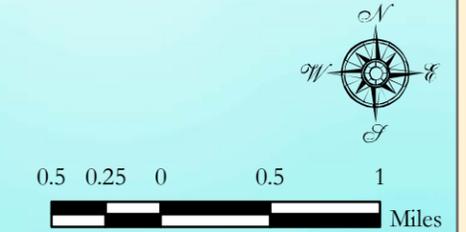
**Legend**

- Pumping Stations
- Sewer Lines
- Sewer and Water Lines
- Water Lines
- Sewer Areas
- Water District
- Roads
- Streams
- Ponds
- Town Boundary

map source: *RIGIS, peter j. smith & company, inc.*

## Comprehensive Plan Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

Figure 5-2  
Utilities  
May 2008





## 6.0 *Open Space & Recreation*

This chapter provides an inventory of the town’s existing open space and recreation resources. These resources play a critical role in the quality of life in Westerly, serving as important natural resource protection areas, providing opportunities for leisure and exercise, and helping to preserve the character of the town. Identifying existing open spaces, recreation facilities and recreation programs will help the town properly plan for future needs.

### 6.1 *Planning Context*

#### 6.1.1 *Statewide Planning Context*

This chapter is presented in the context of several state planning resources including *Land Use 2025, A Greener Path... Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island’s Future* and *Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*.

*Land Use 2025* serves as the foundation for all planning efforts in Rhode Island. With regard to open space and recreation, *Land Use 2025* poses a series of questions to be addressed when setting and implementing objectives and policies that specifically relate to open space and recreation. For further information regarding these guiding questions, *Land Use 2025* can be found at [www.planning.state.ri.us](http://www.planning.state.ri.us).

While *Land Use 2025* establishes a framework for open space and recreation planning, *A Greener Path* and *Ocean State Outdoors*, assess statewide needs and provide specific goals and policies that municipalities should adhere to in their comprehensive plans. *A Greener Path* is reviewed and applied to Westerly in the Open Space section of this chapter, while *Ocean State Outdoors* is reviewed and applied to Westerly in the Recreation section of this chapter.



### **6.1.2 Local Planning Context**

Since the *1991 Comprehensive Plan*, many changes to the town's open space and recreation resources have occurred. The *Comprehensive Plan Update, Phase I* describes the town's accomplishments toward achieving the Plan's recommended actions for Open Space and Recreation. The following are highlights of those accomplishments:

- Acquisition of approximately 135 acres in an aquifer recharge area in the Bradford District
- Acquisition of shorefront property to create a new town beach: Wuskenau Beach
- Purchase of an additional boat to patrol Westerly's shoreline and river
- Provision of picnic facilities at Cimalore Field, Gingerella Sports Complex and Craig Field
- Creation of Rotary Park in 2001
- Clearing of hiking trails and provision of signage at the Town Forest
- Upgrading of town and school playground facilities
- Establishment of the Recreation Department
- Expansion of Senior Center
- Approval of a \$3 million open space bond in 2006

The town's continued open space preservation efforts and recreation facility improvements are encouraged and assisted by the Recreation Department, the Recreation Board, the Westerly Municipal Land Trust and the Conservation Commission. The following two sections describe the management resources, provide an inventory of existing conditions and describe how town resources fit into the regional context.

## **6.2 Open Space**

Open space in Westerly is a part of the community character and is essential to the protection of natural sources and recreational facilities for residents and visitors. The town has not had a consistent funding source for the purchase of open space and its recreational needs. It now has a municipal land trust (the Westerly Municipal Land Trust) and a Conservation Commission, both of which provide the Town Council with conservation recommendations. The Westerly Municipal Land Trust has relied solely on the passage of municipal bonds for its funding.

The following provides an inventory of existing open space, regional conservation plans/strategies and available preservation tools that will assist in the management of these resources.

### **6.2.1 Existing Open Space**

In Westerly there is a demonstrated need for balance between the protection/provision for natural resources and development pressures. Responding to the town's open space preservation needs are a variety of public and private organizations preserving open space in Westerly. The combination of preservation efforts in Westerly has protected over 4,000 acres of conservation land, translating into over 21 percent of the town. Approximately 74 percent of the town's conservation land has public access or limited public access. The table below illustrates the breakdown of the state protected land and land protected by the town and non-governmental organizations.



**Table 6-1 Town of Westerly Conservation Land by Owner**

Fee Simple Owner	Acreage	Percent of Total Acreage	Public Access	Limited Public Access	No Public Access
State of Rhode Island*	1,286.76	28.18%	1,286.76		
The Westerly Land Trust	982.64	21.52%	303.72	678.92	
Private	863.09	18.90%			863.09
Town of Westerly	567.34	12.42%	561.27	6.07	
Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation	161.38	3.53%	4.52	116.5	40.36
Watch Hill Fire District	142.45	3.12%		141.2	1.25
Weekapaug Fire District	137.37	3.01%		86.67	50.7
The Nature Conservancy	126.58	2.77%		126.58	
Audubon Society of Rhode Island	94.92	2.08%	79.55	8.67	6.7
Shelter Harbor Fire District	89.04	1.95%			89.04
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	35.18	0.77%	35.18		
Moore Foundation	33.36	0.73%	33.36		
Nopes Island Conservation Association	24.70	0.54%		23.62	1.08
Westerly Memorial Library	14.66	0.32%	14.66		
Watch Hill Conservancy	3.51	0.12%	0.9		4.41
Westerly Fire District	1.69	0.04%			1.69
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,564.47</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>2,319.02</b>	<b>1,188.23</b>	<b>1,058.32</b>

\*Type of Ownership: Fee Title, Recreation Easement or Conservation Easement

Source: State Conservation Lands and Local Conservation Lands Data from RIGIS and peter j. smith & company, inc.

Note: The Town of Westerly entry in this table includes 82.82 acres owned by the Westerly Municipal Land Trust

Of the fee simple owned properties in the table above, many have one or two easement owners. Many easements list more than one participant, reflecting funding and contingent succession of financial or operating responsibility. These documents are a matter of record.

### Location of Open Space in Westerly

Open space is scattered throughout the town. The largest concentration of open space is in the northern portion of Westerly, including the Town Forest, the Woody Hill Management Area and the Grills Preserve. All these areas are accessible to the public.

In the southern and southeastern portion of the town, a substantial amount of open space is preserved by four golf courses: the Shelter Harbor Golf Club (private club), the Misquamicut Club (private club), the Weekapaug Golf Club (a semi-private club), and the Winnapaug Golf and Country Club (public golf course).

Coastal open space, accessible to the public, includes the Misquamicut State Beach, two town beaches, the Weekapaug Fishing Area, Napatree Point Conservation Area, and several beaches owned by Fire Districts. The Audubon Society of Rhode Island and the Westerly Land Trust maintain large areas of open space along Route 1A on the northern shore of Winnapaug Pond, known, respectively, as the Lathrop Wildlife Refuge and the Winnapaug Pond Preserve. Just north



of Route 1A is the Westerly Land Trust's Dr. John Champlin Glacier Park. These areas provide a large span of open space along and protecting Winnapaug Pond.

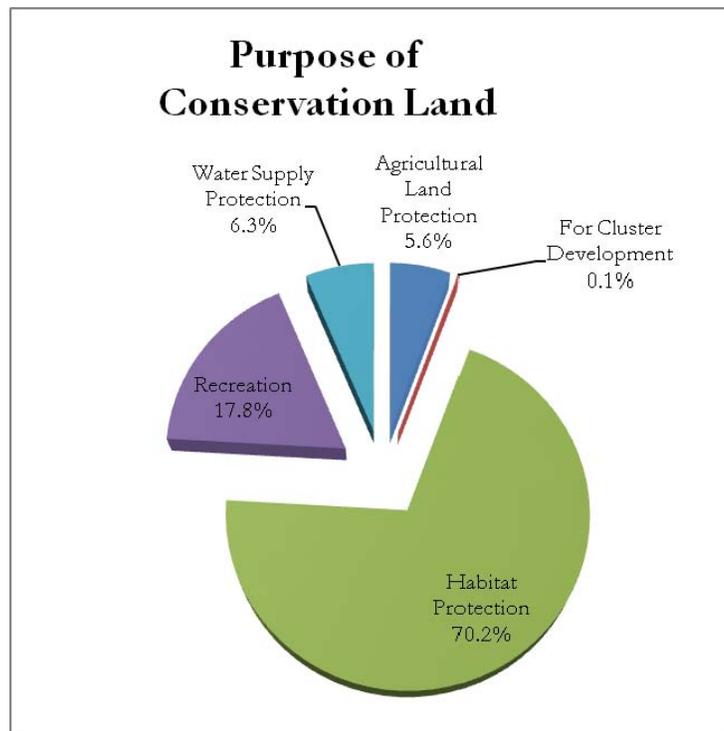
Open spaces in the central portion of the town include swamp lands such as Crandall Swamp and the Newton Swamp Management Area. Open spaces in the northern section of town include the recent purchase of approximately 50 acres on Route 91. This purchase was made possible through the 2006 Open Space Bond Referendum.

### Types of Protected Land

Open space preservation in Westerly has a variety of purposes, including agricultural land protection, water supply protection, habitat protection and recreation. The adjacent pie chart illustrates the breakdown of different types of conservation land in Westerly. Most of Westerly's conservation land has been preserved for habitat protection with recreation as the second largest purpose for preservation.

### Land Acquisition

Integral to ensuring continued open space protection in Westerly are land acquisitions. Acquisition types include fee simple, agricultural development rights, conservation easements, and recreation easements. Property acquisitions have been proven to be an economic benefit to local communities (recreation, tourism, reduction of costs associated with storm damage) and they also help preserve existing scenic resources.



RIGIS and peter j. smith & company, inc.

The Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is working with the South Shore Management Area Work Group (which includes representatives from Westerly), organized by the RIDEM's Land Conservation and Acquisition Program, to identify priority acquisitions along the south shore.

### 6.2.2 Regional Conservation Plans and Strategies

As Westerly considers its future open space preservation needs, it is important to consider how these needs fit into the regional framework. The town should strive to achieve regional goals for open space, while understanding that there may be limiting factors such as narrow road widths, traffic constraints, topography, existing environmentally sensitive areas, and availability of funds.

The regional framework for Westerly includes the state plan, *A Greener Path... Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future* (found at [www.planning.state.ri.us](http://www.planning.state.ri.us)) and the county plan, the *South County Green Space Protection Strategy* (found at [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov)).



The town does not have coastline or riverfront greenways. While the town has partially designed a riverwalk along a portion of the Pawcatuck River, the project has not been publicly funded. An existing bike route follows a portion of Route 1A and Route 1 (both of which are state roads). Portions of the Greenspace Resource Areas proposed for Westerly are currently preserved.

In order for the town to achieve what is proposed in the state’s Greenspace and Greenways System, it needs to:

- Continue efforts on the riverwalk through public and private partnerships
- Initiate a greenways project along the town’s coastal border
- Preserve greenspace along the coast and in the central portion of the town

The Washington County Regional Planning Council and a RIDOT 1999 study concluded that certain elements of a greener path were not environmentally or economically feasible and therefore would not be pursued.

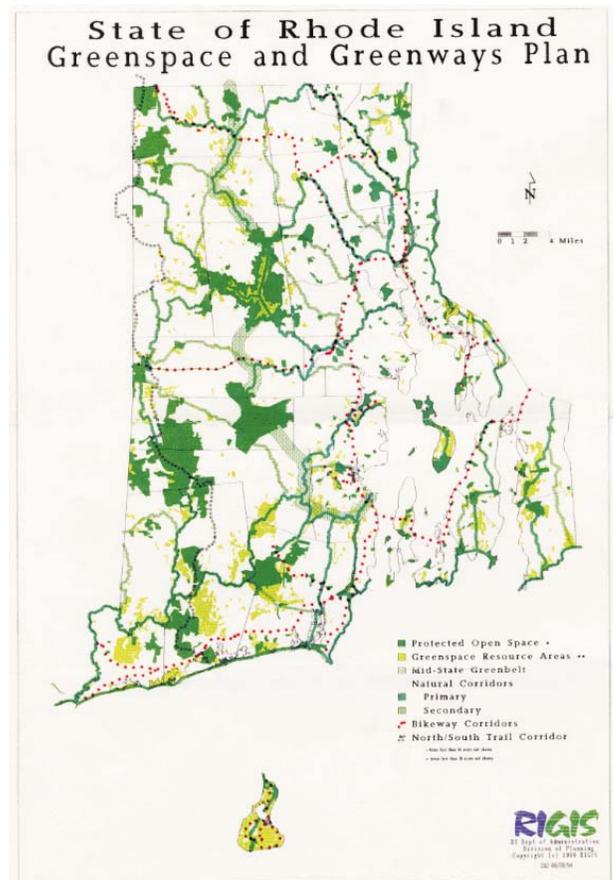
***South County Greenspace Protection Strategy***

The *South County Greenspace Protection Strategy* is an effort to prioritize open space resources into a single system, a system that was intended to focus the many individual open space organizations into a coordinated effort. The University of Rhode Island has targeted critical lands and compiled all existing protected land into a regional map and inventory, recognizing that future acquisitions must provide the greatest economical value for the conservation dollar.

In addition to providing regional information, the *South County Greenspace Protection Strategy* has provided each town in the county with a series of maps and reports to assist towns in making changes to comprehensive plans and zoning and subdivision regulations for meaningful preservation of open space as development occurs. The information provided to each town included: a set of maps illustrating a comprehensive and up-to-date inventory of its natural, cultural and recreational resources, with local protection priorities mapped and linked into a regional greenspace strategy; 10 local resource maps and 16 regional maps with underlying GIS data; and an audit and written report prepared for each community by Randall Arendt, prominent conservation and landscape planner and advocate.

Priorities identified in the composite maps include: five primary destination points in Westerly (Bradford Landing, White Rock, Westerly Center, Watch Hill and Weekapaug); heritage areas along

**Figure 6-1 RI Greenway Bike Routes**



Source: A Greener Path...Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future, Figure 155-6(1).



the town’s coastal edge and along the Pawcatuck River; a large natural resource zone in the central portion of town; and heritage areas within natural resource zones near White Rock, Bradford Landing, Weekapaug, Watch Hill and Chapman Pond. Other priorities identified on the Westerly maps include heritage corridors, natural resource corridors, bike trails, hiking trails and water trails.

Westerly recently funded the initiation of a GIS (Geographic Information System) Mapping System. In GIS, spatial data can be combined or separated and subjected to a variety of analyses. For example, all of the recreation facilities in town could be mapped, along with all of the school facilities, to show areas in which the town and schools could coordinate in delivering recreation facilities.

### 6.2.3 Preservation Tools

Several tools are available to the town to help it preserve and maintain open space as development occurs including the Farm, Forest and Open Space Act, funding sources and state/regional guides to development practices.

**Table 6-2 Preservation Tools for Open Space**

Preservation Tool	Type/Use	Description
Farm, Forest and Open Space Act	Tax Incentive Program	Helps preserve properties for farming, forestland or open space. As property owners face increasing economic pressures to convert to more profitable land uses, this program enables land owners to have their land assessment based on its current use, not its value for development. This is a tool that has been utilized in Westerly. At the time of the 1991 Comprehensive Plan there were 42 properties participating in the program. As of November 2007 there were 73 properties enrolled in the program.
Funding Sources	Land Acquisition/Protection	Funding sources for land acquisition are a critical tool for preservation. Funding sources include direct or matching funds from various programs of DEM, RI Foundation, Champlin Foundation, Duck Foundation, Forrest C. and Francis H. Lattner Foundation, Lattner Family Foundation, town open space bond funds, etc.
Development Guides*	Rhode Island Conservation Development Manual	Provides a 10-step process for planning and design of creative development projects. The manual is in response to increasing development pressures and the resulting “suburban sprawl.” Similar to the goals of cluster development, the manual utilizes what’s called ‘conservation development’ as a technique to preserve open space in a community.
Development Guides*	South County Watersheds Technical Planning Assistance Project	An effort by several groups, including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Rhode Island Rural Lands Coalition and the South County Planners, to prepare a comprehensive review of best possible solutions from around the country and show how they could be applied locally. The result of the project were several documents to help plan for growth including the <i>South County Design Manual</i> , a set of Model Zoning Ordinances, Strategies to promote Farming and Forestry, a study of Transfer of Development Rights and a Development Site Assessment Guide. These documents are available at <a href="http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bpoladm/suswshed/sctpap.htm">www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bpoladm/suswshed/sctpap.htm</a>

\*Because of the relationship between conservation and development, it is important to note that the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management provides several guides for more environmentally sensitive development.



### 6.3 Recreation

While the town does not have a recreation master plan to help guide recreation initiatives, it does have a recreation department to manage and administer improvements for the recreation facilities and programs.

The Recreation Board advises the Planning Board and the Town Council and meets monthly to discuss the planning, organization and promotion of recreation resources in Westerly. The director of the Recreation Department reports to the Board on town recreation matters and efforts. The Recreation Department was created in 2001, fulfilling a recommended action of the *1991 Comprehensive Plan*. The department's staff includes a director and an administrative assistant. The department manages town parks and programs and operates the two town beaches.

The following describes the town's existing recreation facilities including non-water based recreation facilities and water-based facilities and the town's existing recreation programs.

#### 6.3.1 Recreation Facilities and Programs

##### **Non-Water Based Recreation Facilities**

Recreation facilities for non-water based uses include town, public school, quasi-public, private and regional facilities. The following sections provide descriptions of these recreation facilities.

##### *Town Facilities*

There are several non-water-based outdoor town recreational facilities that serve Westerly's active recreation needs, including the Bowling Lane Playground, Cimalore Field, Craig Field, Gingerella Sports Complex, Rotary Park, Airport Field and the Narragansett Avenue tennis/basketball courts. Additionally, all public schools have outdoor recreational facilities available to the public. Generally the town recreation facilities are in good condition; the major facilities are generally five years old or less.

In addition to these facilities, it should also be noted that the town owns a 229 acre property along the Pawcatuck River known as the Town Forest. Although this property is categorized as habitat protection land, like many open spaces, it serves multiple uses. The Town Forest is available for public use as a passive recreation facility and contains approximately three miles of trails for nature walks and environmental education.

The table below describes these town facilities.



**Table 6-3 Town of Westerly Recreation Facilities**

Park Name	Location	Acres	Athletic Facilities	Park Facilities/ Natural Features	Amenities	Regular User Groups
Bowling Lane Playground	Bowling Lane	Mini-park	-	Playground	-	-
Cimalore Field	Wilson Street	25 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Lighted Baseball Field</li> <li>• 1 Lighted Softball Field</li> <li>• 3 Softball/Instructional Fields</li> <li>• 2 Basketball Courts;</li> </ul>	Playground Pavilion/Picnic Area	Snack Bar/ Concession Stand	Westerly High School Baseball and Softball Teams, an Adult Twilight Baseball League, High School and Fall Baseball Leagues, Youth and Adult Softball Leagues, Summer Playground Program
Craig Field	Mountain Avenue	7 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Basketball Court</li> <li>• 1 Lighted Softball Field</li> </ul>	Pavilion/Picnic Area Playground	Public Bathroom	Men's Softball League Town Summer Program
Gingerella Sports Complex	White Rock Road	21 acre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Basketball Court</li> <li>• 1 Tennis Court</li> <li>• 6 Soccer Fields</li> <li>• 1 Skate Park</li> </ul>	Playground Pavilion/Picnic Area	-	Hundreds of Soccer Players Youth Soccer Programs Summer Playground Program
Rotary Park	Airport Road	18.5 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 Lighted Tennis Courts</li> <li>• 2 Volleyball Courts</li> </ul>	Hiking Trail Picnic Area with Gazebo Playground Equipment	Restrooms	High School Varsity Tennis Team
Airport Field	Airport Road		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soccer</li> <li>• Football</li> </ul>		Parking	
Town Forest	Laurel Avenue	229 acres	-	Hiking Trails Pawcatuck River Access for Bird Watchers Environmental Education	-	-

Source: 1991 Comprehensive Plan, Comprehensive Plan Update, Phase I, Town Recreation Director and peter j. smith & company, inc.

*Public School Department Facilities*

The Westerly School Department works in conjunction with the Recreation Department to provide recreation opportunities for the entire Westerly community. The town and the school department utilize each other's facilities as needed to optimize the recreation resources available. All school facilities are available to the public while not in use by the schools. The following table details some information regarding the available recreation resources at the Westerly public schools.



**Table 6-4 Westerly Public School Department Recreation Facilities**

Park Name	Location	Outdoor Athletic Facilities	Indoor Recreation Facilities	Park Facilities
Bradford Elementary School	15 Church Street	1 Softball Field 1 Basketball Court 2 Tennis Courts	1 Gym	Playground
Dunn’s Corners Elementary School	81/2 Plateau Road	Grassed Playing Fields Large Blacktop Play Area 1 Basketball Court	1 Gym	Playground
Tower Street Elementary School	93 Tower Street	1 Basketball Court* 1 Tennis Court* (*Town Facilities Adjacent to the School)	1 Gym	Playground
Springbrook School	39 Springbrook Road	1 Baseball Field 1 Basketball Court	1 Gym with rubberized surface	Playground
State Street Elementary School	35 State Street	Playing Field 1 Basketball Court	1 Gym	Playground
Westerly Middle School	10 Sandy Hill Road	1 Baseball Field 1 Soccer Field	1 Gym with basketball court (6 hoops, can be split for 2 half courts)	Playground
Westerly High School	23 Ward Avenue	2 Indoor Basketball Courts 1 Football/Soccer Field 1 Outdoor Track	1 Gym with basketball court (6 hoops, can be split for 2 half courts) 1 Gym (will be a wrestling center)	Quad (open space for students, occasionally used for physical education classes)

Source: 1991 Comprehensive Plan, Comprehensive Plan Update, Phase I, Westerly Public School Superintendent and peter j. smith & company, inc.

The seven public school facilities (Tower Street School is no longer used as a school) in Westerly are located on approximately 80 acres of open space and include a variety of recreation facilities. The Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and school principals facilitate the construction of new or updated playground facilities at the schools. At Bradford Elementary School, the PTO and Principal have recently begun to reclaim the elementary school’s two tennis courts that had become overgrown. As of fall 2008, the courts had been cleared and the surfaces made usable; other improvements have continued in 2009.

As the table above shows, each public school facility has an indoor recreation facility or gym. While priority is given to school team sports, non-school youth and adult leagues also use school gyms. Demand for the gyms is primarily focused on the High School and Middle School facilities.

*Quasi-Public Facilities*

Quasi-public facilities within Westerly include privately owned facilities available for public use. The most significant of these facilities is Wilcox Park; owned and maintained by the Memorial and Library Association of Westerly, the park is free and open to the public. Wilcox Park serves as a central feature in the heart of the downtown. Other facilities listed as quasi-public have user fees, but are open to the public.



**Table 6-5 Quasi-Public Recreation Facilities in Westerly**

Park Name	Acres	Athletic Facilities	Park Facilities	Natural Features	Amenities
Wilcox Park	14.66	-	Walkways, Benches, Commemorative Monuments, a Fountain, Gazebo	Rare Tree and Shrub Specimens, Flower Gardens, A Pond with Exotic Fish, a Herb Garden, Garden of the Senses, 100 plants of the Gotelli Collection of Dwarf Conifers from the National Arboretum in Washington D.C.	-
YMCA	-	2 Swimming Pools, 2 Gymnasiums, Fitness Centers with Cardio, Strength Training and Free Weight Equipment, and an Outdoor Tennis Court	-	-	Locker Facilities
Westerly Senior Citizens Center	12,500 square feet	-	-	-	Activity Room, Game Room Lounge, and Cafeteria
Camp Wahaneeta – Girl Scouts of America	120 acres	-	-	-	Lodge
Westerly Girl Scout Center	-	-	-	-	2 Story Building with 4 Meeting Rooms and a Kitchen
Camp Quequatuck – Boy Scouts of America	4.5 acres	-	Large Field	Pawcatuck River	3 Large Campsites
Grills Preserve/Westerly Land Trust/Westerly Public School	482 acres	Qualified Cross Country Track	Trails	2.5 Miles of River Frontage on the Pawcatuck River	

Source: 1991 Comprehensive Plan, Comprehensive Plan Update, Phase I and <http://www.oceancommunityymca.org/> and peter j. smith & company, inc.

*Private Facilities*

There are a variety of private facilities providing recreational opportunities in Westerly. Several of these private facilities serve as home to Westerly’s sports groups such as the Paul E. Trombino Sports Complex, home to the Westerly National Little League, and the facility at 60 Hopkinton Road, home to Pee Wee Football and Cheerleading. Listed below are Westerly’s private recreation facilities.



**Table 6-6 Privately Owned Recreation Facilities in Westerly**

Recreation Facility	Location	Description
Green Meadows Driving Range	117 Dunns Corners Road	Public Golf Course
Paul E. Trombino Sports Complex	Dunns Corners Road	22.9 acres and home to Westerly National Little League. Facility has one minor league field, one major league field and one senior league field with bleachers, dugouts, concession stand, field house and a covered picnic area
Pond View Racquet Club	252 Shore Road	Indoor tennis, public by fee
Shelter Harbor Inn	10 Wagner Road	Outdoor Paddle Club, public by fee
The Misquamicut Club	60 Ocean View Hwy and Fort Road	Private club for members and guests
Shelter Harbor Golf Club	Route 1	Private club for members and guests
St. Pius X School (basketball court)	32 Elm Street.	Open to the public after school hours
Weekapaug Golf Club	265 Shore Road	Semi-private club, membership only from May 15 through October 15
Weekapaug Tennis Club	Chapman Road	Available for residents of Weekapaug Fire District
Westerly Pee Wee Football and Cheerleading	60 Old Hopkinton Road	Private facility used for Westerly Pee Wee Football and Cheerleading
Winnapaug Golf & Country Club	184 Shore Road	Public Golf Course
Watch Hill Yacht Club	21 Bay Street	Private Yacht Club
Westerly Yacht Club	Watch Hill Road	Private Yacht Club
Weekapaug Yacht Club	23 Spray Rock Road	Private Yacht Club

Source: 1991 Comprehensive Plan, various private organization websites and peter j. smith & company, inc.

### Regional Facilities

An important consideration when addressing the recreation facilities in Westerly is identifying the surrounding recreation facilities that serve the region. The regional facilities surrounding Westerly include Barn Island Wildlife Management Area (Stonington, Connecticut), Burlingame State Park, Ninigret Park, Quonochontaug Breachway, a river/cultural corridor and a state bike route. Below are brief descriptions of these facilities.

#### Barn Island Wildlife Management Area

A state of Connecticut managed wildlife area located in Stonington, directly across from Watch Hill Harbor on Little Narragansett Bay, this 1,013 acre coastal area is Connecticut’s largest coastal property managed for wildlife conservation. This area has the largest public boat launch on the Pawcatuck River/Little Narragansett Bay waterway.

#### Burlingame State Park

A state park located in Charlestown featuring 3,100 acres of rocky woodlands surrounding Watchaug Pond. The Park features 755 campsites.

#### Ninigret Park

A 227 acre public park in Charlestown, on Route 1A, with four tennis courts, a 9/10 mile bicycle course, basketball courts, a Kid’s Place Playground, Frisbee disc golf course, recreational fields, “Little Nini” Beach, a spring fed pond and the Ninigret Park Frosty Drew Nature Center and Observatory.



Quonochontaug Breachway

A state recreational area located in Charlestown, Rhode Island, this area is a popular public boat launch and fishing area.

River/Heritage Corridor

The state’s Greenways Map identifies a River/Heritage Corridor along the Pawcatuck River north from Westerly’s downtown up through Charlestown and Hopkinton.

Southern RI Green Trail (Autoroute)

Along Route 91 as it exits the town is a State Bicycle Route also known as the Southern Rhode Island Green Trail. The Bicycle Route continues along Route 91 as it travels through Hopkinton, Richmond and Charlestown.

**Water-Based Recreation Facilities**

Westerly’s water-based recreation facilities are key features in the town’s recreation system. Bounded by water on three sides, the town has riverfront and coastal lands that serve as recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Waterfront facilities in Westerly include beaches, marinas and boat launches. Facilities open to the public are identified in Table 6-7.

**Table 6-7 Water-Based Recreation Facilities in Westerly**

Park Name	Owner	Access	Amenities/Park Facilities
Misquamicut State Beach	State	Public	Bathhouse with coin operated hot showers and composting toilets, a concession building including gift shop and office, a lifeguard tower, shade gazebos, outdoor cold showers, a playground and a parking lot
Westerly Town Beach	Town	Public	Beach Pavilion with Showers, Bathrooms, First Aid Room, a Food Concession Stand & 2 Parking Lots with a total of 400 Spaces
Wuskenau Beach (New Town Beach)	Town	Public	On-Site Parking, Public Restrooms, Visitor Center
Sandy Point Island	Avolonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Public Access	Located in Little Narragansett Bay Only Accessible by Boat or Kayak
Napatree Point and Beach (the “Napatree Point Conservation Area”)	Watch Hill Fire District and Watch Hill Conservancy	Public	Public Access
Watch Hill Beach		Public	Bath house, showers, lockers, limited parking-
Watch Hill East Beach		Private	Public access
Maschaug Beach	Misquamicut Club	Private	Public Access
Dunes Park Beach		Public	On-Site Parking
Quonochontaug Beach	Weekapaug Fire District/Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation/Nope’s Island Conservation Association	Private	Limited public access and parking

Source: Comprehensive Plan, Comprehensive Plan Update, Phase I, RIDEM and <http://www.riparks.com/misquamicut.htm> and peter j. smith & company, inc.



In addition to the water-based recreation facilities listed in the table above, there are also restaurants and clubs on Atlantic Avenue that provide direct access to the beach. Accessibility may be limited to customers.

*Access Points for Boating and Fishing*

Other important water-based facilities are access points for boating and fishing. The following table lists the available water access points in Westerly.

**Table 6-8 Water Access Points for Boating and Fishing in Westerly**

Water Access	Ownership	Amenities
Bradford Landing	State owned	Parking
Chapman Pond	State owned	Parking
Main Street	State owned	Parking
Westerly Marina	Public boat launch	Limited Parking
Viking Marina	Privately owned	No Parking
Lotteryville Marina	Privately owned	Parking
Gray's Boatyard	Privately owned	Parking
Watch Hill Boat Yard	Privately owned	Parking
Cove Edge Marina	Privately owned	Parking
Hall's Boatyard	Private	–
Weekapaug Breachway (Fishing only, no boating)	–	–
Watch Hill Dock Floating Docks for Dinghies	Watch Hill Fire District	–

*Riverfront Development*

The Westerly Riverwalk Program was designed and permitted for High Street, but the cost of obtaining easements made it economically unfeasible. It appears that the project can only be completed with private funds, assistance from charities/foundations, changes in zoning (where appropriate) or other incentives provided by state or federal agencies.

**Recreation Programs**

*Recreation Department*

Most programs sponsored by the Recreation Department are seasonal events or classes. The town also provides a summer playground camps at several of the town-owned playgrounds. Several programs, especially those requiring indoor recreation facilities, are sponsored in conjunction with private organizations to provide a wide variety of recreation options for residents. Most team sports are provided by private organizations, but are supported by the town, with teams, such as the Westerly Soccer Association and the Connie Mack Baseball League, using town facilities. Further town recreation program information can be found at: [www.townofwesterly.com](http://www.townofwesterly.com)

Since the Recreation Department was created in 2001, participation numbers for town programs has continued to increase with thousands of residents participating. One of the programs with the largest participation numbers is the town's Blues on the Beach program, a weekly musical offered in July and August held at the old town beach on Atlantic Avenue. Blues on the Beach has grown from 500 to 2,000 weekly attendees.



*Other Program Providers*

The Westerly School Department provides two key programs in Westerly: Westerly Community Education and Enrichment and After School Enrichment. Westerly Community Education and Enrichment provides a variety of adult classes such as educational, hobby, yoga or workforce training classes. These classes are provided at no cost to the taxpayer. All operational costs are paid through tuition fees.

After School Enrichment is offered mainly to elementary school students and runs twice a week, for five weeks, three to four times a year. The program provides classes for students to learn special activities or skills; class subjects may range from martial arts to basket weaving to beach combing. During school vacations in February and April, the program also provides extended full-day sessions. In addition to classes for elementary school students, there are a few programs offered for older students including a program for high school students with the local radio station and a girl's lacrosse program for middle school students. The After School Enrichment program is tuition based. Students who are part of the Free and Reduced Lunch program are eligible for free tuition. For full-day programs offered during school vacations, students in the Free and Reduced Lunch are eligible for reduced tuition.

While it is not a public entity, the Ocean Community YMCA provides additional recreation opportunities in Westerly for members and non-members. The YMCA has locations in Westerly and in Wyoming, Rhode Island and Mystic, Connecticut. Programs include an aquatics program, arts and enrichment programs, childcare, health and wellness classes, yoga programs, sports classes and teen programs. Also offered by the YMCA is a teen center, a location for young adults to gather to socialize after school, early evenings and weekends and an after school program for Westerly's elementary school students, which uses Westerly public school facilities.

Last, the Westerly Public Library provides a multitude of community programs such as book discussions, art gallery receptions and various special events.

## 7.0 *Transportation Network*

### 7.1 *Overview*

A community's transportation network determines how easily people and goods are able to move into, out of and around its boundaries and also helps define its character. The town of Westerly transportation system inventory covers a variety of multimodal system elements including streets, sidewalks, bike/hike trails, air transport, rail transport, water/boat access, and limited bus transit commuter service. By reviewing all available modes of transportation in Westerly and providing consistency with state, regional and county plans, this inventory complies with the objectives of the federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU).

*Transportation 2030: State Guide Plan Element 611* sets the direction for transportation policy and action in the state of Rhode Island. It identifies transportation as a core function that connects the state with the global and regional economies and individuals with their communities. It also acknowledges a need for equity and balance with other factors that influence quality of life issues. The nearby presence of the I-95 and regional connectors in the town permit Westerly to ensure that local transportation decisions meet those ideals.

### 7.2 *Roads and Traffic*

This subsection addresses the roadway classifications, existing traffic conditions, and recent traffic improvement projects in Westerly. The town's street system is maintained through the Public Works Department. Street signs, street painting, brush clearing, pothole repairs, sidewalk replacement and catch basin repairs/cleaning are all performed by the town Highway Department.

#### 7.2.1 *Functional Classification*

In Rhode Island, the functional classification system is prepared and maintained by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, in cooperation with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT).

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) classifies roadways and highways according to the function, or service, they provide. There are three major categories of roadways and highways:

- Local – provides for land use functions such as streets within a neighborhood
- Collector – provides a service from local land uses to major roadways, or arterials
- Arterial – provides a high level of mobility with the least amount of traffic signalization to promote efficient through movement through the community.



In Westerly, there are 17 miles of collector roads; four miles of freeway, inclusive of the Westerly Bypass; and 34 miles of minor and principal arterial roads (urban).<sup>52</sup> These roads are further categorized according to urban and rural. West of Bradford Road/Langworthy Road/Weekapaug Road, Westerly is considered a small urban area. To the east of these roads, Westerly is characterized as rural.

State Route 78, also known as Westerly Bypass Road, serves as a freeway and runs essentially north-south around the residential part of Westerly. State Route 1, Post Road, is a principal arterial that provides service through the south portion of the town and traverses it in an east-west direction. The alternative to Route 1, Route 1A, Shore Road, also traverses the town from east to west, acting as a collector route for traffic to and from the town's southern coastline and its beaches.

Other principal arterials in the rural portions of Westerly include Ross Hill Road, State Route 216, running from the Charlestown town line approximately 9 miles east of Westerly to Westerly-Bradford Road, Route 91; and Westerly-Bradford Road running from Dunn's Corners-Bradford Road to Ross Hill Road. Grove Avenue, State Route 3, serves as a principal arterial from High Street to the Westerly Bypass and Route 1, and then as a connector road/rural minor arterial from the Westerly Bypass to the Hopkinton Town line, located northeast of Westerly, and from there to Route I-95.<sup>53</sup>

### ***7.2.2 Recent Transportation Improvement Projects***

The town Engineering Department has been proactive in designing and implementing a program for the rehabilitation and maintenance of local roads and bridges. The Pavement Management Program was established to determine specifically where money is to be used for performing resurfacing of roadways. A \$5 million bond referendum approved in the fall of 2008 is currently being used to facilitate overall improvements to town roads. \$3 million is ear-marked for roadway reconstruction and \$2 million is for roadway drainage. Of the \$3 million set aside for reconstruction, \$1.7 million will be used for asphalt overlay repair. Approximately seven roads received mill and overlay treatment (asphalt replacement) in 2008.<sup>54</sup>

During fiscal year 2005/2006, the Engineering Department, working in conjunction with the Public Works Department, performed roadway overlay and sidewalk repairs throughout the town. New sidewalks were also constructed in front of the New Town Beach on each side of Atlantic Avenue. In addition, the Engineering Department coordinated with Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) on several other road and bridge projects including the completion of reconstruction projects on High Street and East Avenue and design of the replacement of the Weekapaug Bridge.<sup>55</sup>

The town of Westerly has a comprehensive Pavement Management Program in place managed by the Town Engineer.

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<sup>52</sup> Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan – December 1991, Traffic and Transportation Element

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Personal phone conversation – Jonathan Pratt, Town Engineer, Town of Westerly, December 6, 2007 re: recent bond referendum for transportation improvements.

<sup>55</sup> <http://westerly.govoffice.com>, website accessed November 6, 2007



### **7.2.3 Traffic**

Input received from the public meetings and focus group sessions held in conjunction with the preparation of this Comprehensive Plan indicate that traffic congestion has been a long-standing concern of the residents of Westerly. This is a particular concern in summer months when the combination of returning seasonal residents (an estimated 15 percent of households) and daily tourist visitors results in an explosion of the volume of traffic. Throughout the year, the proximity of the Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun casinos, located approximately 30 minutes north of Westerly, adds to local congestion. A new \$700 million MGM Grand hotel/casino at the Foxwoods Casino brought nearly 3,000 new jobs to the area and accompanying traffic, also from hotel guests, although the subsequent downturn in the economy in 2008-2009 has since reduced the number of jobs and the traffic impact of this expansion.

Traffic congestion issues have been addressed state-wide through the preparation in 1997 of a Congestion Management System (CMS) Plan. Of the roads identified as part of the RI CMS, Route 1 and Route 78 in Westerly were noted. Route 1, however, was the only one identified as currently experiencing congestion. It was also forecasted to continue having traffic congestion well through Year 2015 and even as far out as into 2025. Recommendations for improvements to existing and forecasted congestion along Route 1 included intersection improvements, traffic signalization improvements, access management, and extension of rail into Westerly as an alternative mode of transportation. Recent improvements to Route 1 included those performed at the Westerly-Charlestown border, where the additions of several traffic lights and turning lanes to enhance safety have been installed.

The Westerly highway system has a number of problem areas, in addition to traffic congestion. These include accessibility management; need for better linkages between Route 1 and the seashore and between I-95 and Westerly. Summertime traffic volume regularly results in gridlock at RI 78/Airport Road and Route 1 Post Road. This larger intersection has also been the scene of numerous fender benders. The new Westerly Crossing Center poses additional traffic volume concerns at this intersection. Serious congestion also occurs at Airport Road and Winnapaug Road.

There is no question traffic has increased in Westerly. The table below summarizes 2005 traffic counts and compares them with 1988 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) volume counts (where they are comparable). In 1988 the traffic counts indicated that a section of Route 1 had an average daily volume of 16,300 automobiles, in 2005, the same section of Route 1 had 21,300. Similarly, Route 1A average volume at Winnapaug Road and Weekapaug Road was 2,600 in 1988, and in 2005 it was 4,500.



**Table 7-1 2005 and 1998 Average Daily Traffic**

Route #/Street Name	Section	2005	1988
	<b>Watch Hill Road</b>	5800	N/A
	<b>Shore Road:</b>		
	Ocean View Hwy & Winnipaug Rd	5100	2100
	Winnipaug Rd & Weekapaug Rd	4500	2600
<b>Route 1A</b>	Noyes Neck Rd & Junction with Route 1	2000	N/A
	<b>Beach Street</b>		
	Junction with East Avenue & Route 3	7700	N/A
	<b>East Avenue</b>		
	Where it meets Beach Street	4900	N/A
	Granite St and Route 78	22700	16600
<b>Route 1</b>	Route 78 & Junction with 1A/Shore Road	21300	16300
	West section & town line	13500	N/A
	Route 78 & Route 1A/Shore Road	9500	N/A
	Airport Road and Junction with Route 1	8100	N/A
<b>Route 78</b>	Route 3 & High Street	11600	7400
	Post Rd & Oak Street (North portion)	6400	4400
<b>Route 91</b>	East stretch near Bradford Road	4800	5700
<b>Route 216</b>	Between Bradford and Ashaway Bradford Rd	7300	5000
<b>Route 3</b>	Westerly Bypass Rd (Rt 78) & High Street	11,600	7400
<b>Potter Hill Road</b>	parallel to Rt 3	600	N/A
<b>Upper Canal Street</b>		1800	N/A

Source: RIDOT and peter j. smith & company, inc.

### 7.3 Parking

Parking is a concern in the downtown area; nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said downtown parking is a problem. As Westerly implements the downtown planned redevelopment projects and other projects expected to transform the downtown over the coming years, parking issues can be relied upon to intensify.

In addition to on-street parking, downtown has one parking structure with public parking. Despite its convenient and central location, parking is generally available, but time limited to two hours, at the garage. Downtown employers also lease spaces in the garage for their employees.

Strategies to decrease the demand for on-street parking in the downtown area include encouraging walking and bicycling, exploring opportunities for shuttle bus service and alternative parking facilities, developing town traffic management, calming and parking plans, and identifying properties that provide opportunities for siting parking facilities and shuttle bus stops. The success of the downtown revitalization projects may have as much impact on the perception of parking availability as would an additional parking structure.

Other parking hot spots in town include parking at the beach; more than half of survey respondents said parking at the beach is a problem. Misquamicut State Beach has more than 2,500 parking



spaces and charges a fee. Visitors explore free or lower cost parking in for-pay lots along already congested Atlantic Avenue. Parking is limited in Watch Hill

Parking is limited at the transportation hub with the most potential: the Amtrak rail station. The rail station may be included in the future as a Transit-Oriented Development site which would include significant addition of parking space.

### ***7.3.1 Bus-Van-Taxi Service***

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) provides public transportation service for the State of Rhode Island; within Westerly the service is limited and known as ‘FlexService’. This is a fairly new public transportation service designed for suburban and rural areas.<sup>56</sup> The service provides transportation to areas within the FlexZone between Westerly and Wakefield and Narragansett at four locations: Westerly Train Station, Westerly Wal-Mart, Stedman Center, and Salt Pond Plaza. The service allows people to reserve their ride or to access the service from one of the central locations. The FlexZone is bordered by Spring Brook Road (north border), Route 78 (east border), Route 1 (west border) and Route 1A (south border). This covers the Westerly community with FlexService locations that have varied pick-up times covering a good portion of the day, from early morning to late afternoon/early evening.

Fares for FlexService are as follows: Full fare = \$1.50; Transfers = \$0.10; Half Fare = \$0.75, and Half Fare Transfer = \$0.05.<sup>57</sup> Low-income persons with a disability or those age 65 and above ride free of charge with a “RIPTA No Fare ID Pass”. All other persons age 65 and above or with a disability, pay full fare during RIPTA peak hours of service (7am-9am and 3pm-6pm) on weekdays and pay half fare all other times with RIPTA Senior/Disabled ID Pass or Medicare ID card. The continuation of current RIPTA service levels is potentially threatened by the Rhode Island state budget situation.

Other forms of public transportation that are available include a Park-n-Ride service operated by RIPTA that provides transport between the Westerly Railroad Station and the east approach at Kennedy Plaza in Providence. The total commute time is approximately 75 minutes; the bus leaves the Station at 7:00 a.m. with a return time of approximately 6:30 p.m. Ridership is low, however consistent: approximately 10 riders regularly use the service from Westerly and have for a period of several years.

In addition to the Park-n-Ride commuter service and the FlexService provided by RIPTA, cab service and a demand-response/paratransit service is available. Cab service is provided by Eagle Cab Company, which has a dispatch office located at the Westerly State Airport. The service is provided 24 hours a day, and reservations can also be made. South County Integrated Rural Transit Service (SCIRTS) provides the paratransit service for shopping trips, medical trips to doctor offices, or to Providence for elderly individuals utilizing physical therapy groups, nutrition centers and/or day care centers. There is no charge for riders 60 years of age or older; and those who receive State assistance, but are under age 60, also do not have to pay a fare. A small donation of \$1.50 is asked of those who use the service and are younger than age 60 or older and are receiving State assistance. SCIRTS provides handicap service as well and has three regular vans that carry 14 passengers and one lift van for handicap use

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<sup>56</sup> RIPTA - [www.ripta.com/about/](http://www.ripta.com/about/)

<sup>57</sup> 204 FlexService Schedule, Westerly



### 7.3.2 Rail Service

The Westerly Train Station is located three blocks north of the central downtown area and provides service offered by Amtrak. Built in 1912 and renovated in 1999, the station has underground pedestrian access to both sides of the tracks. Currently, the station is being studied for potential commuter rail service to New London, Connecticut (17 miles away) and to Providence, Rhode Island (44 miles away). Commuter travel time is estimated by RIDOT to be about 50 minutes from Westerly to Providence. RIDOT has determined that the location of the Westerly station is within the 10 minute ‘walk-ability’ radius of the surrounding downtown area and is therefore suitable as a commuter rail station. The station lacks ample parking to support commuter service; it has 37 spaces.

Survey respondents, agreed or strongly agreed (63 percent) that commuter rail accessibility should be a high priority for transportation improvements within Westerly. Community members and transportation agencies have also indicated that beyond commuting to/from work, rail service would provide a convenient means of transportation between Westerly and the T.F. Green Airport in Warwick, as a rail stop at the airport is currently under construction.

The train station is part of the Downtown revitalization project, a transit-oriented development that includes housing and mixed-use development, river access and downtown revitalization for Westerly. The project, designated by the state in May 2008, will be transformative to downtown.

As part of the RI Congestion Management System Plan 2025, the Westerly Train Station was studied to determine its potential role in a system expansion including a network of pedestrian and bicycle routes. In addition, a commuter rail system with extensions to South County stations is in the planning stage, and discussions between the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) and Amtrak have taken place.<sup>58</sup>



Recent improvements made by the RIDOT include downtown pedestrian access to the station through resurfacing sidewalks and new lighting. Commercial investment in the immediate area surrounding the station since its renovation has enhanced and could continue to be enhanced if it is included in a proposed transit-oriented development (TOD) plan, and the potential of commuter rail is realized.<sup>59</sup> Overall lack of commuter rail is a significant inhibitor to economic growth in Westerly. If the vacant land situated north of the station is developed with commercial entities, it could become an anchor to the next phase of downtown revitalization. Although parking at the station is a current impediment, if the proposed TOD is implemented, a significant addition of parking in the community will be included as part of the plan.

<sup>58</sup> <http://envstudies.brown.edu> Special Studies; website accessed November 6, 2007

<sup>59</sup> Ibid



Connecticut’s Shoreline East rail service runs between New Haven and New London; this is only one stop from Westerly, and, although low ridership is generally the norm for this journey leg, Connecticut has expressed interest in extending Shoreline East to Westerly. One major barrier, however, is the series of drawbridges along the path where boat and train traffic intersect. Shoreline East, however, is currently planning renovations to all stations of their line. This stretch of rail from New London to Providence is the only part of the New York to Boston corridor not connected by commuter rail.<sup>60</sup>

A 1995 study conducted by Brown University in consultation with forecasts from RIDOT, indicate that with an extension of commuter rail to Westerly, daily boarding at the Westerly Station for the Year 2000 would have been 268. The anticipated figure of 268 daily boarding reflects a 17 percent capture rate. This model considers only the weekday commuter potential and does not address leisure and weekend potentials.<sup>61</sup>

The following table reflects use of Census 2000 data, as part of the aforementioned study, for determining the potential future rail commuters from Rhode Island towns having existing train stations to Westerly. The information presented includes number of workers/commuters and percent of commuters from origin to destination. According to Census 2000 data, a potential 969 workers could access rail service from Westerly to other points within the state. Conversely, a lesser amount of workers from other Rhode Island towns could access commuter rail to get to Westerly. Combined, the potential number of rail commuters to/from Westerly is approximately 1,609.

**Table 7-2 Potential future rail commuters from Westerly**

From Westerly to:	# of Workers (potential riders)	Percentage (of all potential commuters)
<b>Providence</b>	138	1.25
<b>Warwick</b>	158	1.43
<b>East Greenwich</b>	16	0.14
<b>North Kingstown</b>	195	1.77
<b>South Kingstown</b>	462	4.18

Source: US Census and peter j. smith & company, inc.

**Table 7-3 Potential future rail commuters to Westerly**

To Westerly from:	# of Workers (potential riders)	Percentage (of all potential commuters)
<b>Providence</b>	28	0.04
<b>Warwick</b>	85	0.20
<b>East Greenwich</b>	26	0.43
<b>North Kingstown</b>	149	1.08
<b>South Kingstown</b>	352	2.62

Source: US Census and peter j. smith & company, inc.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> envstudies.brown.edu/oldsite/Web



## 7.4 Air Service

Air service in Westerly is provided through the state-owned airport located just east of the center of Westerly with primary access via U.S. Route 1 or State Route 78 (Westerly Bypass) to Airport Road. Operated by the Rhode Island Airport Corporation, Westerly State Airport serves the aviation needs of Westerly and its nearby communities in Rhode Island and Connecticut. General aviation aircraft, including private corporate aircraft, are served by the airport, and New England Airlines provides limited, critical commercial air passengers and cargo service to and from Block Island.<sup>62</sup>

Recreational flying is the most frequent activity at the airport, however, corporate/business activity and career training/flight instruction are also frequent activities supported by the airport. During the summer months there is heavy private aircraft activity from seasonal residents and vacationing visitors. Other typical activities that are conducted at general aviation airports, including traffic reporting, air shows, medical/patient transfers, and military exercises also occur on occasion at the Westerly airport. As of 2005, the Federal Aviation Administration classified the Westerly Airport as among 'Non-Primary Commercial Service Airports', since annual enplanements are fewer than 10,000 passengers.<sup>63</sup>

In September 2007, a Rhode Island State Airport System Plan was submitted as a recommendation to the State Planning Council Technical Committee to commence a public hearing regarding the August 2007 Airport System Plan. In compliance with the State Guide Plan elements, the Airport System Plan addressed Element 640 and covered each of the six airports within the State. The Rhode Island State Airport System Plan dated September 2007 estimates that Westerly State Airport in 2006 had 9,900 enplanements and 15,400 operations. Enplanements are defined as the number of passengers boarding departing flights and operations are defined as the total number of takeoffs and landings. Forecasts for Years 2011 and 2021, show that enplanements are expected to increase to 11,000 and 13,600, respectively.

Operations at the airport are seasonal, with the majority of operations occurring from Memorial Day through Labor Day. During this period, there is at least one scheduled departure to and arrival from Block Island every hour. During the off-season, the flight schedule is reduced to at least one scheduled departure to and arrival from Block Island every other hour.<sup>64</sup>

The airport Plan identified needs for Westerly airport, including:

- Runway/taxiway separation is needed
- Pavement rehabilitation is needed (and presently ongoing)
- Runway safety improvements are needed with respect to length, grade and/or obstructions
- Runway Object Free Area improvements and obstruction removal are needed.

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<sup>62</sup> Rhode Island Airport Economic Impact Study Update, 2006

<sup>63</sup> Rhode Island State Airport System Plan, September 28, 2007

<sup>64</sup> Ibid



## ***7.5 Water Access for Boaters***

There are 10 boat ramps available in the town for a fee. All are located in the Pawcatuck River estuary. Boats can be launched during the operating season at the Westerly Marina, which is free to all Westerly residents and is operated under a lease agreement between the owners of the marina and the town.

The Pawcatuck River is designated as a Special Area governed by the Coastal Resources Management Council of Rhode Island. As such, a management plan has been developed for the proper use and overall guided management of the estuary. The Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay Interstate Management Plan, July 1992, was prepared to “provide a consistent, ecologically-based policy framework for decisions involving the use of the estuary’s resources.”<sup>65</sup>

A Harbor Management Plan has been in development for an extended period of time and its successful completion would help manage the growing activity within the Pawcatuck River/Little Narragansett Bay area.

In 2001, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) acquired approximately 1.4 acres along Main Street in downtown Westerly adjacent to the Pawcatuck River for purposes of constructing a boat ramp into the River. In addition, situated just north and upriver, designs for a public riverwalk were near completion, but are currently in abeyance. The intent of the riverwalk was to further pedestrian access to Pawcatuck via a pedestrian bridge that was to be part of the riverwalk.

The five-year update to the Comprehensive Plan identified the following land acquisitions by the town that further public access to the waterfront and water access for boaters:

- Property along Margin Street adjacent to the Pawcatuck River next to the sewage treatment plant
- Approximately 7 acres located on Margin Street adjacent to the Pawcatuck River, next to the parcel leased to Westerly Marina
- Approximately 27 acres of tidal marsh adjoining Winnapaug Pond on the north side of Atlantic Avenue

In 2001, the town acquired 3.12 acres of formerly privately owned property on Atlantic Avenue. This allowed the town to establish a new beach and provide parking. Westerly now has two locations for its town beaches.

## ***7.6 Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel***

A Shoreline Bikeway Report detailing a proposed on-road Signed Shared Roadway (Bike Route) was submitted by the town of Charlestown to the state DOT as part of the 2003-2005 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The study was a proposal for a shoreline bikeway that would include four roadways within the towns of Charlestown and Westerly. The roadways would be signed as “shared roadways” for purposes of alerting automobile drivers that the roadway is to be shared with non-motorized modes of transportation, specifically bicycles.

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<sup>65</sup> The Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay: An Interstate Management Plan, Adopted July 14, 1992



Recommendations for the portion that traversed Westerly included making the section along Route 91 (Alton Bradford Road) from Route 1 (Post Road) in Charlestown a Signed Shared Roadway, pending improvements that would widen all areas where total roadway width is less than 28 feet. Post Road/Shore Road from Route 216 in Charlestown to Winnapaug Road in Westerly, however, was not recommended as a Signed Shared Roadway.<sup>66</sup> More information about this initiative and additional proposed bikeways also appears in the Greenways section of the Open Space and Recreation chapter.

The application to the Transportation Advisory Committee for the shoreline bikeway was approved and included in the FY 2003-2005 TIP. Implementation of the plan would address the goals, policies, and priorities identified in the Westerly 2006 Update to the 1991 Comprehensive Plan with respect to linking downtown to the River and Wilcox Park; and investigating the creation of bike paths in conjunction with scenic roads. The ultimate goal is to develop a continuous east-west bikeway connecting the towns of Westerly, Charlestown, and South Kingstown to then become part of a statewide bicycle network planned and established by RIDOT. One of the areas of concern, however, is Post Road (Route 1) if the road were to be shared with bicyclists. There are over forty crossroad intersections along the Route 1 corridor (not just in Westerly). Experienced bicyclists indicated that they would probably not make efficient use of the indirect paths. The report further indicated that a recommendation was made to continue allowing bicyclists to use Route 1, however in the Shoreline area, "...but not to designate the roadway for bicycle use through signing."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Study and Development – Shoreline Bikeway, South County Trail, Post Road, Ross Hill Road, and Shore Road, Town of Charlestown and Westerly, July 2007

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

## 8.0 *Historic & Cultural Resources*

### 8.1 *Neighborhoods, Historic Districts, Structures and Sites*

#### 8.1.1 *Historic Districts*

Westerly was incorporated as a town in 1669, and over the years it has remained a hub of commerce and recreation in southern Rhode Island. The core of Westerly is approximately bounded by the Pawcatuck River on the west; Oak Street and Railroad Avenue on the north; Tower Street, Granite Street, and Franklin Street on the east; and Wells Street on the south. Westerly also has a collection of distinct villages which provides a glimpse into the town's historic past whether they are commercial centers, coastal communities, or mill towns. These villages and districts are: Avondale, Bradford, Misquamicut, Potter Hill, Shelter Harbor, Watch Hill, Weekapaug, and White Rock.

There are also six neighborhoods in the town listed as Historic Districts on the National Register of Historic Places. These are Bradford Village, Main Street, North End, Watch Hill, Westerly Downtown, and Wilcox Park. There are another 11 areas which have been either determined eligible for Historic District listing, or recommended for nomination or for further study by the responsible state agency, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHP&HC). See National Register Information System, <http://www.nr.nps.gov>.

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission provides municipalities within the state with a variety of information on historic resources. In 1978, the Commission developed the Preliminary Report on Historic and Architectural Resources of Westerly, Rhode Island as a tool to identify and record properties of historic and architectural significance in the town. In addition to this town-specific survey, the RIHP&HC has prepared several state-wide surveys including a historic landscapes survey, an outdoor sculpture survey, a historic bridges survey, an engineering and industrial sites survey and an archeological survey. In each of these historic surveys, sites in Westerly have been identified. For a broad discussion of Westerly's historic neighborhoods, listed and eligible for listing, see *Westerly Preservation Report 2006*, Westerly Preservation Society, prepared by Eric Dray and Gretchen Schuler, Preservation Consultants, and *Historic and Architectural Resources of Westerly, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report*, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, March 1978, <http://www.nr.nps.gov>.)

Within each of the listed historic districts are structures and sites which are deemed to be “contributing” to the historic character of the particular district. These are so identified in the various inventories prepared as part of the listing application process. In addition to historic districts, there are eight structures and sites in the town which have been listed individually on the National Register. These are: Babcock-Smith House; Flying Horse Carousel; Former Immaculate Conception Church (now George Kent Performance Hall of the Chorus of Westerly); Lewis-Card-Perry House; Nursery Site RI-273; U.S. Post Office (Broad and High Streets); Westerly Armory; and Weekapaug Inn. See Rhode Island Properties, Westerly, listed in the National Register, <http://www.preservation.ri.gov/register/riproperties>.



There are many other structures and sites in the town which have been identified as eligible for listing, or recommended for nomination or for further study by the RIHP&HC.

### 8.1.2 Regulatory Protection

Largely because the action has not been supported by community consensus, the town has thus far not enacted historic district zoning, including establishing a single town-wide historic district commission pursuant to Chapter 45.24.1, RIGL. However, other means to protect the listed districts and the structures within them have been enacted by the Town Council.

The Zoning Ordinance standards governing development plan review, to which all development except one and two family structures is subject, requires:

“If the building is in a Historic District, the recommendations of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission shall be incorporated in the Administrative or Planning Board review.” (See §260-45[F](1) ) The definition of “Historic District” used in the ordinance includes a historic site or sites “registered or ... deemed eligible to be included, on the state register of historic places.” (See §260-9[B])

For the Bay Street commercial area of the Watch Hill Historic District (SC-WH Commercial zone), the Town Council in 2006 took another approach to preserving the character of the area. It enacted an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance proposed by the Watch Hill Conservancy, which established architectural design standards for construction there. These standards are applicable to the development plan review of all applications in that zone.

More recently, in 2009, the Watch Hill Conservancy published a primer on the residential architectural history of Watch Hill, *Watch Hill Style*. With the visual appeal of its 200 full-color images of Watch Hill cottages, it is intended to influence those planning new construction in Watch Hill to emulate the architectural traditions of the community.<sup>68</sup>

Supporting both the standards enacted for Bay Street and the examples contained in *Watch Hill Style*, the Conservancy also provides initial free design services to those planning new construction in the Watch Hill Historic District.

Additionally, with respect to the large area of the town within the jurisdiction of the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), either due to its proximity to the coast or by virtue of being located within the Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs) for Winnapaug Pond or Quonochontaug Pond, additional protection also exists in the permitting process. CRMC’s regulations, Section 220, Areas of Historic and Archaeological Significance, C. Policies state:

“3. The Council shall require modification of, or shall prohibit proposed actions, subject to its jurisdiction where it finds a reasonable probability of adverse impacts on properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Adverse impacts are those which can reasonably be expected to diminish or destroy those qualities of the property which make it eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Council shall solicit the

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<sup>68</sup> *Watch Hill Style*, The Watch Hill Conservancy, 2009, Watch Hill, RI



recommendations of the Historical Preservation Commission regarding impacts on such properties.

“4. Prior to permitting actions subject to its jurisdiction on or adjacent to properties eligible for inclusion (but not actually listed in the National Register of Historic Places), and/or areas designated as historically or archaeologically sensitive by the Historical Preservation Commission as the result of their predictive model, the Council shall solicit the recommendations of the Commission regarding possible adverse impacts on these properties. The Council may, based on the Commission’s recommendations and other evidence before it, including other priority uses of this Program, require modification of or may prohibit the proposed action where such adverse impacts are likely.”

As an incentive for property owners to maintain the historic character of designated historic structures and to encourage the owners to obtain historic designation for structures not already so designated, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) exempts historic structures from floodplain management requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as long as they maintain their historic structure designation.

### ***8.1.3 Funding Assistance***

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHP&HC) has administered a program to assist owners to meet the costs of maintaining their historic properties, and the rehabilitation of historic structures (both those within listed historic districts and those individually listed) has been supported by state (30 percent) and federal (20 percent) tax credit programs. Due to state budgetary limitations, the state program has been eliminated except for projects which had received approval from RIHP&HC prior to January 1, 2008. Among these projects which remain eligible is the Westerly Land Trust renovation and rehabilitation of the United Theatre. The federal program remains in place. The state credit program has been highly successful, and the town should advocate for its restoration. There is also a state residential homeowner credit (10 percent) for maintenance and repair of historic houses.

### ***8.1.4 Historic Preservation Accomplishments***

The RIHP&HC and a panel of historic architectural consultants convened by it authorized the demolition and replication of the historic Ocean House Hotel (1868), located in the Watch Hill Historic District in an area under CRMC jurisdiction. This major project is scheduled for completion by mid-2010.

National Register listing and a grant under the federal Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), operated under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), have been used to rehabilitate low and moderate income housing in the town’s North End.

Adaptive restoration recently preserved the Dr. John Champlin house at 9 Granite Street, as an office building; the town granted a zoning variance to make this use possible. Adaptive restoration is currently being undertaken to preserve the Old Town Hall as a museum. In addition, the Westerly Land Trust is currently embarking on an ambitious urban initiative to create a gateway to the town along Main Street and the river and to renovate the United Theatre and a portion of the adjacent property for film and live performances, as well as for community meeting and rehearsal space. The recently revitalized Granite Theatre and George Kent Performance Hall, both former churches,



provide theatrical and musical performance space. The Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers maintain a museum in a renovated former service building at the Lighthouse.

### ***8.1.5 Recognitions***

Westerly's abundance of historic resources has not gone unnoticed. In 2002 the town was designated one of the "Dozen Distinctive Destinations" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Each year the Trust selects 12 "unique and lovingly preserved communities in the United States" as Distinctive Destinations. As of 2007, there have been 96 communities so designated. The designation recognizes the community's efforts to preserve the historic and scenic assets of Westerly, which the Trust calls a "quintessential New England beach town."

The town has also been designated a Preserve America Community under a White House initiative, which recognizes the town's appreciation of its heritage as an economic and educational asset and provides eligibility for Preserve America grants.

Wilcox Park was awarded a Centennial Medallion from the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1999 and has since received a Preserve America grant.

### ***8.1.6 Historic Cemeteries***

There are many historic cemeteries in the town, a number of which have been registered to date and are listed on the Rhode Island Cemeteries Database, and many others are thought still to exist. (See [http://members.tripod.com/debyns/ceme\\_des.html](http://members.tripod.com/debyns/ceme_des.html) and <http://www.historicalcemeteries.ri.gov>) There are also Native American burial sites, which are protected under state law.

The Town Code of Ordinances provides protection of historical and archaeological burial sites. Article III. Preservation of Historical and Archaeological Burial Sites. (See Sections 8-81 through 8-88, Westerly Code of Ordinances)



## *8.2 Cultural Resources*

There exists a variety of non-profit cultural institutions and events which are important to the community and its tourist industry. Foremost, perhaps, among these are the Westerly Public Library and its Wilcox Park, the Chorus of Westerly which has programs year round in its concert hall, and the Summer Pops concerts, held in June, in Wilcox Park. The Park is also the site of productions of Shakespeare-in-the-Park and of the Salt Marsh Opera, and, by its location, the non-profit Granite Theatre, complements the performing arts activities in Wilcox Park. While largely privately supported, some of the town's cultural institutions also receive municipal funding. In addition, special benefits are provided artists and art facilities at specially designated areas of downtown Westerly. Artists who live and work in the state-recognized Westerly Arts District are eligible for certain beneficial tax incentives. (See Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (<http://www.arts.ri.gov/projects/districts.php>) The Granite Street Overlay District provides for professional offices and artistic studios to be located in an otherwise residential district. (See §60-58 Westerly Code of Ordinances)

The Memorial and Library Association of Westerly owns and operates the Westerly Public Library, itself built as a Civil War memorial, and the surrounding 14-acre Wilcox Park, the original portion of which was designed in 1898 by Warren Manning, a protégé of Frederick Law Olmstead. The Park is perhaps the single most character-generating feature of the town and is often referred to as a "jewel" of the town. Although Westerly is a medium-sized community, its Library collection is the second most actively used in the state. Both the Library and the Park are currently undergoing a major restoration. The Westerly Armory, which houses the Westerly Band, the oldest civic band in the country, was recently restored.



# Appendix II – Public Input

## 9.0 Public Input into the Comprehensive Plan

### 9.1 Introduction

The purpose of the public input program for the Comprehensive Plan is to build support and understanding for the Plan and to incorporate the visions of the community’s stakeholders in the Plan and the planning process. In its Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, the state of Rhode Island encourages public input into the Comprehensive Plan, but its only requirement for public input is that the Planning Board and Town Council hold public hearings prior to the adoption of the Plan. The Act leaves the design of public input programs to the discretion of communities. It provides a series of suggested input techniques, but its concrete requirements are:

*In order to encourage citizen participation in the comprehensive planning process, planning boards, commissions, or committees are directed to adopt comprehensive plans only after soliciting and considering public input. Public hearings by the planning board, commission, or committee and the municipal legislative body are required to be held prior to the adoption of the comprehensive plan. Adoption of the comprehensive plan by a municipal legislative body is in the same manner provided for the adoption of ordinances in the manner provided for in the legislative or home rule charter of the municipality except that the plan need not be published in its entirety in a newspaper of general circulation.<sup>69</sup>*

For the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan, a public input program was designed to ensure residents and stakeholders were given ample opportunity to participate in the planning process. The following elements were incorporated:

- Vision Sessions – Vision sessions were held with the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee (“the Committee”) and the town’s department heads at project kickoff. Vision sessions are designed to give the groups the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses of the town and to express their visions of the future. In the case of the department heads, discussion focused on the usefulness of the forthcoming plan and how it could best meet their needs.
- Focus Groups – Six focus groups were conducted as part of the planning process. Focus Groups are facilitated discussions on a few questions with stakeholders and experts identified in particular topic areas.
- Interactive Public Workshops – Interactive public workshops were designed to allow the public to give individual input as well as to collaborate with other residents and participants. Three rounds of public workshops were planned:

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.planning.state.ri.us/comp/handbook16.pdf>



- Round One – The first round of workshops focused on the identification of local issues. It featured individual and group input, gave participants the opportunity to give their personal opinions about issues in the town as well as a collaborative group exercise in which participants located the issue areas on maps of the town. The purpose of the session was to educate and inform the public about the Plan and process as well as to gather opinions and feedback. The mapping contributed by the groups was used directly in the creation of the Future Land Use Plan.
- Round Two – During the second round of workshops, the goals and objectives of the Plan were introduced. A “Futures Plan”, graphically depicting potential projects and opportunities for Westerly, was presented. Workshop participants were asked to identify priorities from among the proposals presented and to identify additional projects to enhance Westerly’s future.
- Round Three – During this round, participants were asked to provide feedback on the draft actions for each of the Plan’s ten goals.
- Community Survey – A community survey was mailed to a randomly selected representative number of Westerly households to gain community feedback about a range of community issues. The survey is the only scientifically executed element of the public input program. The survey instrument was developed specifically for the community through consultation with the Citizens Advisory Committee and is an important indicator of community sentiments.

**Table 9-1 Public Input Timeline**

	Summer 2007	Fall 2007	Winter 2008	Spring 2008	Summer 2008	Fall 2008	Winter 2009	Spring 2009	Summer 2009
Workshops	Public Meeting Round #1	Focus Groups			Public Meeting Round #2			Public Meeting Round #3	
Other Input Tasks	Vision Session with Dept. Heads	Community Survey	Interviews, one-on-one meetings, conference calls			Review and refine public input record and comprehensive plan document			

Table 9-1 shows the timeline of the public input activities. It is important to note that once the Comprehensive Plan, as recommended by the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, is formally submitted to the Planning Board and Town Council, the Board and Council will also conduct public hearings at which additional public input will be heard.

The public input program includes synopses of the vision sessions, focus groups, workshops and survey. A number of interviews were held throughout the planning process with elected and appointed officials, citizens, state and local leaders and others. A volume of correspondence was also received.

## 9.2 Vision Sessions

The purpose of these sessions was to gather the reflections and insights on the character of the town of Westerly and perspectives on the unique challenges and opportunities facing the town. The vision sessions inputs were used along with the other sources of public input to assist in the identification of matters of special concern within the town. The opinions and views expressed during these and other public input sessions help to lay the basis of the goals and objectives for the Plan which



express the vision of the future for the town of Westerly. These sessions also helped alert the consulting team to issues of special concern about which they might not have been aware.

The vision session methodology is designed to spark thoughtful conversations among participants and between participants and the facilitating consultant. The object is to create an atmosphere where participants felt comfortable enough to air their views and opinions with confidence. Four questions for discussion were provided to the participants in printed form at the beginning of the session. The facilitator reviewed each question, gave participants a few minutes to jot down some thoughts and responses and then went around the room ensuring everyone had an opportunity to weigh in on each question. At the conclusion of the session, participants were asked to note any other issues of which they thought the consultant should be aware. These answers were usually not opened for discussion, but the papers were gathered and responses to that question were aggregated with the rest of the account of the session.

The digests that appear below are designed to make economical use of space while reflecting the general direction and tone of the conversations surrounding the questions.

### *9.2.1 Citizens Advisory Committee Vision Session*

As part of the kickoff for the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan, a vision session was held with the Citizens Advisory Committee during the Committee's first meeting with the consultant on July 30, 2007. There were 12 members of the Committee and three staff present at the Vision Session.

When asked to describe the character of the town of Westerly, committee members noted its small size, historic New England quality, its seaside location and its diversity in population, cultural activities and offerings, as well as its beautiful setting. Committee members described the town as family-oriented and its residents as caring and charitable.

When asked to articulate their visions of the future for the town, committee members wanted to see more employment opportunities to encourage young people to stay in Westerly or to move back and live there. Committee members' visions also included adequate and affordable housing, housing and services for senior citizens, natural resource protection and downtown restoration and revitalization. Several members of the Committee expressed that they would like to see development limited and the character of the town preserved.

Committee members were asked to list the town's most important opportunities. Several members of the Committee focused on the distinction between tourist and resort communities noting that Westerly should become more of a resort destination and less dependent upon a seasonal economy. Other opportunities committee members cited included economic development potentials such as light industrial, knowledge-based industry, health care and industrial development. Natural resources preservation, access and natural resources-based industry were also mentioned as potentials. Several committee members also saw potential in Westerly's location, highway, rail and air access.

The challenges faced by the town in committee members' opinions included school performance, infrastructure funding and the need to balance growth with development. Several committee members addressed taxes, although one thought taxes should be raised to protect water resources



while another thought taxes should be maintained low. Several committee members expressed concern about the financial status and future of town's medical facilities.

Committee members were asked to describe special issues that should be considered in drafting the new Comprehensive Plan. One commented that there are not sufficient ties between the seasonal and year-round residents and that the seasonal residents felt they pay proportionally higher taxes for services rendered. A perceived lack of enforcement of zoning and excessive variance granting, growing financial pressures limiting access to funding for investment in infrastructure, education and economic development were noted. Other committee members noted a need for affordable housing and better beach access.

### ***9.2.2 Department Heads Vision Session***

A vision session was held with the town department heads July 31, 2007. The purpose of this session was like that of the Citizens Advisory Committee session, but it also sought to gather input specifically on how the participants used the 1991 Comprehensive Plan and their specific needs for the new Comprehensive Plan.

There were 13 department heads, managers, superintendents and directors participating in the session.

Participants used terms like “traditional,” “small town” and “historic” to describe the character of Westerly. It is “old world combined with modern sensibilities,” said one. Several participants referred to change and growth in Westerly, with one noting it’s “not the small town it used to be.”

When asked to describe their visions of the future for the town of Westerly, several participants looked at the question from two sides, anticipating what they thought would happen as opposed to what they would like to see happen. Several of these responses indicated a future in which Westerly will be “unfortunately city-like” and overcrowded; this Westerly of the future was comparable to Rockland County, New York. Other visions for the future anticipated responsible development and planning, open space preservation, the quaintness of Westerly preserved, water and infrastructure improvements made and industrial revitalization to bring new jobs to the community.

The participants were asked to note how the 1991 Plan was useful to them and what was good about that Plan. Responses were varied. While it had been used as an implementation guide for departments such as engineering and utilities, it was not used as often as it should have been. The Plan was viewed as outdated and one participant said the Plan had conflicting and contradictory goals.

When asked what the new Plan should do, participants named usefulness, user-friendliness and accessibility as specific qualities they would like the new Plan to possess. One participant said the Plan should be fair to everyone in the community; another noted the Plan should be a “tool to define what we want where and how we want things developed.” The Plan should “focus on Westerly being the leader of the pack.” Several participants referred to the requirement that the Plan be “implementable” so that it will be useful.



### ***9.3 Focus Group Summaries***

Six focus group sessions were held as part of the planning process on October 9 and 10 and November 19, 2007. Like the vision sessions, focus groups are facilitated discussions on a limited number of questions. Focus group participants were asked about the character of Westerly, what the community's focus over the next 20 years should be and the opportunities and challenges currently facing the town. Discussion topics and participants were identified with the help of the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee. The focus group input was used along with the other sources of public input to assist in the identification of matters of special concern among the residents and members of special interest groups and those with special areas of expertise within the town.

The opinions and views expressed during these and other public input sessions helped to lay the basis of the goals and objectives for the Plan, which express the vision of the future for the town of Westerly. These sessions also helped alert the consulting team and Citizens Advisory Committee to issues of special concern about which they might not have been aware.

The focus group session is designed to spark thoughtful conversations among participants and between participants and the facilitating consultant. The object is to create an atmosphere where participants felt comfortable enough to air their views and opinions with confidence. The questions for discussion were provided to the participants in printed form at the beginning of the session. The facilitator reviewed each question, gave participants a few minutes to jot down some thoughts and responses and then went around the room ensuring everyone had an opportunity to weigh in on each question. This format was generally followed for the four questions. At the conclusion of the session, participants were asked to note any other issues about which they think the consultant should be aware. The question were usually not opened for discussion, but the papers were gathered and responses to that question were aggregated with the rest of the account of the session.

The following focus groups were conducted October 9 and 10:

- Natural Resources and Open Space
- Real Estate, Housing and Development
- Economic Development
- Circulation, Traffic and Transportation
- Fire District Moderators

An additional focus group engaging members of the Parent Teacher Organization and Westerly school administrators was held November 19. This focus group was conducted by officers of the Citizens Advisory Committee with materials supplied by the Plan consultant.

#### ***9.3.1 Natural Resources and Open Space***

Of the 20 persons invited to the Natural Resources and Open Space focus group held October 9, 13 participated or sent representatives; in addition, there were three Citizens Advisory Committee members in attendance.

The character of Westerly as highlighted by the participants included its small town and historic features, its distinct villages, its abundance of natural resources and the development pressures it is



experiencing. The town's waterfront and coastline were repeatedly named as defining characteristics.

Aquifer and surface water protection were named overwhelmingly as the appropriate focus for the town's natural resources and open space focus over the next 20 years. Also frequently named was open space preservation, as was the need for recreational opportunities and concern about the ability of the water supply and waste water treatment capacity to keep pace with development.

The most often cited challenges to the protection of natural resources and open spaces in the town were: residential and industrial development pressures, watershed protection and water consumption and funding availability. Other issues highlighted included the need for low-impact development practices, the need to maintain the character of the community and maintenance and management of open spaces.

Some of the most important natural resources and open space opportunities or potentials indicated for the town were the need to develop public-private partnerships to address open space and infrastructure issues, increasing awareness of the need to protect and conserve natural resources and implementation of a well-prepared Comprehensive Plan. Other issues cited included the opportunity to educate the public about the need to conserve and protect resources and how tax revenues can be used to enhance quality of life.

Other issues mentioned included the impacts of the Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun casinos in Connecticut, the need for water access in the downtown area and the need to acknowledge the important role played by summer residents and tourism in the town's economy. Other closing remarks included issues related to the need to preserve the town's unique character and to curb sprawl. Westerly's downtown was built out before the invention of the automobile and that is a unique feature and asset to the town. A perception that there is undue influence by developers on the town, zoning and planning boards as well as the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee members was expressed.

### ***9.3.2 Real Estate, Housing and Development***

The Real Estate, Housing and Development focus group was held on October 9. Of the 19 potential participants invited, eight participated or sent representatives. There were also two members of the Citizens Advisory Committee present.

Participants in this focus group generally described Westerly as a diverse community highlighting its qualities of being a good place to work, live and raise a family and also as a resort community with historic characteristics that is undergoing change.

When asked to identify a real estate, housing and development focus for the next 20 years, responses were varied and included housing affordability, growth control and ensuring a diversified housing stock. Participants also highlighted natural resources and open space preservation and a concern about potential overuse of the town's ponds, river and oceanfront. One participant noted that growth in Westerly may be more perception than fact and that, if growth is too tightly constrained, taxes will have to be increased to meet growing demands.



The most often cited real estate-related challenges were the need for more affordable housing, infrastructure improvements and higher density development. Redevelopment of blighted areas was cited by one participant as a particular challenge, while three cited higher-density development as a challenge, and one cited cost of land.

Among the opportunities for the town that participants cited were rehabilitation of existing structures, implementation of a mixed used ordinance and appropriate waterfront development. Extending infrastructure to the entire town was cited by a participant and other opportunities that were raised included resort potential and the shoreline and beach, downtown living and the state-mandated 10 percent affordable housing benchmark.

### ***9.3.3 Economic Development***

Among the 20 people invited to an Economic Development focus group, nine attended or sent representatives. There were also two Citizens Advisory Committee members present at the session held on October 10.

Participants' descriptions of the character of the town of Westerly focused on its many amenities (shoreline, theater, arts, open space, shopping) and its family orientation. Its unique aspects include air and rail service, according to one participant. Other defining characteristics include its rich history and architecture; attributes such as its hospital and library; two participants named Wilcox Park among the town's defining characteristics.

Participants felt the town's economic development focus over the next 20 years should be clean industry and attracting a quality hotel. Participants also thought that job skills and educational improvements were important, as were diversifying the economy, becoming an arts and cultural center for southwestern Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut and addressing tax base issues. Affordable housing and services to the elderly were also mentioned.

Improving the schools, recruiting quality employees and balancing taxes with service provision were named by participants as economic development challenges facing the town of Westerly. A number of other issues were raised, including the need to balance open space with development, parking and transportation challenges in Misquamicut and Watch Hill, retaining local family-owned businesses and competition with big box retail. One participant mentioned the need for strong and open leadership and another noted the need to develop citizen commitment to deal with problems.

The opportunities the town should take advantage of include development of a national chain hotel, cited by four participants, and development of a new industrial park, cited by three participants. Other opportunities included the potential to develop the area adjacent to Routes 1 and 91 into an office park and the promotion of a downtown arts district. Improving the quality of education, parking, traffic, taxes and the potential to restructure government were all also cited as opportunities.

Other issues raised by participants included the need to "keep the hospital as it is," the need to preserve Watch Hill the way it is, housing affordability and the need for intelligent zoning in Misquamicut. Resistance to change and the need for change in town government were also cited. Also mentioned were the need to communicate the Main Street project proposed by Charles Royce and the Royce Family Fund to residents and the need for awareness of the Westerly Arts District.



### ***9.3.4 Circulation, Traffic and Transportation***

Among the 15 individuals invited to the Circulation, Traffic and Transportation focus group held on October 10, eight participated or sent representatives. There were also two Citizens Advisory Committee members present.

The participants' characterization of the town of Westerly centered on some bigger picture ideas, such as its location at a mid-point between Boston and New York, a destination for tourists and its tradition, elegance, and traffic congestion. Strong family values, tight-knit and divided were also terms used to describe the town. One participant described the town's walkability and potential for public transportation access downtown.

Seven of the participants named public transportation as a focus for traffic and transportation over the next 20 years. Other areas for focus included improving the traffic flow at the intersection of Route 78 and Route 1 and near the airport, access management, traffic calming and congestion control. A number of other ideas were also put forth including improving rail and bus options, designating downtown as a growth center and "plan accordingly" and linkage, infrastructure and road capacity maintenance and improvement.

Circulation challenges facing the town included road congestion, lack of adequate bus and rail service, lack of capital for public infrastructure improvement, limited parking and the need for improved road maintenance and the need for capital to finance these improvements. Specific individual challenges cited included tourists, growth, sidewalks, airport, road capacity and bike/pedestrian accommodation. Another road-related issue raised was the potential to replace stop signs with roundabouts.

Opportunities included the provision of bus and rail services, bike and pedestrian paths and access management. Westerly's location was named as an opportunity for TOD (transit-oriented development); safe routes to school and planning were also named as opportunities.

Discussion of other issues centered mainly on opportunities and challenges faced by the airport. The airport itself is seen as an asset and could be an even bigger asset in an emergency as the runways have been redone and lighting installed. While the terminal has been redone, its restaurant has failed to attract an operator and hangar space is in short supply.

### ***9.3.5 Fire District Moderators***

There were eight individuals participating in a focus group for the fire district moderators held October 10 – seven individuals, one each representing each of the seven fire districts plus one member of the Committee. This focus group was less structured than the other focus group sessions. It consisted generally of a conversation about the concerns of each respective fire district. District representatives were generally in agreement that a spirit of cooperation exists among the Westerly fire districts with all of the districts that have fire departments and fire equipment responding in mutual aid to each Westerly alarm.

There are concerns among the fire districts on three major fronts. First, for the districts that do not have fire equipment or stations, there is concern about the increasing cost of contracting with districts that do have fire stations and firefighting equipment. The cost of this contract is passed along to district taxpayers. The second set of concerns exists among the districts that do have fire



stations and firefighting equipment and is identical to the concerns of the first set – that is, the on-going cost of providing fire protection to the district taxpayers and its impact on the taxpayers. The third set of concerns is shared by all seven districts: the increase in the tax levy as the value of local property has increased in an overheated residential real estate market.

One concern that was voiced by representatives of Bradford was the increasing amount of area of that district that has been set aside for conservation and open space. Bradford has the lowest tax base of the seven districts.

### ***9.3.6 School Administrators and PTO Members***

Fifteen individuals participated in the focus group held on November 19. Participants included the Superintendent of Schools, members of the school department administration, PTO officials and parents of students. The meeting was facilitated by Robert Ritacco, chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee; Richard Smith, vice chairman and Harrison Day, treasurer, also participated in the facilitation and discussions.

One participant described Westerly as “a place where people want to settle, raise families and retire.” Words used to describe the community were “small town,” “growing,” “close knit” and “family oriented.”

When asked what the town’s primary focus should be over the next 20 years, education was the priority most often mentioned. Others that were mentioned repeatedly include: limiting housing development, education facility improvements, development of a community/recreation center and maintaining a small-town feeling.

Participants noted a number of challenges facing the town such as: improving school facilities and programs, managing growth so as not to lose its sense of community and affordable housing. Among the opportunities mentioned by participants were: improving the education system, coastal area opportunities, increasing affordable housing, increasing after school activities for children and people wanting to live and raise their families in Westerly.

There was extensive discussion about the need to upgrade or replace the physical structures of the school system over the next 15-20 years. There was also discussion about the need for programs and facilities to improve the educational opportunities for students – languages, science labs, technology and honors programs. The importance of affordable after-school programs for students was stressed by several participants. They suggested that such programs could possibly be provided through closer collaboration with the town’s Recreation Department. Improved athletic facilities including the idea of a centralized recreation center with a pool and tennis courts was discussed as well. Improved public transportation for children, parents of school-age children and the elderly was identified as an important priority for Westerly. The Superintendent noted that traditionally 7-10 percent of the school-age population opts out of the public system for private schools and there is a concern that the percentage may increase without significant investment to improve the public schools.

Participants discussed concerns about housing affordability, jobs and transportation as factors in whether their children would be able to remain in Westerly after completing their education. Many expressed concerns about the pace of development, the expanding number of condos and presence



of malls and large retail businesses. Keeping small local businesses viable was seen as a priority for many participants. The downtown area was identified as a success and a highly valuable asset to Westerly and one that should continue to see investment and appropriate development. Maintaining our natural resources and open space and accessibility to beaches was also a highly important priority for the group. There was discussion about the need to seek out alternative revenue streams (other than property taxes) to help fund the future needs of the town. The Superintendent suggested making education excellence a core driver in the town's economic development strategy.

## ***9.4 Public Workshops***

### ***9.4.1 Round One***

Two interactive public workshops were held at the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan process, one each on the evenings of July 31 and August 1, 2007. The sessions were held on Tuesday, July 31 at the Venice Restaurant, 165 Shore Road and Wednesday, August 1, at the Elks Club, 1 Dixon Street. There were 69 total combined participants from the public in the workshops; members of the Citizens Advisory Committee participated as facilitators and observers.

Each workshop featured background information about the Plan and Plan process as well as an interactive portion. The interactive portion of the program encouraged both individual input as well as group consensus-building. The purpose of the meetings was to educate the public about the Plan and the importance of the Plan and to identify issues that should be addressed through the planning process. By using both individual and group input techniques, the workshop sought to encourage collaboration and cooperation in problem identification and solutions.

Participants were given workbooks and seated at tables in groups. Each table had a large map of the town. The workbooks asked for individual feedback in the issue areas of land use, circulation, economy and community services. Each section asked the participant individually to rate each of four or five statements identifying the level to which they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Then, working as a group and using the maps, participants were asked to identify areas where issues are prevalent – for example, where sidewalks are needed, areas for open space preservation, etc. At the end of the session, groups of participants were asked to identify the top three issues from among all of the items identified and discussed over the course of the evening and present these findings to the assembled group.

The tabulated outcome of these workshops as well as the opinions and views expressed during these and other public input sessions helped to lay the basis of the goals and objectives for the Plan which express the vision of the future for the town of Westerly. These sessions also helped alert the consulting team to issues of special concern about which they may not have been aware.

The results of the workshop's individual input appear below.



**9.4.1.1 Individual Input – Land Use**

Participants in the public workshops overwhelmingly agreed that the town should preserve unique natural features and areas to protect open space and encourage public access with 98 percent of participants who said they agreed or strongly agreed. They also felt that the town’s aesthetic quality should be better with 83 percent of participants who agreed or strongly agreed. While a majority (56 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that Westerly needs more affordable housing, 30 percent had no opinion on this matter and 14 percent disagreed; no respondents strongly disagreed with the need for affordable housing. Responses are tabulated in the table below.

**Table 9-2 Individual Input: Land Use**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>The Town should preserve unique natural features and areas to protect open space and encourage public access.</b>	77.5%	20.0%	1.3%	1.3%	0.0%
<b>Westerly needs to develop more affordable housing including single- and multi-family.</b>	23.8%	32.5%	30.0%	13.8%	0.0%
<b>The overall aesthetic quality of residential and commercial development in the town should be better.</b>	51.9%	30.9%	13.6%	2.5%	1.2%
<b>Dense mixed-use developments with both commercial and residential components should be encouraged in Westerly.</b>	9.1%	27.3%	20.8%	24.7%	18.2%



### 9.4.1.2 Individual Input – Circulation

Traffic volume and safety are issues in the town of Westerly. More than 90 percent said they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. There was general agreement on the need for bike lanes, parking and sidewalks in Westerly, with margins of 72 to 76 percent of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements. There was less enthusiastic agreement about the need for trails with 55 percent of participants saying they agreed or strongly agreed on the need for a comprehensive trail system. Responses are tabulated in the table below.

**Table 9-3 Individual Input: Circulation**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>I am concerned with the volume of traffic and traffic safety in the town.</b>	57.5%	33.8%	6.3%	2.5%	0.0%
<b>Pedestrian safety is an issue in Westerly and there is a need for more sidewalks in the town of Westerly.</b>	28.2%	34.6%	25.6%	10.3%	1.3%
<b>There is a need for official bike lanes in Westerly.</b>	32.9%	40.5%	19.0%	6.3%	1.3%
<b>A comprehensive trail system for recreational and transportation purposes is needed in the town.</b>	17.1%	38.2%	32.9%	10.5%	1.3%
<b>Additional parking is needed in the town.</b>	36.4%	40.3%	16.9%	3.9%	2.6%



**9.4.1.3 Individual Input – Economy**

Participants in the public workshops expressed a more diverse range of opinions about issues relating to the town’s economy than they did in the previous two sections. While more participants agreed with the need to identify land for commercial development, they were less enthused about the need to identify land for industrial development. Thirty-six percent of participants indicated that they had no opinion about whether Westerly has potential as a year-round tourism destination, leaving only 43 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that Westerly has year-round tourism appeal. Respondents were emphatic that they do not support identifying areas to accommodate highway commercial uses such as chain hotels, restaurants and gas stations for businesses and tourists: 63 percent of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the need for these amenities, while 27 percent agreed or strongly agreed, and the remainder expressed no opinion. Responses are tabulated in the table below.

**Table 9-4 Individual Input: Economy**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Westerly needs to identify land for commercial development such as offices and high tech businesses.	18.2%	41.6%	22.1%	16.9%	1.3%
Westerly needs to identify land for industrial development such as manufacturing and light industrial.	17.1%	36.8%	19.7%	17.1%	9.2%
Westerly has tourism destinations that have potential year-round appeal.	17.3%	25.3%	36.0%	14.7%	6.7%
Westerly needs to find areas to accommodate highway commercial uses such as chain hotels, restaurants and gas stations for businesses and tourists.	12.0%	14.7%	10.7%	32.0%	30.7%



9.4.1.4 Individual Input – Community Services

Participants in the public workshops expressed a level of concern about the town’s preparedness in terms of infrastructure. Twenty-three percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the town is keeping up with need for infrastructure, while 35 percent had no opinion on this matter; 42 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that the town is keeping up with these needs. Participants overwhelmingly agreed or strongly agreed (85 percent) that the town should acquire land for parks, open space and schools, echoing a similar level of agreement that the town should preserve unique natural features and areas in the land use section. There were 60 percent of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that individual septic systems are a problem in the town. While no participants strongly disagreed that there are adequate emergency services, 31 percent had no opinion on this issue. Responses are tabulated in the table below.

Table 9-5 Individual Input: Community Services

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Westerly is doing a good job of keeping up with current and future needs for infrastructure, including gas, electric, cable, storm water, sanitary sewer.	4.3%	18.8%	34.8%	30.4%	11.6%
Individual septic systems in Westerly are a problem.	24.3%	35.7%	25.7%	12.9%	1.4%
The town should acquire land now for future parks, open space, schools and community facilities.	43.4%	42.1%	7.9%	3.9%	2.6%
Adequate emergency services including fire, police rescue, animal control, etc., are available in Westerly.	14.1%	42.3%	31.0%	12.7%	0.0%



**9.4.1.5 Individual Input – Community Character**

Three questions plus an open-ended question relating to the character of the community were asked in the workbook but were not the subject of the collaborative group input. The open-ended question asked participants to complete the sentence “The Town of Westerly is ...” Participants’ great regard for the natural beauty and close-knit quality of the community was reflected in their answers to this question. The respondents used adjectives like beautiful, safe, wonderful, lovely and charming to describe Westerly and many responses simply called it a great place, or a great place to raise a family. Some responses voiced concern about growth, detrimental sprawl and development, and a need to preserve natural features.

Most of the participants felt – 84 percent agreed or strongly agreed – that Westerly’s character is changing too quickly because of development pressure. Generally, participants felt adequate shopping and cultural activities are available in Westerly. The results are tabulated in the table below.

**Table 9-6 Individual Input: Community Character**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>There are adequate shopping opportunities in Westerly.</b>	36.6%	16.9%	25.4%	19.7%	1.4%
<b>Adequate cultural activities are available in Westerly.</b>	25.4%	33.8%	18.3%	21.1%	1.4%
<b>Westerly’s character is in danger of changing too quickly because of development pressure.</b>	71.0%	13.0%	5.8%	4.3%	5.8%

Participants were asked if they plan to move away from Westerly. No participants said they plan on moving but 6.5 percent said they might. When asked why they might move from Westerly, there were a number of responses. The responses included taxes (seven responses), government (two) and schools (two).

Participants were asked to provide additional comments highlighting other issues they wanted brought to the attention of the Committee and consultant. Many participants expressed concern about housing affordability, and about the quality of education in Westerly’s schools and taxes. The pace of development was also an issue highlighted by a number of comments which expressed concern that Westerly’s charm is at stake because development is not being managed. Participants also highlighted transportation and traffic issues, including traffic congestion, but also concerns about expansion at the airport and its potential to encroach on neighborhoods, the need for better rail service at the railroad station and public transportation. Other areas of concern include beach access and preservation of the town’s natural resources and downtown and economic revitalization. There were also a number of comments reflecting concern that the town’s planning and zoning standards are not adequately or consistently enforced.

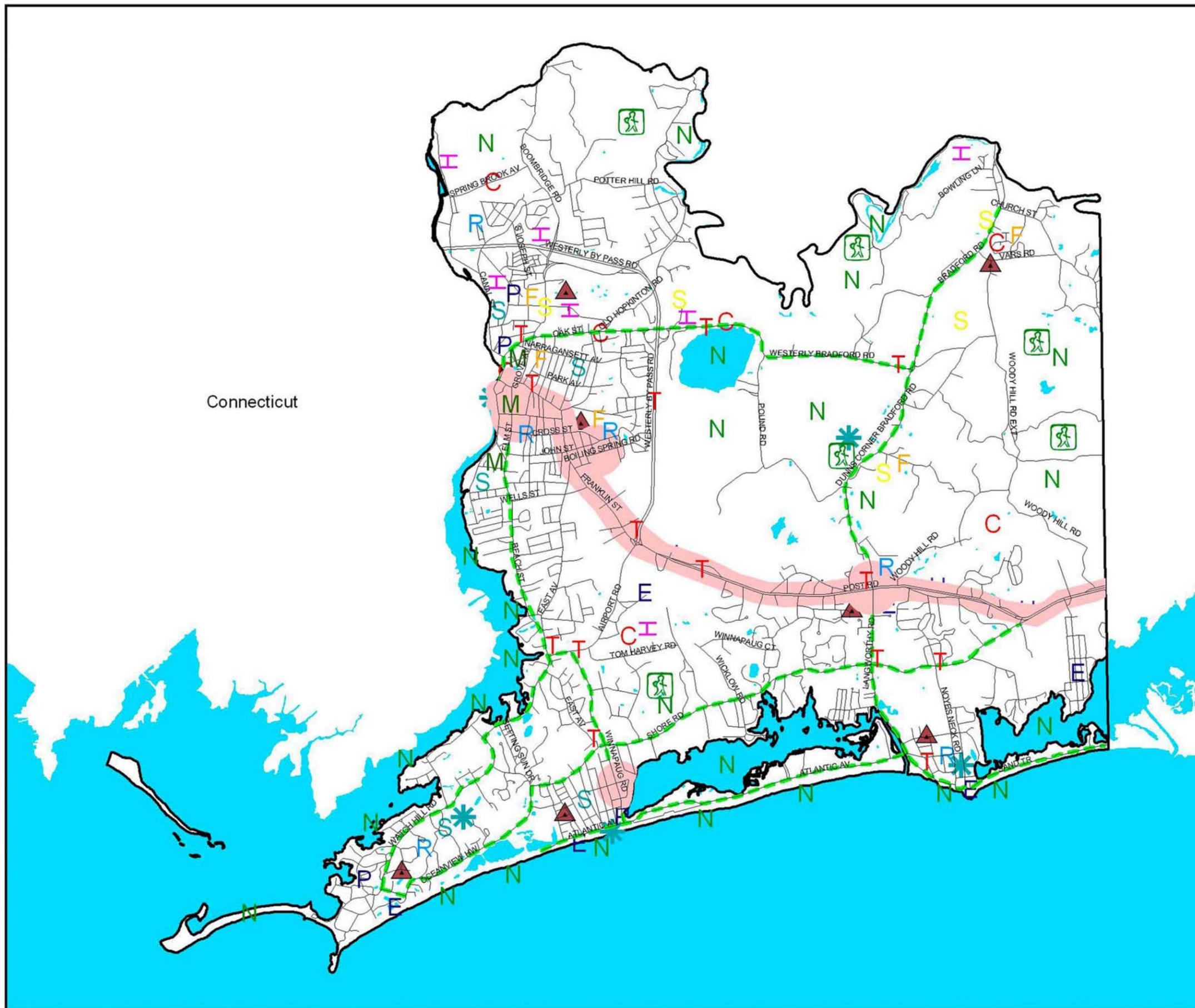


#### ***9.4.1.6 Group Input***

In addition to providing their individual input, participants in the public workshop also collaborated and cooperated in a group exercise. During the workshop, participants were seated at tables of no more than eight. Each table was equipped with a large map of Westerly and four colored markers. The group used the markers to locate areas of problems and issues and also of opportunities relating to the questions they filled in during the individual input in each of the four areas addressed – land use, economy, circulation and community services.

The purpose of the group exercise was to locate on the maps as many of the issues and potentials as possible in order to provide the basis for an informed, creative and supportable Future Land Use Plan. The group exercise also had the benefit of encouraging people who live in the same town but have not met to work together to assist the town in the planning process and also help them better understand planning and the important role residents have in the process.

The map below represents a synthesis of all of the marks made on each map over the course of both evenings.



Connecticut

Legend

- N Preserve Natural Features
- F Location for Multi-family Housing
- S Location for Affordable Single-family Housing
- M Location for Mixed-use Development
- T Traffic Issues
- R Residential Design Standards Needed
- Commercial Design Standards Needed
- S Sidewalks Needed
- Location for Bike Lanes
- Good Location for Trails
- P More Parking Needed
- C Location for Commercial Development
- I Location for Industrial Development
- \* Tourism Destination
- H Location for Highway Commercial Businesses
- ▲ Infrastructure Issues
- E Lacking Emergency Preparedness

**Comprehensive Plan  
for the Town of Westerly, RI**

*Figure 9-1  
Public Input  
Issue Identification*







### 9.4.2 Round Two

An interactive public input session was held July 29, 2008 at the Westerly Middle School. The purpose of the meeting was to allow members of the public to react to the draft goals and objectives, suggest revisions to the draft goals and objectives and to recommend actions to support the goals and objectives. There were 72 local residents who signed the sign-in sheets at the meeting.

Two weeks prior to the meeting, a booklet was published by the *Westerly Sun* that included the Plan's goals and objectives. The booklet was distributed with the newspaper and additional copies were widely available for resident review prior to the meeting. During the meeting, the goals and objectives were reviewed in order and participants given the opportunity to write responses and suggestions on provided worksheets.

Residents' comments on the goals and objectives are summarized below. Many of the comments tended to emphasize the same issues or concerns, such that it is possible to group 50 percent or more of the comments on each goal into a relatively few topics, as follows:

#### Goal 1—Natural Resources (57 responses total)

- Protect and preserve open space (15 responses)
- Limit and/or control development (7 responses)
- Protect water resources including the salt ponds, river, etc. (7 responses)
- Educate citizens about natural resources (6 responses)
- Preserve beach access for all citizens (6 responses)

#### Goal 2—Transportation Strategies (46 responses total)

- Promote public transportation including shuttle service to the beaches (16 responses)
- Provide safe bicycle paths and walking trails and sidewalks (11 responses)
- Issues related to parking (5 responses)

#### Goal 3—Transportation Assets (42 responses total)

- Need improved Amtrak services and commuter rail (16 responses)
- Provide bus or trolley service within the town (4 responses)
- Under this goal there was a mixed response related to the Westerly State Airport and possible ferry service on the river with about equal numbers of respondents favoring and opposing these two ideas (15 responses total)

#### Goal 4—Economic Development (53 responses total)

- Yes to local business, no to chain and big box (13)
- Improve education (school system) and provide more training opportunities (13 responses)
- Be more business-friendly (9 responses)



Goal 5—Housing (49 responses total)

- Rehabilitate existing structures and neighborhoods and provide for infill (10 responses)
- More affordable housing, especially for the elderly (9 responses)
- Less development (7 responses)
- Enforce existing zoning (5 responses)
- Support non-profit groups (4 responses)

Goal 6—Infrastructure (35 responses total)

- Increase infrastructure capacity, especially wastewater treatment (9 responses)
- Promote conservation and alternative energy (8 responses)
- Less development, save wastewater treatment capacity (6 responses)

Goal 7—Unique Character (41 responses total)

- Regulations for development, parking, signs, architecture to lower impact on town (15 responses)
- Preserve neighborhoods, give them some say in what happens (7 responses)
- Zoning ideas and issues (4 responses)
- Less development (3 responses)

Goal 8—Balance among tourism, seasonal, year-round (35 responses total)

- There were no dominant themes in the comments for this goal. Some respondents wanted more tourism and visitors and some wanted fewer.

Goal 9—Institutions (47)

- Importance of quality education and comments about school facilities (27 responses)

Goal 10—Regional Solutions(31)

- There were no dominant themes in the comments for this goal.



### 9.4.3 Round Three

The draft Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives and actions were presented to the public at a workshop held on Saturday, March 7, 2009 at the conference center of the Westerly Hospital. The draft materials were advertised in the *Westerly Sun* prior to the workshop. Approximately 30 members of the public and 10 members of the Citizens Advisory Committee attended. Because the goals and objectives had been presented previously for public comment, the focus of this workshop was the review of 55 actions designed to be specific and achievable within a 5-year time frame.

During the workshop there was an opportunity for the public to ask clarifying questions and to make verbal and written comments on the draft material. In order to gain more systematic feedback, attendees were also asked to fill out a form that allowed them to rate the proposed actions and provide comments on missing items and priorities. Individuals were asked to rate each action as to whether they agreed, disagreed, or felt that additional clarification was needed. Ten action items had five or more respondents that either disagreed with the action or felt that further clarification was needed. The responses are summarized in Table 9-7 below. Workshop attendees were in strong agreement with the remaining action items.

The Citizens Advisory Committee carefully reviewed each action that had five or more disagreements or clarifications needed as well as the written and verbal comments from the workshop. In response to this feedback from the public, several actions were rewritten and new actions were added. Also maps and explanatory material were added for clarity.

**Table 9-7 Issues Identified by the Public**

Action Number	Action	Agree	Disagree	Clarification Needed
1.1	Adopt Salt Ponds overlay district	24	1	6
1.2	Limit increase in zoning density	23	1	6
1.8	Develop a river corridor overlay district	19	2	8
3.4	Implement strategies by which the Westerly airport increases economic development opportunities	19	3	5
4.1	Implement economic development policies from 2008 Blue Ribbon Task Force report	17	0	5
5.1	Implement the existing (2006) affordable housing plan and review progress annually	24	3	7
5.5	Adopt regulations for housing seasonal hospitality and tourism industry employees	15	5	7
8.2	Review and revise planned resort development provision in the Westerly zoning ordinance	19	5	2
8.5	Insure that land-use regulations and decision makers consider implications and impacts on tourism, seasonal residents, year-round residents, and regional services	21	0	5
9.5	Establish and fund an annual appropriation to the Westerly Hospital to assist in reimbursement for uncompensated services for Westerly citizens	15	6	3



## 9.5 Community Survey

### 9.5.1 Introduction

A community survey was mailed to 1,000 randomly selected Westerly households during the early autumn of 2007. In order to ensure that representative samples of Westerly households received the survey, the survey distribution methodology was customized to fit Westerly's unique situation. For most of the town, the normal survey distribution methodology was employed: the consultant purchased addresses from a list broker and, having determined the number of surveys to be mailed, divided the number of addresses provided by the number to be mailed to find the proportion of addresses from that area of town to be used.

Another methodology was employed for the area south of Shore Road until it meets with Route 1 and east from there, south of Route 1. Addresses for these surveys were provided by the Westerly assessor's office and the identical methodology was employed to determine the proportion of those addresses that would be mailed surveys and to ensure random distribution. This methodology of using two sources of addresses for the same random mailing was justified by the need to ensure that a fair representation of all Westerly households was offered the opportunity to respond to the survey, including renters and – because there is such a high proportion of them – seasonal residents.

The community survey is the only scientifically executed element of the entire public input program for the Comprehensive Plan. In Westerly, of the 1,000 surveys distributed, 37 were returned undelivered and 329 completed useable surveys were received. This results in a margin of error of 4.44 at a 95 percent level of confidence. This means that the responses received are reliable, plus or minus the margin of error, 95 percent of the time. Margin of error comes into play when results are very close together. For example, if there was a result to a question that showed one opinion closer than 4.4 points from a differing opinion, no conclusion can be drawn because the responses are *within the margin of error*. These same results yield a 5.5 margin of error at the 99 percent level of confidence. Again, no conclusions could be drawn from the results of any questions with differences closer than 5.5 points from one another.

Although the survey is statistically reliable and was scientifically distributed, it is important to understand that the population answering the survey may not be representative of the total population of Westerly. Survey respondents tended to be older, better educated and wealthier than the population as a whole. They also tended to be home owners rather than renters. They are, however, representative of the population as a whole to an extent, and although the exercise is not perfect, the result yields an important and informative barometer of local attitudes.

The purpose of the community survey was to gather information about these local attitudes in a statistically reliable way. It is the broadest reaching of the public input techniques, covering more topics and questions than any of the other input techniques. The community survey also serves to reinforce the results of other public input techniques, serving to help ensure that the Comprehensive Plan accurately reflects the aspirations of the community.

### 9.5.2 Digest of Results

Respondents to the survey felt the town has a strong sense of identity and sense of community. Among respondents to the survey, 77 percent agreed or strongly agreed that Westerly has a strong sense of identity and 71 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they felt a sense of community in



Westerly. Similar proportions give the character and appearance of Westerly’s downtown and beach areas high approval – 71 percent and 64 percent respectively. Overwhelmingly, respondents to the survey indicated that they felt safe in Westerly, with almost 87 percent saying they agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe, compared with fewer than 12 percent who had no opinion on the matter and less than 2 percent who disagreed. There were no respondents who strongly disagreed that they felt safe in Westerly.

Respondents to the survey were emphatic in their endorsement of open space and cultural, historic and natural resources preservation. Among respondents, 83 percent said protecting open space from development should be a priority, with 44 percent who said they strongly agreed. Preservation of environmentally sensitive land was also named as a priority by more than 88 percent of respondents; and almost 92 percent want development to be planned to preserve waterfront, beaches and water quality. Respondents expressed similar strong feelings about historic areas, structures and landscapes with nearly 82 percent indicating they agreed or strongly agreed these should be identified and preserved.

The survey also asked about attitudes on a number of other issues, including traffic. When asked to pick among five major local streets where traffic is a “significant problem,” more respondents agreed or strongly agreed (73 percent) that Airport Road/Winnapaug Road was a problem. Franklin Street/Granite Street was the second-most significant problem street (65 percent) followed by, respectively, downtown (61 percent), Route 1 (58 percent) and Beach Street/Watch Hill Road (41 percent). A large proportion of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that downtown parking is a problem (73 percent) and while nearly 54 percent think that parking at the beach is a problem, 30 percent neither agreed nor disagreed that parking at the beach is a problem.

### ***9.5.3 Survey – Community and Government Services***

The purpose of the Community and Government Services questions in the survey is twofold. The first part of the section asks respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction that Westerly’s services are prepared for the future. The second part of this section asks respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements regarding community and government services. While survey respondents generally expressed overall satisfaction that their community and government services are prepared for the future, they are least satisfied that the streets, schools and water and sewer services are prepared for the future with 50 percent, 20 percent and 30 percent, respectively, saying they are somewhat dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the level of preparedness. They are more satisfied that parks and recreation – 66 percent either extremely or somewhat satisfied – fire (60 percent) and ambulance services (57 percent) are prepared for the future.



**Table 9-8 Survey: Community and Government Services Preparedness**

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
<b>My level of satisfaction that the following services are prepared for the future is:</b>					
<b>Police</b>	29.6%	23.8%	37.2%	8.8%	0.6%
<b>Fire</b>	39.8%	21.4%	36.4%	2.4%	0.0%
<b>Ambulance</b>	36.1%	21.2%	40.2%	2.5%	0.0%
<b>Streets</b>	5.0%	18.2%	26.3%	37.9%	12.5%
<b>Water and Sewer</b>	16.8%	21.1%	32.1%	19.0%	11.0%
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>	29.0%	37.0%	26.9%	7.1%	0.0%
<b>Schools</b>	16.9%	22.2%	41.3%	14.1%	5.6%

Overall respondents to the survey felt they are knowledgeable about town services, with 70 percent saying they strongly agree or agree that they are knowledgeable. Overwhelmingly, Westerly survey respondents felt safe in the town with 86 percent saying they agreed or strongly agreed they felt safe. Although concerns were raised about the quality of the community’s educational system in the public workshops held in July and August 2007, as well as in the focus groups, this concern failed to be strongly expressed in the survey, although a high rate, 41 percent, reported having no opinion. Respondents were split over the question as to whether the town is doing a sufficient job of managing growth, with 39 percent voicing no opinion, 1 percent strongly agreeing, 29.9 percent agreeing and 30 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

The results of this section of the survey are summarized below.

**Table 9-9 Survey: Community and Government Services Opinions**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>I feel I am knowledgeable about Town services and offices</b>	12.2%	51.7%	28.1%	7.3%	0.6%
<b>I feel safe in Westerly</b>	23.4%	63.2%	11.6%	1.8%	0.0%
<b>In general, I am satisfied with the value of town services I receive in return for taxes paid.</b>	10.0%	40.7%	23.1%	14.0%	12.2%
<b>The town is doing a sufficient job of managing growth.</b>	0.9%	29.9%	39.0%	24.2%	6.0%
<b>Westerly’s schools are excellent and add to our quality of life</b>	11.1%	23.2%	40.9%	17.6%	7.1%
<b>More adult educational offerings should be available</b>	8.4%	22.3%	59.1%	9.0%	1.2%



### 9.5.4 Survey – Community Identity and Design

The community character section of the survey deals with respondents’ attitudes about the community’s identity, appearance and mix of uses.

Westerly residents’ positive regard for the community is reinforced by the community character section of the survey. There were 67 percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that Westerly has a strong sense of identity and 70 percent felt a strong sense of community in Westerly. In addition, 64 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the beaches’ character and appearance is of high quality and a similar proportion, 69 percent, said the downtown’s appearance and character is of high quality. A somewhat smaller proportion, 55 percent, felt that the character and proportion of the community’s commercial buildings is of high quality. There were 69 percent who agreed or strongly agreed that the appearance of tourism-related development should be controlled.

Respondents favor encouragement of single-family residential development over mixed-use and multi-family development. Encouragement of retail development, light industrial and office parks was favored over the development of heavy industrial development.

The results of the community character section of the survey are summarized below.

**Table 9-10 Survey: Community Identity and Design**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Westerly has a strong sense of identity</b>	20.4%	56.3%	17.3%	5.3%	0.6%
<b>The character and appearance of Westerly’s commercial buildings is of high quality</b>	7.4%	47.2%	26.2%	14.8%	4.3%
<b>The character and appearance of our beaches is of high quality</b>	16.2%	47.4%	18.3%	16.5%	1.5%
<b>The character and appearance of Downtown is of high quality</b>	19.0%	51.7%	15.9%	13.3%	0.0%
<b>The town should encourage the following types of development:</b>					
Retail	17.5%	45.0%	17.8%	8.4%	11.3%
Light industrial/technical	12.4%	44.6%	26.4%	8.6%	8.0%
Heavy Industrial	10.2%	19.0%	19.7%	27.2%	23.9%
Office Parks	15.0%	33.9%	30.3%	10.1%	10.7%
Single-Family Residential	10.3%	41.7%	28.2%	9.9%	9.9%
Multi-Family Residential	5.2%	23.9%	30.6%	21.3%	19.0%
Mixed Uses: residential, retail and other commercial uses	3.3%	22.5%	41.5%	14.7%	18.0%
<b>Westerly should control the appearance of tourism-related development</b>	29.1%	39.6%	19.5%	6.2%	5.6%
<b>I feel a sense of community in Westerly</b>	14.2%	56.3%	17.0%	6.2%	6.2%



### 9.5.5 Survey – Land Use

The purpose of the land use section of the community survey is to assess residents’ opinions about the land uses and land use regulations in the community.

Survey respondents echo the sentiments of participants in the summer workshops and focus group members in overwhelmingly favoring protection of open space from development with 83 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that open space should be protected. While the community identity and design results suggest that mixed-use development is not supported, when asked if they support mixed-use development downtown, 61 percent agreed or strongly agreed.

Concerns raised in other forums about the adequacy and consistency of zoning code enforcement were somewhat supported, with 33 percent saying they agreed or strongly agreed that the code is effective and adequately enforced and 26 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; however, 41 percent appeared to not have a strong opinion on the matter. Survey respondents were not united in their attitudes about the location and density of new residential development in Westerly and they were also less united on housing affordability although housing affordability is clearly an issue in Westerly.

The table below summarizes the land use portion of the survey.

**Table 9-11 Survey: Land Use**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The existing zoning code is effective and adequately enforced	13.8%	19.0%	41.1%	18.7%	7.4%
Mixed use development along our downtown riverfront would improve the quality of life in Westerly	11.7%	49.1%	19.0%	14.1%	6.1%
The location and density of new residential development is appropriate	4.0%	25.9%	38.3%	20.4%	11.4%
The Town has a broad range of housing types to meet residents’ needs and is affordable for all incomes	7.7%	36.8%	29.1%	13.8%	12.6%
The land uses in and around beaches are appropriate	5.5%	33.4%	25.8%	29.1%	6.1%
There is enough public access to our beaches and the river	11.3%	53.4%	12.0%	13.2%	10.1%
The location and amount of industrial, commercial and retail development are appropriate.	4.0%	26.2%	36.0%	24.3%	9.5%
Protecting open space from development should be a priority	44.3%	38.7%	9.4%	6.0%	1.6%



### 9.5.6 Survey – Culture and History

The culture and history section of the survey assesses attitudes about the town’s cultural and historic resources. While this section contains just two statements, it affirms the opinions that have been gathered so far in the Comprehensive Plan process – that is, that Westerly residents would like to encourage cultural activities and overwhelmingly favor the preservation of the town’s historic resources.

The table below summarizes the culture and history section of the survey.

**Table 9-12 Survey: Culture and History**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>The town should encourage additional cultural facilities and programs (concert hall, theater, music, art).</b>	22.1%	49.1%	20.6%	8.3%	0.0%
<b>Identification and preservation of the town’s historic areas, structures and landscapes is a priority</b>	26.5%	55.2%	14.3%	4.0%	0.0%

### 9.5.7 Survey – Transportation

The transportation section of the survey helps to gauge residents’ opinions about the transportation system and to set priorities for recommendations for improvement to the transportation system in the town. In addition to seeking respondents’ opinions about roads, the section also seeks opinions about pedestrian circulation, public transportation and rail.

Concerns about traffic congestion have been raised through the public input program and the community survey results confirm residents’ frustration with the road network. Among five roads or intersections named as possible traffic congestion sites, survey respondents said Airport Road/Winnapaug Road was the most significant problem with 73 percent indicating they agreed or strongly agreed, followed by Franklin Street/Granite Street, 64 percent; downtown, 60 percent; Route 1, 58 percent; and Beach Street/Watch Hill Road, 40 percent.

More than 50 percent of respondents felt the town is not adequately served by public transportation; and 63 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the town needs commuter rail accessibility. When asked about priorities for future funding, 80 percent agreed or strongly agreed that greenways and trails should be funded, followed by public transportation, 67 percent; parking at multi-modal centers, 63 percent; and sidewalks, 56 percent.



The results of the transportation section of the survey are summarized below.

**Table 9-13 Survey: Transportation**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Traffic is a significant problem on the following streets:</b>					
US 1(Route 78 to Dunn's Corners)	37.5%	20.9%	12.8%	28.1%	0.6%
Airport Road/Winnapaug Road	42.8%	30.6%	11.0%	15.3%	0.3%
Franklin Street/Granite Street	35.7%	28.9%	17.7%	17.7%	0.0%
Beach Street/Watch Hill Road	19.7%	20.9%	34.2%	21.5%	3.7%
Downtown	24.7%	35.8%	22.8%	14.5%	2.2%
<b>Downtown parking is a problem</b>	33.5%	39.4%	11.5%	15.5%	0.0%
<b>Parking at our beaches is a problem</b>	26.3%	28.1%	28.8%	14.4%	2.5%
<b>The quality and safety of our town road system is adequate for the current population and future growth</b>	11.8%	23.8%	31.6%	26.3%	6.5%
<b>The town is adequately served by public transportation</b>	6.5%	13.8%	25.8%	34.2%	19.7%
<b>Pedestrian safety is an issue/problem</b>	6.4%	35.4%	33.4%	24.2%	0.6%
<b>To mitigate some traffic issues, the town should increase funding of:</b>					
Sidewalks to connect neighborhoods and/or retail	22.7%	33.5%	31.6%	11.8%	0.3%
Greenways and trails (pedestrian/bike/walking trails)	36.9%	43.1%	13.1%	6.9%	0.0%
Public transportation (bus, trolley)	20.6%	46.3%	20.3%	12.9%	0.0%
Parking at the town's transportation hubs (railroad station, bus/trolley stops, airport)	24.1%	39.0%	25.7%	11.1%	0.0%
<b>Commuter rail accessibility should be a high priority</b>	38.7%	24.4%	24.4%	9.5%	2.9%

### 9.5.8 Survey – Environment

The purpose of the environment section of the survey is to gain insight into respondents' attitudes about environmental issues in the town, including environmental protection and opinions about the adequacy of the town's efforts to address pollution and litter.

As anticipated by the input gained in the other elements of the process, Westerly survey respondents overwhelmingly endorsed identification and protection of the town's environmentally sensitive lands. Eighty-nine percent agreed or strongly agreed that environmentally sensitive lands should be protected with 51 percent saying they strongly agreed; and 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed that development should be planned in a way that preserves waterfront, beaches and water quality.



Survey respondents generally endorsed the town’s efforts to address noise, light and air pollution and litter control. However, a large proportion of respondents seemed to have no strong opinion, suggesting they felt too uninformed to provide one.

The table below summarizes the environmental section of the survey.

**Table 9-14 Survey: Environment**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Identifying and protecting the town’s environmentally sensitive lands should be a priority.</b>	50.6%	38.1%	10.7%	0.6%	0.0%
<b>Development should be planned to preserve waterfront, beaches and water quality.</b>	46.0%	45.7%	5.5%	1.2%	1.5%
<b>The town is doing a sufficient job to address the following issues:</b>					
Noise Pollution	5.9%	37.0%	32.7%	17.0%	7.4%
Light Pollution	8.3%	42.6%	37.7%	9.0%	2.5%
Air Pollution	7.9%	34.9%	44.7%	10.7%	1.9%
Litter Control	9.5%	34.4%	30.1%	20.6%	5.5%
<b>Appropriate steps are being taken to address erosion, storm water runoff and other sources that pollute surface and groundwater resources</b>	4.4%	22.7%	38.9%	24.3%	9.7%

### 9.5.9 Survey – Parks and Recreation

The purpose of the parks and recreation section of the survey is to gauge respondents’ opinion about the level of service of parks and recreation spaces and programs in the town and to set the direction for recommendations for future parks and recreation provision.

Survey respondents support the development of the town’s riverfront with green space for enjoyment with 50 percent indicating they agreed and 29 percent saying they strongly agreed. The other statements in this section failed to gain a similar level of support. There were a high proportion of respondents who did not express a strong opinion. In an open-ended question asking what kinds of parks and recreation developments are needed, the largest proportion of responses mentioned bike and walking trails.



The table below summarizes the parks and recreation section of the survey.

**Table 9-15 Survey: Parks and Recreation**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Additional parks are needed in the town</b>	13.9%	20.4%	34.9%	25.9%	4.9%
<b>The riverfront should be developed with more green space for residents to enjoy</b>	28.8%	49.7%	21.2%	0.3%	0.0%
<b>More passive recreational opportunities (bird watching, nature watching) are needed in Westerly</b>	13.6%	27.2%	40.6%	17.0%	1.5%
<b>More active recreational opportunities (hiking, biking, swimming, fishing, golfing) are needed in Westerly</b>	14.0%	30.2%	34.0%	18.4%	3.4%
<b>Additional recreation facilities (baseball/softball, soccer, pool, ice rink, community center, youth center, etc.) are needed</b>	9.5%	29.7%	29.7%	25.2%	6.0%
<b>I am willing to pay more for more/better recreation facilities</b>	4.6%	30.5%	29.5%	18.8%	16.6%

### *9.5.10 Survey – Economy and Business Services*

The purpose of the economy and business services section of the survey is to gauge respondents’ opinions about the existing business climate in the town and about the ways it can be improved in the future. The results of the survey are used as the basis for recommendations on ways to improve the economy and business climate in the town.

A higher proportion of respondents shop in Westerly than don’t, 61 percent to 39 percent, and there is not clear support for large-scale retail establishments in the town. An almost equal proportion of respondents disagreed that such developments are needed: 44 percent disagreed, while 39 percent agreed. However, when asked whether support for local business development, entrepreneurs and job creation is needed, 73 percent agreed or strongly agreed that such support is needed. Jobs that retain young families in town are supported: 75 percent agreed or strongly agreed that such development is important. Respondents overwhelmingly support the idea that new development should pay its own way for infrastructure and other costs: 86 percent said they agreed or strongly agreed that development should pay its own way.

There was not a strong level of support for enhancing tourism in the town: 15 percent strongly agreed and 33 percent agreed that tourism should be enhanced, but 20 percent disagreed and 23 percent had no opinion on the question. When asked specifically to support ideas for enhancing tourism, there was more support for making Westerly easier to get around, making it more visually appealing and creating more family-friendly activities and attractions than developing heritage and other attractions to appeal to older adults. The most support, 77 percent, was for enhanced open space, both on and off the beach.



The economy and business services section is summarized in the table below.

**Table 9-16 Survey: Economy and Business Services**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>The town should support business development and local entrepreneurs to generate well-paying jobs</b>	25.7%	46.1%	24.5%	1.6%	2.2%
<b>More large-scale destination retail is needed in Westerly</b>	12.5%	26.6%	16.6%	24.1%	20.1%
<b>I do the majority of my shopping in Westerly</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>			
	61.1%	38.9%			
<b>More jobs sufficient to retain more of our young families are needed in Westerly</b>	26.8%	48.2%	19.2%	3.8%	1.9%
<b>Westerly should attract a recognizable brand name national hotel chain to support growth of business and Westerly's economy</b>	20.1%	31.5%	17.3%	15.1%	16.0%
<b>Westerly should develop a new industrial/office park to help attract research, technology and light industrial businesses</b>	17.6%	47.8%	21.0%	9.9%	3.7%
<b>New development projects should pay their fair share of the cost for infrastructure and other improvements</b>	49.2%	36.8%	10.2%	2.8%	0.9%
<b>Tourism development needs to be enhanced in Westerly</b>	15.0%	33.4%	22.5%	20.6%	8.4%
<b>How should Westerly enhance tourism development?</b>					
Concentrate on making the town more visually appealing	15.5%	52.4%	21.7%	9.7%	0.6%
Concentrate on making the town easier to get around	23.5%	46.3%	23.8%	5.9%	0.7%
Develop family-friendly attractions and activities	15.8%	47.3%	28.0%	7.7%	1.3%
Develop cultural/heritage tourism to appeal to older people	14.5%	46.9%	29.6%	6.8%	2.3%
Enhance open space and recreation on and off the beach	25.6%	51.5%	18.4%	3.6%	1.0%