

THE RHODE ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING STANDARDS
GUIDANCE HANDBOOK SERIES

**GUIDANCE HANDBOOK #4:
PLANNING FOR HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES**

APPROVED BY THE STATE PLANNING COUNCIL

January 14, 2015

The general assembly hereby establishes a series of goals to provide overall direction and consistency for state and municipal agencies in the comprehensive planning process established by this chapter. [...] To promote the protection of the natural, historic and cultural resources of each municipality and the state.

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsection 45-22.2-3(c)(4)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Guidance Handbook Series is the result of over twenty-four months of cooperation and coordination among state agencies, local planners and other professionals interested in helping cities and towns craft better comprehensive plans. The guidance development process was overseen by the Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee, a dedicated group of planning, land use, legal and community professionals who worked diligently to develop content on the comprehensive planning process and to review topical content as it was developed. Without this group the manual would not have become reality.

Additionally, the topical content for the guidance handbook series was developed in conversation with numerous experts, including staff from the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program. These knowledgeable individuals are the reason that the manual is helpful, user-friendly and thorough.

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook is meant to be an accompaniment to the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual (“the Standards Manual”), providing additional information on the historic and cultural resource-related standards contained within the manual, as well as general guidance on planning for historic and cultural resources. The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual and the other guidance handbooks in the series can be found online at www.planning.ri.gov/statewideplanning/complanning/.

This manual is split into two sections. [Section 1 - General Information on Planning for Historic and Cultural Resources](#) provides general information, including the purpose of doing so, relevant documents to review and ways to connect historic and cultural resources and the other topical areas. [Section 2 - Fulfilling the Standards](#) provides information on satisfying the specific requirements presented in the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual.

NOTES

In some cases, this guidebook presents “notes” that are relative to the content being discussed. Each note that occurs within the text will be tagged with a symbol to alert the reader to the note’s purpose, as shown below.



This symbol is used to identify references to the Rhode Island General Laws (RIGL). Blue text within this note provides a link to the actual RIGL citation.



This symbol alerts the reader to something that is required for State approval.



This symbol alerts the reader to potential data sources.



The text following this symbol provides additional suggestions to enhance comprehensive plans.



This symbol alerts the reader to sample goals, policies and actions that would fulfill the requirements.



This symbol indicates general information that is secondary to the main point of the text, but could be helpful to the municipality.



This symbol alerts the reader to a cross-reference within the guidebook series. If a concept is mentioned in the text area and more information on the concept is available elsewhere in the guidebook series, this note will point the reader to where to find it.

**SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON PLANNING FOR
HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES**

WHAT ARE HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES?

Historic and cultural resources are markers of our collective heritage and may include properties, structures, natural objects, places, landmarks, landscapes, and archaeological sites that the community has determined to be significant and therefore worthy of protection.

WHY INCLUDE HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES?

An understanding of where a community came from—its heritage—is essential to plan for what it will become. The physical remnants that represent this heritage tell us a story about the way that people lived, their values, and how the built environment changed over time. These resources help foster a connection to the past and our interconnectedness with other human beings, both past and present, and the environment. They also contribute to the character of a specific place and help determine its quality of life. A community’s understanding of itself also evolves through its arts and culture, which is why these topics have been included in this chapter as well. Including historic and cultural resources as part of the planning process ensures that these significant resources are considered when formulating decisions about the built environment.



The required content for related to historic and cultural resources stems from the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsections [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(2\)](#), [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(5\)](#) and [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(12\)](#).

RELEVANT STATE GOALS AND POLICIES

Every comprehensive plan must be consistent with and embody the State’s goals and policies for historic and cultural resources as found in the State Guide Plan and the laws of the State. The goals and policies listed below represent the main themes of the State’s goals and policies for historic and cultural resources and are intended to provide focus as to which aspects of the State’s goals and policies are most important for local comprehensive planning.



See the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsections [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(1\)](#) and [45-22.2-9\(d\)\(3\)](#).

FROM THE STATE GUIDE PLAN

Preserve historic buildings, districts, and archaeological sites.

[Land Use 2025: Rhode Island’s State Land Use Policies and Plan, LUP 24, page 2-10](#)

Excellence in community design: communities that are high quality, energy efficient, safe, healthful, distinct, diverse, and aesthetically pleasing; communities that are rich in natural, historical, cultural, & recreational resources; communities that provide abundant economic opportunities.

[Land Use 2025: Rhode Island’s State Land Use Policies and Plan, Goal 3, page 5-10](#)

Preserve and enhance special districts and special places, supporting particular uses and resources.

[Land Use 2025: Rhode Island’s State Land Use Policies and Plan, Goal 3, Objective 3B page 5-10](#)

Encourage more widespread use of historic district zoning.

State Guide Plan Element 110: Goals and Policies, Goal 11, Policy 2, page 11

Utilize historical survey and planning programs to emphasize and preserve the identity of historic neighborhoods and communities.

State Guide Plan Element 110: Goals and Policies, Goal 11, Policy 4, page 11

Invest in arts and culture to build on Rhode Island's identity as a cultural destination.

Rhode Island Rising: A Plan for People, Places and Prosperity, Goal 3, Policy 3, page 76

Enhance and preserve historic and other aspects of neighborhoods and communities which add identity and character.

State Housing Plan, 1-2-3 Stabilizing and Protecting Existing Areas, Policy B, page 1.2

FROM THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL LAWS

The general assembly finds that the historical, architectural, and cultural heritage of the state of Rhode Island should be preserved as a part of our life to enrich the experience of present and future generations, and that the continued expansion of urban development threatens the existence of our historical sites and structures.

Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, RIGL section 42-45-1

The preservation of structures of historic and architectural value and historic cemeteries, wherever located within a city or town, are declared to be a public purpose, and any city or town council has the power by ordinance to regulate the construction, alteration, repair, moving, and demolition of these structures within the limits of the city or town.

Historical Area Zoning, RIGL section 45-24.1-1

It is declared to be the policy of the state to join with the federal government, private patrons, and institutions and professional organizations concerned with the arts to insure that the role of the arts in the life of Rhode Island communities will continue to grow and will play an ever more significant part in the welfare and educational experience of our citizens.

Rhode Island Council on the Arts, RIGL section 42-75-1

OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Before beginning assessment of existing conditions, needs and trends, and before developing new goals, policies and actions, communities should review other state and local plans and other documents that are relevant to planning for historic and cultural resources, including:

- Any local historic and cultural preservation plans that may be available;
- State historic resource surveys for each city and town, available at <http://www.preservation.ri.gov/survey/publications.php>;
- The "Rhode Island State Historical Preservation Plan," State Guide Plan Element 140, available at http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/guide_plan/shpp140.pdf; and
- The RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission's "Saving for the Future: A Statewide Preservation Plan for Rhode Island," available at http://www.preservation.ri.gov/pdfs_zips_downloads/resources_pdfs/2012state-plan.pdf.

STAKEHOLDERS TO INCLUDE

In addition to the general public, when discussing how best to plan for historic and cultural resources, municipalities may benefit from involving:

- Owners of historic buildings and homes;
- Representatives from local preservation advocacy group;
- Representatives from the local Historical Society;
- Representatives from local museums, cultural institutions, and sites;
- Members of the local arts community;
- Preserve Rhode Island; and
- Representatives from the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission.

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE PLAN

While historic and cultural resources are not a new topic for comprehensive plans, there is value in considering the ways in which this topic can be more integrated with the other topical areas. It is important that municipalities not consider the topic areas in as segregated elements, but rather as pieces of a larger system. Everything within a community is connected in diverse and varied ways, all of which should be considered when crafting a comprehensive plan. The information provided below is intended to highlight a few of the ways that municipalities should think about the connected nature of the topic areas.

RELATIONSHIP TO LAND USE

A community's historic and cultural resources directly shape the character of a community. The context in which these resources are set impacts their contribution to the built environment. In areas that directly abut historic districts, archaeological sites, scenic view corridors, etc., it is especially important to be sensitive to the context and to site new development appropriately so as not to interfere with the character that these resources confer on a particular area.

RELATIONSHIP TO NATURAL RESOURCES

Some aspects of historic and cultural resources are inextricably linked with natural resources, especially as they relate to scenic areas and view corridors. Communities should consider opportunities for combining efforts to protect and preserve natural resource areas with historic and cultural resources. Areas with high natural resource value and historic or cultural value should be considered of particularly high value in protection and preservation efforts.

RELATIONSHIP TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Rhode Island's rich cultural and historic resources contribute significantly to its economy in a wide variety of ways. Places with a rich sense of history and culture directly draw tourists and contribute to the local economy. Adaptive reuse of older buildings for new purposes, such as mill buildings for residential lofts and artist live-work space is another example of the ways in which preserving historic resources can ignite economic development.

SECTION 2. FULFILLING THE STANDARDS

STANDARD 4.1

IDENTIFY HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCE AREAS AND SITES (SUCH AS, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, HISTORICAL BUILDINGS, LANDMARKS, AND SCENIC VIEWS) BY:

- a. Including one or more maps showing:
 - i. Properties or districts listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places; and
 - ii. Locally designated historic districts established through the zoning ordinance.
 - b. Including clear identification of the name of each mapped resource area and/or site.
-

To properly plan for the protection of historic and cultural resources, municipalities must have an understanding of what currently exists in their community. The best way to understand the historic and cultural context, is to identify the resources areas and sites on a map.



CRAFT A BETTER PLAN

Additionally, while not required, communities may wish to map valuable or significant historic and cultural resources that have not been officially designated, including:

- Any known properties that meet the eligibility criteria for listing on the State Register of Historic Places but have not yet been listed as such;
- The community's cultural assets, such as theaters, museums and galleries; and
- Other resources that the community has identified as significant.



For guidance on determining which resources are significant, see Standard 4.2.

The purpose of identifying these resources on a map is to assist the community in allocating future land uses and developing policies and implementation actions for the preservation of such resources.



DATA SOURCES

To fulfill this standard, communities may want to use the following data sources:

- State Survey Overviews for each city and town in Rhode Island available at <http://www.preservation.ri.gov/survey/publications.php>.
- Discussions with local historic preservation groups or stakeholders.
- Data from the RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, available at www.rihphc.ri.gov.

STANDARD 4.2

ASSESS ISSUES RELATED TO HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES BY INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

- a. A discussion of the significant historic and cultural resource areas, types and/or sites that exist within the community;
 - b. Discussion of any current or potential future threats to the community's significant historic and cultural resources; and
 - c. Identification of any existing local programs related to the management of historic and cultural resources, such as a local historic district ordinance.
-

Identifying historic and cultural resources on a map is the first step in determining the community's needs related to historic and cultural resources. Building on the understanding of the resources that exist within the municipality, comprehensive plans must include an assessment of the issues that the community's significant resources may be facing.

It is not necessary to discuss all of the community's historic and cultural resource areas and sites, only those that the community deems as significant. The community's significant historic and cultural resources may be discussed individually as specific properties, as historic districts or areas, or by classifying them into categories or types. The discussion should highlight the significance of the resource, area or resource type to the community, including any special or unique characteristics.

It is important to remember that the officially designated resources and resource areas may not encompass all of the community's significant historic and cultural assets. When determining what is significant to the community, it may be helpful to review the following list:

- **Residential Resources:** Residential, neighborhoods, multifamily dwellings, individual homes, gardens, including examples of locally significant or distinctive building traditions and styles;
- **Commercial Resources:** Commercial districts, marketplaces, and individual buildings (e.g., general stores, offices, etc.);
- **Industrial Resources:** Mills, factories, industrial complexes, etc., as well as locally significant industries and traditional occupations and skills;
- **Institutional Resources:** Institutional districts and individual buildings (e.g., schools, churches, etc.), especially those that may be architecturally significant;
- **Transportation Resources:** Roadways, bridges, pedestrian ways, footpaths and trails, railroad tracks, structures and buildings, trolleys, streetcars lines and cars or equipment, canals, waterways and landing areas, airports and airfields, gateways;
- **Rural Resources:** Landscapes, farm complexes, barns, etc.; and
- **Other Historic, Archaeological and Cultural Resources:** Community landmarks (natural or man-made), battlegrounds, gardens, parks, scenic views, cemeteries, burial grounds, etc.

When assessing the threats that the community's significant historic and cultural resources may be facing now or in the future, communities should consider the following guiding questions:

- Is the community currently carrying out any measures to manage or protect the resources that it has identified as significant?

- Are there any historic districts currently designated within the municipality? How well are they preserving the community’s historic and cultural resources?
- Are any historic or cultural resources threatened due to encroachment of human activities, unintended land use conflicts or physical disturbance, or rapid physical deterioration?
- What is the likelihood that the identified historic/cultural properties are currently, or will be in the future, affected by inappropriate land uses or other human activities?
- Are there any policies or activities currently in effect that will adversely impact the community’s historic cultural resources?
- Are any inconsistencies, competing priorities, or conflicts evident between the protection of historic and cultural resources and the other elements of the comprehensive plan?
- Are there opportunities for coordination with other elements of the comprehensive plan?



CRAFT A BETTER PLAN

While not required, it may also be helpful to include a discussion of the historic context of the community. This could include a description of the broad patterns of growth and development within the community that may be represented by historic properties and cultural and archaeological sites. This information should serve as the basis for decisions about the identification, evaluation, and treatment of historic and cultural resources.



DATA SOURCES

To fulfill this standard, communities may want to hold discussions with local historic preservation groups or stakeholders.

STANDARD 4.3

INCLUDE GOALS THAT EMBODY THE STATE'S GOALS FOR HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES AND POLICIES TO SUPPORT EACH GOAL.

The goals and policies of the State call for the protection and enhancement of our cultural heritage. Comprehensive plans must include one or more goals that further the State's aim of preserving significant historic and cultural resources, as well as policies to support each goal. The goals and policies that may be appropriate for a community's comprehensive plan will depend on the nature and desires of the community, especially the quantity and quality of historic and cultural resources and their level of protection. To determine the goals and policies that will best protect significant historic and cultural resources, municipalities should consider the following guiding questions:

- What are the community's priorities for the preservation of its significant resources?
- What is the current level of protection for resources that the community has deemed significant?
- Are there any significant buildings, sites, view corridors, archaeological sites, etc. that may experience a threat over the next twenty years?



For more information on the difference between goals, policies and implementation actions, see Guidance Handbook #1 - The Comprehensive Plan 101.



SAMPLE GOALS

- Our community will present itself in a manner that is culturally aware and physically welcoming.
- Our community will protect and promote all of its significant historic and cultural resources.
- Our community will be characterized by historic neighborhoods that meet the needs for families of varied income levels.



SAMPLE POLICIES

- Discourage the demolition of historic buildings and structures and encourage their adaptive use and renovation.
- Enhance access to resources for arts and cultural organizations.
- Protect, preserve and promote a high quality built environment in our community.
- Promote community design that contributes to a sense of place.
- Preserve the historic buildings, districts and areas that contribute positively to our community's character.
- Promote and encourage understanding of the community's unique history through its cultural and historic sites.
- Build and foster neighborhood vitality through increased access and diversified cultural participation.

- Preserve scenic views and corridors.
- Protect and preserve historic and cultural resources through the use of design standards, zoning controls, easements, and other tools.
- Protect and encourage the use of State and Federal historic tax credits for adaptive reuse of historic structures by private developers.

STANDARD 4.4

Include implementation actions within the Implementation Program that address:

THE PROTECTION OF HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES.

Historic and cultural resources help shape the character and overall sense of place in Rhode Island. Municipalities must adopt implementation actions that are proactive in helping to maintain this character through preservation of resources of historic and cultural significance. When determining the best implementation actions for preserving historic and cultural resources, communities should consider the following guiding questions:

- Have historic and cultural resources been identified and documented adequately for use by decision-makers and the public?
- What can be done to strengthen the role that historic and cultural resources play in our community?
- What tools and techniques for preserving our community's cultural heritage are available and how can the community use and promote the use of the appropriate tools and techniques?
- What measures are currently being used to manage or protect resources? How can these measures be better supported?
- How do the municipality's regulatory policies benefit or hinder adaptive reuse of historic structures?
- What mechanisms could be introduced for the protection of scenic views and vistas, archaeological sites, cultural resources, etc.?
- Do existing municipal regulations, such as zoning and land development regulations, need improvement so that our resources will be better protected?
- Are there potential partners such as local preservation groups, interested citizens, local arts organizations with whom the municipality can partner to implement the goals and strategies?



SAMPLE ACTIONS

- Establish historic districts as recommended by the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission.
- Create incentives for property owners to renovate and preserve their historic properties.
- Appoint committee to study the possibility of designating additional historic districts that will be protected by zoning regulations.
- Evaluate local historic districts for possible expansion, consider the designation of additional districts and consider different levels of historic district controls for individual districts.
- Create, fund and staff a Historic District Commission to advocate and oversee resource protection as an integral part of the planning process.
- Develop a program to encourage local merchants to preserve and protect historic features of Main Streets buildings.
- Adopt a demolition delay ordinance.

- Maintain a database of parcels within local historic districts and Special Flood Hazard Areas or the projected sea level rise areas to monitor impacts to these areas and coordinate with property owners on potential strategies to protect historic assets in town.
- Coordinate with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) and the municipal Historic District Commission (HDC) to identify options and resources to assist owners of historic buildings to flood-proof or elevate their property while preserving the historic integrity of the property and district.
- Establish local incentives and guidelines for historic property owners who voluntarily propose to elevate a structure above base flood elevation or otherwise flood-proof their property so as to not unfairly penalize owners of historically-significant properties who are actively working to meet the goals of climate resilience.

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