

# 1. Introduction

Riverhead is a community rich in natural, historic, and scenic resources that is experiencing powerful forces of change. Riverhead continues to be the most important agricultural community in Suffolk County and one of the most important in the State. Riverhead's unique landscape also includes waterfront areas on the Great Peconic Bay, Flanders Bay, and Long Island Sound; portions of the Central Pine Barrens and the scenic Peconic River; and distinctive bluffs and woodlands along the Sound. The Town has an historic Main Street and hamlet centers, like Jamesport and Aquebogue.

With change, there are both opportunities and risks. Enterprise Park at Calverton promises to attract new businesses and jobs. Increasing tourism is drawing more visitors into downtown, Jamesport hamlet, and the wine country, where they spend money on overnight accommodations, cultural events and attractions, meals, and specialty items like antiques and crafts. Retailers along Route 58 are drawing shoppers from the entire East End, as well as in the western part of Suffolk County.

At the same, local residents know the downsides of growth all too well: disappearing open space; increasing threats to natural resources; worsening traffic congestion; overburdened community facilities; proliferation of unattractive sprawl and strip development; and worst of all, a diminishment of the Town's unique countryside character that attracted so many residents in the first place.

Recognizing these opportunities and pressures, the Town Board, with the assistance of the Planning Board, embarked upon the preparation of this Comprehensive Plan in the late 1990s. Early on, the Town established a goal to develop a plan that fully takes into account the concerns of the community and strives for fair, balanced solutions to complex problems. Working with local consultants, the Town coupled extensive research and field work with a multifaceted community outreach process.

## 1.1 COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROCESS

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For the purposes of the Comprehensive Plan, the Town's outreach process included everything from public workshops, to surveys, to interviews with key stakeholders. By using a variety of techniques, the Town was able to hear from a broad range of townspeople, including downtown business leaders, concerned residents, farmers, social service organizations, environmental advocacy groups, participants of Riverhead Vision 2020, and many others.

Although public outreach increased the time involved with preparing the Comprehensive Plan, it was time well spent. The outreach process was extremely effective in soliciting concerns, ideas, and opinions from the public. The comments that were obtained played *the* essential role in writing and rewriting the goals and policies in this document, ultimately resulting in a better plan for the community's future.

## **CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

At the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan process, the Planning Board established and organized a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to oversee the preparation of plan. The members of the CAC included local residents, property owners, businesspeople, representatives of neighborhood groups, members of Riverhead Vision 2020, and other representatives of the community. Serving in an advisory capacity to the Planning Board, the CAC was responsible for raising issues of concern and reviewing and commenting on first drafts of chapters in the plan as they were released. (CAC members are listed on the Acknowledgments page.)

Two rounds of CAC meetings were held, as discussed below. All CAC meetings were held in Town Hall, were open to the general public, and were noticed in local newspapers. Through the CAC meetings, anyone interested in the Town's future was invited to express his or her viewpoints.

### **Round One Workshops**

The first series of CAC workshops was held in the spring and summer of 1999. During the very first workshop, facilitators from the firm of Abeles Phillips Preiss & Shapiro conducted a "SWOT" analysis. The acronym "SWOT" stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The exercise was intended to identify those attributes of the Town that people liked or disliked (strengths and weaknesses) and those evolving trends that had the potential to positively or negatively impact the Town (opportunities and threats).

The session was an interactive, audience-based discussion of the whole Town. People called out ideas, and facilitators wrote them down on large sheets of paper. As the pages were filled, one by one, they were pinned up throughout the room. By the end of the session, the walls were literally papered with the issues, concerns, and ideas that were ultimately considered and explored in drafting the Comprehensive Plan. Members of the Planning Board and staff from the Town's Planning Department and the Community Development Department attended many of the meetings.

The SWOT analysis was just the beginning. What followed were 12 separate workshops, each focusing on a particular topic of concern. Like the SWOT analysis, the format of these subsequent workshops was interactive and audience-based, where people could call out ideas, and facilitators took notes. The discussion topics were as follows:

- Downtown
- Transportation
- Business Districts
- Parks and Recreation
- Natural Resources
- Waterfront
- Infrastructure
- Economic Development

- Agriculture
- Scenic and Historic Resources
- Community Facilities and Services
- Housing

## **Round Two Workshops**

During the Round One workshops, two notions quickly became apparent. First, CAC members and the general public were most immediately concerned about downtown revitalization and agricultural land preservation. Second, CAC members wanted to be closely involved in the drafting of each element of the Comprehensive Plan. Thus, it was decided that first two steps of the Comprehensive Plan drafting would be to prepare (1) a Downtown Revitalization Strategy (portions of which would eventually be incorporated into the Plan) and (2) the Agriculture Element of the Comprehensive Plan. It was also decided that a second round of workshops would be necessary, so that CAC members would have an opportunity to review and comment on first drafts of the plan's elements.

The first workshops during Round Two were held in early 2000 for the purposes of reviewing and discussing the Downtown Revitalization Strategy. Based on comments received from the CAC meeting, the Strategy was revised and approved by the CAC in summer 2000, and subsequently adopted by the Planning Board. In summer and fall 2000, workshops were held on the first drafts of the Agriculture Element. Subsequently, between early 2001 and early 2002, the remaining Round Two workshops were held.

During each workshop, the Town's consultants presented one or more draft elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Multiple copies of the draft chapters as well as executive summaries were made available at the beginning of each meeting. Presentation-size maps and diagrams were prepared and used as the basis for discussion. Draft chapters and maps were also made available on the Town's web site, <[www.riverheadli.com](http://www.riverheadli.com)>. PowerPoint presentations were made for some of the chapters. Many of the Round Two workshops were videotaped and later aired on cable, helping to keep informed those members of the community who might not have been able to attend a workshop.

Throughout the Round Two workshops, members of the CAC and the general public were invited to pose questions, offer suggestions, proffer new ideas, point out omissions or corrections in the draft text, or make any other comments. Again, the consultants noted all the points raised during the workshops. Subsequent to the meetings, some individuals and organizations also submitted written letters and comments to the Town on the draft chapters.

## **Surveys and Interviews**

While the CAC meetings were taking place, the Town was also busy conducting two additional outreach initiatives: surveys and interviews. Multi-page surveys were distributed to all households on the topic of the downtown area. The purpose of the survey was to assess shopping trends and understand concerns about the downtown area. The results of the survey were

instrumental in preparing the Downtown Revitalization Strategy, as well as the goals and policies related to downtown in this document. The survey also included an invitation for people to get involved in the CAC workshops.

Also, the Town's consultants conducted interviews with various public, private, and non-profit organizations in order to obtain their unique perspectives on the Town's needs. Among the organizations interviewed were:

- Atlantis Aquarium;
- Business Improvement District (BID) in downtown Riverhead;
- Merchants and property owners in downtown Riverhead;
- Merchants in Aquebogue, Jamesport, and Wading River;
- Parking District in downtown Riverhead;
- Riverhead Central School District;
- Riverhead Free Library;
- Riverhead Senior Center;
- Riverhead Vision 2020;
- Riverhead Volunteer Ambulance Corps;
- Social service providers;
- Suffolk County Department of Health Services, Riverhead Health Center;
- Suffolk County Department of Health;
- Suffolk County Historical Society;
- The proposed Science Center children's museum;
- The Town's four fire districts;
- Various Town departments, including Police, Engineering, Recreation, and Community Development

## **RIVERHEAD VISION 2020**

Finally, the outreach process for the Comprehensive Plan was coordinated with Riverhead Vision 2020, an independent, grass roots initiative organized by resident (and CAC member) August Field with the purpose of developing a long-range vision for the Town's future.

The Vision 2020 process was composed of a series of "study circles" in which participants raised issues of concern and brainstormed new ideas. Among some of the recurrent themes discussed in those meetings were the need for growth, cultural traditions, the rural atmosphere of Riverhead, recreation needs for youth, and improved connections between business, civic, health and human service organizations. More than 200 people attended study circles in spring and summer 2000.

The process culminated in a Vision Fair in June 2000, where participants voted on potential actions for improving the Town's quality of life, particularly in the downtown area. Many of these recommendations were compatible with the proposals in the Downtown Revitalization Strategy, such as the improvement and expansion of Grangebél Park. In addition to August Field, other members of Riverhead Vision 2020 were active participants in the Town's CAC meetings. In this way, there was cross-fertilization between the two processes.

## **1.2 CONTENTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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The Comprehensive Plan is composed of eleven different elements, each dealing with a distinct topical area of the community. Each element contains goals and recommendations specific to that topic area. The Proposed Land Use Plan in Chapter 2 weaves together those goals and recommendations into a single, coherent plan for development and conservation, providing a snapshot of what the Town would be expected to look like in the future. The other ten elements of the plan are organized as follows:

- Chapter 3: Agriculture Element
- Chapter 4: Natural Resources Conservation Element
- Chapter 5: Scenic and Historic Resources Preservation Element
- Chapter 6: Business Districts Element
- Chapter 7: Economic Development Element
- Chapter 8: Housing Element
- Chapter 9: Transportation Element
- Chapter 10: Utility Service Element
- Chapter 11: Parks and Recreation Element
- Chapter 12: Community Facilities Element

The first drafts of many of these chapters included a detailed inventory and analysis of demographic data, economic and business trends, land use patterns, transportation infrastructure, public facilities and programs, and other background information. This information is presented in summary form in the elements listed above; the detailed inventory and analysis has been moved to the appendices. The reason for doing so was to make the plan more concise and easier to read.

## **1.3 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS**

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Preparation of the Comprehensive Plan was undertaken concurrently with two other planning efforts: the Downtown Revitalization Strategy, which was completed in August 2000; and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP), which was being prepared as of October 2003.

The Downtown Revitalization Strategy provides a plan for "retooling" Main Street toward tourists and visitors, building off of the North Fork's emerging tourism market. The strategy was reviewed and approved by the CAC and subsequently adopted by the Town Board. Many of the recommendations in the Downtown Revitalization Strategy have been folded into Chapter 6, the Business Districts Element. Also, the Downtown Revitalization Strategy is hereby incorporated in full as part of the Comprehensive Plan, meaning that the recommendations in that document should be treated as Comprehensive Plan recommendations.

The LWRP provides specific recommendations with regard to the use of waterfront areas on Long Island Sound, the Great Peconic Bay, Flanders Bay, and the Peconic River. Particular attention is given to the issues of environmental protection, dredging, and waterfront access. Because the Comprehensive Plan and the LWRP were prepared concurrently, background information between the two planning efforts was shared, and policies and recommendations were coordinated, such that the two plans would not be at odds.

The Plan is also being sent in draft form to Suffolk County, neighboring towns, the Regional Plan Association, State and County transportation agencies, the Central Pine Barrens Commission, and other concerned and interested agencies and organizations. It is Riverhead's hope that the draft plan will be reviewed by those entities and that they will provide constructive comments. It is important that the Riverhead Comprehensive Plan be compatible with the plans of neighboring towns as well as State and County agencies.

#### **1.4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan will be an incremental process. When the Comprehensive Plan is completed, the Town's zoning ordinance will be updated over the course of the following 12 months to reflect all of the newly adopted goals and policies in this document. Then, as development proposals come forward from the private sector, those new projects will have to conform to the new zoning provisions. State and County agencies, when undertaking projects in Riverhead (e.g. roadway improvements) will be required to take the Comprehensive Plan into account.

This document was distributed to the public several times for feedback and comments. The Riverhead Town Board and Planning Board, along with the Riverhead Planning Department played pivotal roles in reviewing, editing, and revising the Comprehensive Plan. The two Boards critiqued and reworked the Comprehensive Plan in light of the commentary gathered at public hearings and correspondence submitted by various civic groups and landowners. Regular work sessions, open to the public, were held to evaluate all of the public input and feedback while taking into consideration accepted planning principles and practices. The Riverhead Planning Department was instrumental in advising and assisting the two Boards throughout the entire process.

Pursuant to Section 272-a and Section 239-m of the General Municipal Law, the Suffolk County Planning Department reviewed the interim version of the Comprehensive Plan submitted by the Riverhead Planning Board. The Suffolk County Planning Department issued a staff report

granting the conceptual approval of the Comprehensive Plan with comments on some of its goals and policies. In terms of regional and inter-town issues, the Department found that there was no direct conflict between the Comprehensive Plan and other regional plans, such as the Central Pine Barrens Plan, the Agriculture and Farmland Protection Plan, and the Suffolk County Sanitary Code. The final version of the Comprehensive Plan includes several of the recommendations made by the Suffolk County Planning Department.

Once the Comprehensive Plan is adopted by the Town Board, implementation will be relatively inexpensive and cost-effective. Because many aspects of the Comprehensive Plan would be implemented incrementally over time, those implementation tasks would be folded into the Town government's day-to-day administrative tasks. New development will be required to conform to the revised zoning provisions, as subdivision and site plan applications are submitted. Thus, implementation for the most part would cost no more than the normal costs that the Town already incurs for the purposes of administration. There would be a one-time cost involved with updating the Town's zoning regulations.

The Comprehensive Plan includes some recommendations for new, expanded, or improved public facilities, like parks, roads, or maintenance facilities. However, the Comprehensive Plan does not make budgetary decisions. The Town Board would have to decide whether and how much money to spend on implementing such public facility improvements when approving the Town's budget on an annual basis.