

Sustainability, Resilience, and the Environment

GOAL: Protect, preserve, and restore the natural environment; improve resilience to climate and environmental hazards; ensure equity in environmental policy; and mitigate the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions, air and water pollution, and contamination on residents' health, safety, and quality of life.

Providence is a [historic colonial-era](#) coastal and riverine city with established road and land patterns and a relatively small amount of vacant land. The city's built infrastructure, topography, and natural habitats are interconnected and vulnerable to a changing climate, a growing population, and other external challenges. Antiquated infrastructure and deferred maintenance present challenges, particularly within the city's stormwater infrastructure, which has been overwhelmed in recent storm events. Rising sea level and varying temperatures add to these challenges, with "frontline" neighborhoods bearing the brunt of the impact. Climate change impacts everyone, but the term frontline communities has emerged in recent years to refer to the primarily low-income, communities of color that endure a disproportionate risk of the adverse impacts of climate change, while already confronting interconnected environmental justice challenges.

Sea level rise and storm surge threaten property and infrastructure in low-lying areas and along waterways. Increasingly frequent and intense rain events now cause flooding in areas that were previously able to withstand the deluge. Rising temperatures result in more high-heat days and impact air quality, particularly in areas with high percentages of impervious surface and sparse tree canopy. These issues continue to present new challenges to residents, businesses, infrastructure, and the environment, and have social, economic, and environmental impacts.

In alignment with decarbonization mandates set by the **Rhode Island Act on Climate (2021)**, the City must reach certain emissions benchmarks over the next 30 years. Specifically, these benchmarks include reaching 45% below 1990 emission levels by 2030, 80% below 1990 emission levels by 2040, and reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. Recognizing the urgency of the aforementioned climate and environmental justice issues in combination with state mandated climate action, the City of Providence will embark on incremental progress towards a net-zero future.

In order to face these challenges, attention must be focused on restorative environmental practices, energy conservation, a transition away from fossil fuels for heating and transportation, and promotion of renewable energy sources, cleaner industrial operations, and emissions reduction. We must be prepared for and facilitate a transition to an equitable, post-fossil fuel existence. Particular attention to

and investment in areas of the city that bear outsized burdens must continue to occur. Frontline communities must be engaged in the identification and implementation of solutions to these challenges.

Existing documents and ongoing efforts such as the City of Providence Climate Justice Plan, the Providence Tree Plan, Providence Hazard Mitigation Plan, and ProvPort Master Plan have significant bearing on specific aspects of this section as well as strategies to reach climate mandates and should be referenced for details and implementation where applicable.

In 2019, the City of Providence, in partnership with the Racial Environmental Justice Committee and residents of Providence’s frontline communities, created the **Climate Justice Plan**. The plan provides a comprehensive and community-input driven analysis of seven primary strategies which aim to achieve climate and environmental justice for all Providence residents and for the natural environment. The Plan prioritizes solutions for low-income, communities of color who often bear the brunt of environmental hazards yet contribute the least to climate and environmental crises.

Objectives and Strategies

OBJECTIVE SRE1: CLIMATE PROTECTION, STORMWATER and FLOODING

Ensure the protection and resilience of the people, natural environment, built environment, and infrastructure of Providence to the effects of climate change and extreme weather.

Strategies:

- A. Assess stormwater and flood protection infrastructure, focusing on resiliency capacity, deferred maintenance and repair, particularly in flood-prone areas, with the intention of protecting water quality, preventing erosion and riverbank destabilization, and protecting human lives and property.
- B. Reduce impervious surface and investigate mechanisms to incentivize pavement reduction, use of permeable surface materials, and green infrastructure/nature-based stormwater solutions.
- C. Study and prioritize rivers, watersheds, and flood-prone areas for further analysis and funding (and explore funding sources and mechanisms).
- D. Coordinate inter-departmental efforts ~~between~~ ~~amongst~~ Planning and Development, Parks, Sustainability, Public Works, and Emergency Management to maximize stormwater management and flood mitigation planning, funding, design, and implementation.
- E. Incorporate stormwater mitigation and management into streetscape projects and prioritize projects with ancillary benefits including heat island mitigation, stormwater retention, traffic calming, complete streets configurations, and open space.
- F. Coordinate and incorporate plans and studies into multi-departmental decision-making, ~~including~~ the Hazard Mitigation Plan, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Woonasquatucket Flood project and ~~subsequent~~ recommendations, and Seekonk River ~~/York Pond Watershed-area~~ projects and plans.

- G. Coordinate with and assist community groups in their efforts to implement stormwater and flood reduction measures.
- H. Review and revise the City’s stormwater ordinance to ensure a balance between the desire for increased development and density in certain zones and the impacts of increased impervious area and stormwater to avoid exacerbating flooding. Consider including requirements to address pollutants of concern for specific watersheds. Also consider more stringent on-site stormwater management requirements for new development or substantial redevelopment projects.
- I. Identify the areas most impacted by flooding caused by heavy rain events, sea level rise, and storm surge, and consider regulatory measures to ensure development is safely sited and resilient to flooding.
- J. Identify locations and consider strategies to restore floodplains to reduce the incidence of flooding and lessen risk to health, safety, and the economy.
- K. Review and revise City floodplain management responsibilities and procedures including maintenance of elevation certificates and related recordkeeping.
- L. Incorporate phytoremediation and other natural solutions into stormwater and flood mitigation efforts where possible, mindful of the prevalence of contaminated land adjacent to water bodies and rivers.
- M. Encourage and assist in the “greening” of flood-prone areas wherever possible.
- N. Build on the findings and recommendations of the Infrastructure Resilience Framework project and the ProvPort Master Plan to identify funding sources to develop and implement a plan for the Port of Providence to increase resilience to storm surge and to avoid the spread of hazardous materials and contamination that could result from significant flooding of the port area.
- O. Devote resources to the ongoing maintenance of the hurricane barrier.

OBJECTIVE SRE2: CLIMATE PROTECTION, AIR QUALITY, and HEAT MITIGATION

Ensure resilience and the protection of public health to the effects of extreme heat and air pollution.

Strategies:

- A. Support and help expand public and private air quality monitoring programs, particularly in areas with high rates of asthma, odor complaints, highway and truck traffic, and industrial activity.
- B. Work with the state to strengthen environmental monitoring and enforcement of violations, to ensure regulatory compliance by industrial operators.
- C. Support and implement actions to reduce the incidence of air quality odors, issues, and violations, working with state and federal regulators and industrial operators.
- D. Investigate ways to address the cumulative impacts of pollution sources in concentrated areas.
- E. Support enforcement of anti-idling regulations, particularly in the port area and other high-traffic industrial and commercial areas and investigate off-street options for truck queuing and temporary parking.
- F. Encourage, support, and implement best practices that reduce emissions from businesses and vehicle fleets in alignment with state mandates.

- G. Promote and encourage additional use of and membership in programs such as DERA (Diesel Emissions Reduction Act) and Green Marine.
- H. Plan for the reduction of fossil fuel imports, operations, and storage at ProvPort and in the port area overall, ensuring that there is no increase in fossil fuel infrastructure except as may be necessary for improvements for safety, resiliency, and the environment, or to facilitate the delivery of more environmentally friendly fuels.
- I. Promote expansion of renewable energy businesses and operations and other clean and “green” industrial uses throughout the region.
- J. Promote development practices that increase green space, landscaping, native plants and wildflowers, tree-planting, natural vegetation, and reduced impervious surface to mitigate the heat island effect.
- K. Support the implementation of the Providence Tree Plan and promote private and non-profit planting efforts that increase canopy coverage, especially in low-canopy neighborhoods.
- L. Identify properties with large rooftops suitable for increased thermal emittance, or cool and reflective finishes, to offset heat island impacts, particularly in frontline communities and/or neighborhoods with high percentages of large buildings and roof coverage.
- M. Work with state and federal agencies to mitigate the cumulative impact of emissions and pollutants generated by industrial operations.
- N. Expand and facilitate use of alternative fuels and improve traffic circulation to reduce emissions and improve air quality.
- O. Protect neighborhoods from the impacts of freight movement, particularly by truck, by promoting appropriate travel routes and temporary staging areas.
- P. Reduce VMT (Vehicle Miles Traveled), expand and promote transit, bicycle, scooter, and pedestrian transportation and mobility. Support telecommuting and home-based employment.

OBJECTIVE SRE3: NATURE AND THE CITY

Protect and restore environmentally significant and sensitive areas and habitat including wetlands and wetland buffers, rivers and riverbanks, and the urban forest.

Strategies:

- A. Promote and advocate ing for the restoration of all rivers and waterbodies to fishable and swimmable conditions.
- B. Enforce regulations relating to stormwater and water quality and ensuring compliance with state total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) and water quality standards.
- C. Support and promote the implementation of the Providence Tree Plan and voluntary planting efforts, with particular focus on developing funding strategies and programs to support tree planting and maintenance on public and private property in low canopy neighborhoods.
- D. Support, promote, and implement naturalization of riverbanks, valleys and uplands where practicable.
- E. Protect habitat in and along rivers and other waterbodies as well as on land, particularly in conservation zones and in parks.

E.F. Consider waterfront development and conservation standards such as WEDG (Waterfront Edge Design Guidelines) and the use of innovative materials to facilitate shoreline restoration.

OBJECTIVE SRE4: RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Conserve energy, reduce consumption of fossil fuels in alignment with local targets and state mandates, and develop and implement renewable energy sources.

Strategies:

- A. Continue developing and implementing strategies to incrementally reduce greenhouse gas emissions across energy, transportation, waste and other sectors in line with city and state plans and mandates like the Climate Justic Plan, the RI Act on Climate, and the forthcoming RI Climate Action Plan.
- B. Continue investments in multi-modal transportation safety, efficiency, and electrification in line with the Great Streets Plan, RI Transit Master Plan, and RI Long Range Transportation Plan, to encourage mode shifts toward public transportation, walking, biking, carpooling, and electric vehicles.
- C. Continue to transition the City ~~f's~~ motor-vehicle fleet to low- or no-carbon vehicles by procuring fuel-efficient, hybrid technology and alternative energy vehicles.
- D. Support the transition of RIPTA's bus fleet to zero-emissions vehicles, with an emphasis on transitioning routes in areas impacted by poor air quality.
- E. Reduce vehicle emissions caused by excessive idling by measures including public education, consideration of anti-idling regulations, and enforcement of existing regulations.
- F. Continue to pursue weatherization, energy efficiency, and electrification at City-owned facilities.
- G. Reduce the City's use of materials and increasing recycling rates, promoting the use of recycled materials, and encouraging source reduction in packaging.
- H. Promote and incentivize ing weatherization, energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy sources of commercial and residential buildings.
- I. Identify opportunities and locations for ~~and~~-constructing local renewable energy sources including wind and solar locations such as schools, rooftops of large buildings, underutilized former gas-stations, and parking areas.

OBJECTIVE SRE5: SUSTAINABILITY AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Ensure that buildings and infrastructure are environmentally sustainable and resilient to the effects of climate change.

Strategies:

- A. In alignment with the City's Green Building Ordinance, decarbonize City-owned buildings by 2040 through investments in weatherization, energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy.
- B. Promote the use of "green" technology and practices in industry, business and construction.

- C. Develop design criteria that maximize energy conservation and electrification and minimize the use of fossil fuels in buildings.
- D. Encourage the use of recycled materials in the construction of buildings.
- E. Encourage the reuse of existing buildings.
- F. Promote the long-term benefits of energy-efficient rehabilitation and new construction and consider the use of appropriate incentives.
- G. Promote the use of rain barrels to collect rainwater and prevent sewer overflow.
- H. Encourage “depaving” of properties through education, enforcement of existing paving limits, and incentives, where applicable.
- I. Utilize the institutional master plan review process to encourage institutional stakeholders to reduce excess pavement and develop more sustainable and resilient buildings and infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE SRE6: BROWNFIELDS

Prioritize the remediation of brownfields (land contaminated by hazardous substances and/or petroleum) to revitalize neighborhoods, remove health hazards, address community needs including open space, and improve the environment.

Strategies:

- A. Continue to pursue US EPA Community Wide Assessment and Cleanup Grants, [RIDEM Brownfields programs, and other resources for brownfields assessment, remediation, and redevelopment](#).
- B. Work with state, private, and non-profit entities to facilitate the assessment, remediation, and environmentally sustainable redevelopment of brownfield sites.
- C. Identify environmentally compromised land and establish strategies to mitigate impacts.
- D. Identify additional funding sources to encourage redevelopment of vacant, underused, and environmentally compromised lands such as brownfields.
- E. Identify and coordinate geographic-specific grant needs for brownfields assessment and cleanup and ensure sufficient staff and consulting resources to develop high-quality grant applications.

OBJECTIVE SRE7: PUBLIC AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT

Encourage and foster environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient practices.

Strategies:

- A. Lead by example and reduce the City’s environmental footprint by adopting environmentally conscious practices for City government and in City facilities.
- B. Encourage and, when practicable, provide incentives to recycle, conserve water and energy, use renewable resources and alternative sources of energy, and use public transit and alternative modes of transportation.
- C. Support and incorporate community-led efforts and scientific findings to improve environmental conditions and public health in frontline neighborhoods.
- D. Synthesize and publicize the findings and recommendations of ongoing efforts such as the NOAA Shoreline project, National Science Foundation project, and ProvPort Master Plan to improve conditions for public health, access, wildlife habitat, and resiliency in the port area.

OBJECTIVE SRE8: FRONTLINE NEIGHBORHOODS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Mitigate the disproportionate environmental and health impacts of pollution, climate impacts, and the degradation of natural systems on environmental justice neighborhoods.

Strategies:

- A. Reduce the impacts of pollution from industrial operations; fuel and materials storage; energy production; and freight movement, with attention to the health, safety, and quality of life impacts of emissions, pollutants, traffic, and nuisances on near-industry neighborhoods.
- B. Encourage the development and implementation of sustainable industrial practices. Strategies should include reducing emissions from truck traffic and idling, cargo-handling equipment, ships and vessels, building energy use, energy production, and industrial processes.
- C. Promote the use of and transition to clean and renewable energy sources for port and industrial activities.
- D. Work with industry stakeholders to identify and support development of cleaner alternatives to fuels and materials.
- E. Promote and plan for cleaner, “greener,” industrial operations and uses that balance economic, social, and environmental outcomes and improve resilience to sea level rise, storm surge, and environmental impacts.
- F. Ensure that the port provides meaningful economic benefit to near-port neighborhoods, including Upper and Lower South Providence and Washington Park. For example, develop and publicize job-training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged near-port neighborhood residents.
- G. Foster a transparent and collaborative relationship between the City, near-industry neighborhoods, industrial operators and landowners, and other stakeholders.
- H. Increase public access to and involvement in the port area and shoreline, especially for residents of port-area neighborhoods while avoiding conflict with commercial uses.
- I. Promote the improvement of environmental conditions of port properties, particularly those north of ProvPort, and encourage the establishment and growth of cleaner industry, such as offshore wind-related and other industry in the renewable energy sector. Discourage additional fossil fuel business in Providence, ensure no additional fossil fuel infrastructure other than safety and environmental improvements, and plan and prepare for the phase out of such businesses that will result from state decarbonization mandates.
- J. Position industrial areas to be prepared for a “post-carbon” future in alignment with state decarbonization mandates.
- K. In anticipation of federal and state legislation targeting investment in “green justice areas,” establish local green justice area designations to identify neighborhoods most affected by cumulative impacts and environmental justice issues.
- L. Prioritize green justice areas for resource allocation, ensuring that communities with historically disproportionate environmental burdens receive an equitable share of resources, such as the establishment of resilience hubs, energy efficiency, and electrification of homes, and workforce development. Ensure the implementation of required sustainability projects via the Sustainability Projects Reserve Account in accordance with ProvPort Master Plan requirements.

- M. Prioritize and implement recommendations of ongoing efforts such as the NOAA Shoreline project, National Science Foundation project, SNEP Opportunity to Advance Resilience (SOAR), and ProvPort Master Plan to improve conditions for public health, access, wildlife habitat, and resiliency in the port area.

OBJECTIVE SRE9: THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGION

Ensure coordination with other municipalities and the state to ensure mutually beneficial environmental outcomes.

Strategies:

- A. Coordinate the review of state and federal government plans and projects with adjoining communities to ensure that the proposals will not adversely affect air and water quality and environmentally sensitive areas.
- B. Encourage and participate in regional and state-led efforts to meet state decarbonization mandates set forth in the Act on Climate.
- C. Coordinate with the neighboring municipalities of East Providence and Pawtucket on plans and projects with mutual benefits on and around the Seekonk and Providence rivers, including environmental protection (habitat, water quality), recreational boating, and shoreline access.
- D. Work with the state and neighboring municipalities to address the issue of water-borne debris and marine hazards.
- E. Pursue regional and/or watershed-level approaches to stormwater management and flood control.
- F. Encourage the state to lead by example by using alternative fuel vehicles for fleet and transit vehicles, decarbonizing state-owned buildings, and building infrastructure that will reduce VMT.
- G. Work with state and other municipalities to address regional sustainability through coordinated approaches to transit, air and water quality, brownfield remediation, flood zone protection, and provision of bike paths and recreational areas.
- H. Ensure that state projects meet or exceed local landscaping requirements.
- I. Encourage the state to consider ease of maintenance in its designs and identify long-term maintenance plans for all of its projects.

The Built Environment

GOAL: Protect, preserve and promote a high-quality built environment.

An essential element of Providence’s quality of life is its urban design — how the city looks, feels, and functions.

“Urban design” refers to the basic structural forms on which the city is built — natural features such as waterways, landforms, and topography; the street grid, alleys, the open space system; the architecture of its buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces; and the relationships among all of these elements. Providence has achieved high-quality urban design consistently over time and people cherish the result.

History of Design Excellence

Fortunately for Providence, at several critical points in its history, leaders recognized the value of the city’s special features and character and worked to preserve and restore the elements that make Providence unique. These include the traditionally designed public buildings, road network, and open spaces that use Providence’s natural assets to the best advantage and create a unique civic identity. It also includes the land development patterns that feature compact, walkable neighborhoods and outstanding architecture.

One of the oldest cities in the northeast, Providence has retained an unusual urban coherence, which combines exemplary 18th and 19th century residential neighborhoods with many high-quality industrial buildings and a central business district downtown. It also has a rich history of art, design, invention, and innovation. Sustaining excellence in urban design into the future demands that Providence continues to use its best legacies to guide development. While new development need not conform to or attempt to replicate the precise historical or architectural particulars of historic buildings, it should reflect the fine qualities of design and use of materials inherent to the best of Providence’s built environment, old and new. This applies to all of the city’s neighborhoods, and for both new construction and rehabilitation. It also applies to infrastructure such as streets and bridges, as well as public and private buildings.

Providence’s identity is shaped largely by the diversity and evolution of its architectural styles, dating from the 1600s to the present. Fortunately, some of the architectural heritage of every era remains as part of the built environment of the city. Historic buildings provide not only a sense of place but a sense of continuity with the past. We can learn from them about the people who came before us, how they lived and worked and shaped the city we know today.

The economic value of historic preservation in Providence is well established. Historic preservation is an economic development tool that creates jobs, stimulates related retail and service industries, generates tax revenue, and develops Providence as a business location and tourist destination. 7% of Providence’s land area falls within a local historic district. Altogether, the local and national districts cover 31% of the city’s land area. From late 2013 until today, property owners have spent over \$300 million on construction in Providence’s local districts. In the same span, property owners have spent \$2.5 billion on

construction in the city as a whole. Thus, work in historic districts counted for 13% of overall spending in just 7% of the city's land area.

Tools to Promote High-Quality Urban Design

Historic Districts. Cities like Providence recognize that historic buildings are culturally, aesthetically, and financially valuable to the community as a whole and are worthy of preservation. In 1960, the city created the Providence Historic District Commission (PHDC) to protect the unique physical character and visual identity of the city by regulating development in designated local historic districts. In Providence, historic districts are established as zoning overlay districts after extensive neighborhood consultation and education, a public hearing, and adoption by the City Council. Providence has eight local historic districts, containing a total of approximately 2,600 properties. Local historic districts contain residential, commercial, religious, educational, industrial, governmental, transportation, and civic buildings, in addition to other structures and open spaces, and represent a range of architectural styles. In 2021, the city adopted its newest historic district, the Power-Cooke Street Historic District, which contains 90 properties.

In 2000, Providence developed the Industrial and Commercial Buildings District, the state's first non-contiguous, thematic local historic district. This district is composed of mid-19th to 20th century industrial and commercial buildings throughout the city. The buildings in this district are reviewed by the PHDC for demolition and major alterations only. The landmark status makes these buildings eligible for state, federal and local tax incentives for their rehabilitation and renovation. In 2014, Providence created the Providence Landmarks District (PLD). Following the non-contiguous model, the PLD incorporated the ICBD as a sub-category, and added a new residential sub-category. The residential category is composed primarily of individually listed National Register properties (approximately 33 buildings). The residential district also includes approximately 22 significant buildings that owners requested for inclusion in the district. By adopting the PLD, Providence has protected the majority of individually listed National Register properties in the city.

Providence also contains many National Register Districts. Properties in these districts, when not also in local historic districts, are generally not regulated by the city, but are eligible to receive state and federal historic tax credits.

Downtown Zoning. In 1994, the city created the Douncity Overlay District to regulate the design of buildings and open spaces in the historic core of Downtown Providence. The Douncity Design Review Committee was designated as a public body to review design within the district. In 2012, as the state was in the process of demolishing I-195, which passed through the middle of Downtown, the city refashioned its Downtown zoning to extend design review into the Jewelry District and the I-195 redevelopment corridor in Downtown and Fox Point. The Douncity Design Review Committee (DDRC) was renamed the Downtown Design Review Committee and given broader authority to regulate design in this area.

In 2011, the I-195 Redevelopment District Commission was created by the R.I. General Assembly to serve as the property owner and development review board for the I-195 surplus parcels, now called the Providence Innovation & Design District. The city collaborates closely with the I-195 Commission to ensure that development on its land is designed appropriately and fits within the urban design context of the city while also fulfilling the commission's aims of innovation and high standards of building design.

The Capital Center Special Development District, created in 1982, is an overlay zoning district located in the northern portion of Downtown. The Capital Center Commission (CCC) was established to administer development in the district. By ordinance, when the CCC dissolves, the DDRC and its staff will assume jurisdiction over the area of applicability. In order to have a more consistent regulatory structure in Downtown, the city supports the dissolution of the CCC. This will require action and coordination by city, state, and federal agencies, with legislation introduced at the city and state level to ensure a smooth transition to the new regulatory structure.

Development Plan Review. The city utilizes a process called Development Plan Review (DPR) to review many types of projects, including those under the purview of the City Plan Commission, the DDRC, and city staff. The city has recently incorporated new tools to integrate design review into the DPR process.

Tax Incentives. In 2002, the State of Rhode Island created economic incentives to stimulate the redevelopment and reuse of historic properties. The owners of these properties were eligible for state tax credits equal to 30 percent of qualified rehabilitation expenditures, which was the most generous state historic tax credit program in the country. In combination with the federal historic tax credit of 20 percent, redevelopers of historic buildings in Rhode Island were able to get back 50 percent of their qualified expenses. Unfortunately, the state historic tax credit was eliminated in 2008. In 2013 a R.I. state historic tax credit was reinstated where projects can earn 20-25% of qualified rehabilitation expenditures. The current program is set to sunset on June 30, 2024.

In 2015 the state created the Rebuild Rhode Island tax credit program, which allows for adaptive reuse or development of recognized historic structures. The program is set to sunset on December 31, 2024. The city feels strongly that the state historic tax credit and the Rebuild Rhode Island tax credit programs must be further extended to help preserve our significant historic structures and to help foster development.

Challenges

Financial Burden. Local historic districts protect some of Providence's most important legacies, but can also put a financial burden on homeowners who must adhere to strict standards for renovation and preservation. In some instances, regulations to sustain the historic features of buildings are beyond the economic means of homeowners. Government incentives are often critical to assist historic property owners in preserving their properties.

Natural Hazards and Sea Level Rise. A significant portion of the city's infrastructure and facilities are at risk of impact by natural hazards. Extreme flooding has occurred in the past, most notably in 2010, and reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that this will only increase with severe storm events. Given its location at the head of Narragansett Bay and its low elevation, the city is vulnerable to flood damage, and many historic buildings at risk.

Development of Vacant Lots. In the late 1980s and early 1990s many of Providence's neighborhoods were littered with vacant lots. With an increase in market pressure, many of those lots have been developed. While this has been a welcome change and has produced needed housing, the quality of construction on many of these infill lots has been poor. Residential and commercial infill projects have often been constructed with poor quality materials, and do not fit in with the character of the existing homes and businesses. More effort must be made to encourage and mandate quality design for infill construction.

Ongoing Policy Challenges

Sustainable Development. In recent years there has been a recognition that our buildings need to be more sustainable in terms of use of building materials, energy efficiency, use of renewable energy, water conservation, stormwater management, to name a few. LEED and other standards of environmentally sustainable construction are now widely accepted and increasingly attainable. The city has taken a lead role in this movement, through developing and renovating schools and other buildings to green standards. The city must adopt policies that result in continued improvements in sustainable building practices, including adaptive reuse and stormwater management.

Alternative Energies in/on Historic Structures. Home and business owners often want to install alternative energy technologies on their home or business. In 2013 the Historic District Commission created standards for the installation of solar energy systems. Since this time the HDC has reviewed 80 solar applications, with an approval rating of 97%, striking a balance between the need to protect the built environment and changing technologies.

Neighborhood Character. The increasing need for a broad array of housing options requires a more diverse mix of residential types that are both affordable and complementary to neighborhood character. New construction must be sensitive to the character and qualities of Providence's neighborhoods. It is also important to retain the traditional character of neighborhood commercial districts, while allowing for more density in appropriate areas.

Undesignated Structures. Many buildings in Providence that may qualify for landmark designation are outside of historic districts. The City continues to evaluate properties for landmark designation. This plan identifies properties that should be included in historic districts.

Modern Architecture. The city has not adequately addressed preservation standards for significant examples of architecture from the second half of the 20th century. Without foresight, more

architecturally significant structures of this underappreciated era may be lost. Neighborhoods and architectural styles developed after World War II have matured but are not addressed by current preservation policies. Many of these areas are intact in form, but have had their materials changed. Their pattern of development is more significant than the intactness of their materials and should be evaluated for potential designation.

Surface Parking Lots. Surface parking lots downtown and along commercial corridors are an excellent opportunity for redevelopment. Filling in gaps in the urban fabric with high quality infill projects will add to the city's character.

Underrepresented Communities. The city has been evaluating recognition of significant properties and sites in areas not typically covered by historic districts. In some cases, physical buildings no longer exist, and we are evaluating how to recognize them in ways that have meaning to the community.

Objectives and Strategies

OBJECTIVE BE1: DESIGN EXCELLENCE

Promote a culture of high-quality architecture, construction, and urban design.

Strategies:

- A. Promote high-quality urban design through design standards and design review.
- B. Reevaluate and improve design standards for all development projects.
- C. Strategically invest in public infrastructure, streetscapes, and public amenities to promote Providence's civic identity and attract high-quality development.
- D. Consolidate the development review process in Downtown by dissolving the Capital Center Commission and subjecting all projects to a uniform development plan review process.
- E. Encourage high-quality innovative contemporary building design.
- F. Encourage, support, and use enforcement tools to ensure the maintenance and stewardship of all buildings in Providence.

OBJECTIVE BE2: NEW DEVELOPMENT AND TRADITIONAL CHARACTER

Encourage new development to be compatible with Providence's traditional character.

Strategies:

- A. Through the design review process, promote design innovation and architectural diversity that complements Providence's traditional character.
- B. Encourage developments to be compatible with surrounding uses while not stifling innovative design and architecture.
- C. Ensure that regulations reinforce high-quality urban design and traditional neighborhood character through rules governing size, scale and massing.

- D. Promote and incentivize the redevelopment and reduction of surface parking lots and excessive impervious surface.
- E. Encourage mixed-use, pedestrian oriented developments along commercial corridors and in other growth areas at a greater height and density than in the residential areas.
- F. Ensure that new developments improve pedestrian movement and provide pedestrian amenities.
- G. Promote adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

OBJECTIVE BE3: DESIGN OF THE PUBLIC REALM

Reinforce the design quality, function, and character of connections among public places and centers of activity.

Strategies:

- A. Preserve, enhance, extend, and connect the historic patterns and character of the city's street and sidewalk system.
- B. Develop streetscape standards that enhance the pedestrian experience and incorporate high-quality design elements that are economical and easy to maintain.
- C. Promote public art in the built environment that reinforces a sense of place.

OBJECTIVE BE4: PRESERVATION PLANNING

Preserve the historic buildings and districts that contribute positively to Providence's urban fabric.

Strategies:

- A. Protect and preserve historic resources citywide through design standards, zoning controls, easements, and other tools.
- B. Consider adopting varying degrees of regulation for historic properties. Explore whether a lesser regulated local historic district is viable for certain areas.
- C. Identify stronger enforcement options to discourage the alteration and demolition of historic resources without approval.
- D. Develop additional financial incentives and tools, such as property tax incentives, for property owners to rehabilitate structures of architectural or historic merit.
- E. Require institutions to identify historic buildings and plan for their future use. Propose institutional properties listed or eligible for the State or National Historic Register for inclusion into local historic districts.
- F. Update the zoning map to reflect appropriate boundaries of historic districts, including adding new properties and removing properties where demolition has occurred.

OBJECTIVE BE5: DESIGN LEADERSHIP

Ensure that the City of Providence takes the lead in design excellence and historic preservation.

Strategies:

- A. Support and encourage historic preservation of city-owned properties. Historic city properties such as former schools and firehouses should be considered for adaptive reuse and demolished only as a last resort.
- B. Consider the adaptive reuse of historic buildings when procuring office space for city agencies.
- C. Work with the state to evaluate and address the impact of building codes and other regulations on historic preservation and cost of construction.
- D. Design and construct city buildings as models of design excellence.
- E. Construct and rehabilitate municipal buildings to high standards of energy efficiency and sustainability.
- F. Continue to develop standard house designs that developers can easily adapt to vacant lots in the city.

OBJECTIVE BE6: PUBLIC AWARENESS

Promote public awareness of urban design and historic preservation principles through education and collaboration with partners and schools.

Strategies:

- A. Raise public awareness of the historic significance of structures and areas in Providence.
- B. Encourage partnerships with design and preservation organizations to organize public information campaigns, particularly in underrepresented communities.
- C. Support efforts to educate Providence residents on the importance of high-quality urban design, contemporary architecture, and historic preservation.
- D. Support student education and involvement in urban design and historic preservation.

OBJECTIVE BE7: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGION

Work with the State of Rhode Island and adjacent communities to support design excellence and historic preservation in the region.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage the state to restore the historic tax credit.
- B. Work with adjacent communities to ensure high-quality design on the city's borders.
- C. Encourage high-quality urban design for state projects within the city.

OBJECTIVE BE8: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL HAZARDS

Protect the built realm from natural hazards.

Strategies:

- A. Continue to identify areas at risk of natural hazards within the city's built environment.
- B. Refine regulations regarding building in high-hazard areas.
- C. Work to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards by improving stormwater management structures and practices.
- D. If necessary, remove vulnerable structures in high hazard areas.
- E. Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the Fox Point Hurricane Barrier in protecting the built environment.

Economic Development

Goal: Grow, adapt, and strengthen Providence's economy

As Rhode Island's largest city and economic engine, the importance of Providence's business climate cannot be understated. Retaining and attracting businesses is vital to the city and its residents' prosperity and quality of life. Providing a welcoming, supportive economic climate to existing and future businesses and the physical assets and workforce to support them is a top City priority.

Providence leaders recognize the need to foster a resilient business climate that can withstand and adapt to changing economic landscapes and attract investment from emerging and growing sectors. Since 2020, the ways in which people live, work, learn, and play have undergone dramatic changes nationally and locally. Despite large-scale shifts in this post-Covid landscape, Providence's current economic climate is encouraging. The city's unemployment rate is among the lowest in the nation (2.9% as of September 2023), which indicates a robust economy that continues to diversify.

Providence is also well-positioned for growth, especially in health, science, tech, and tourism sectors. In the past decade, the city has also notably developed a more robust food and urban agriculture sector, which is unique and poised for further growth in the coming decade. To support this expansion, the City continues to work with developers to enhance their understanding of the infrastructure requirements associated with emerging sectors. This targeted work will ensure the availability of cutting-edge lab and maker spaces that enable new businesses to establish roots in Providence, underscoring a deep commitment to inclusive growth that positions Providence as a thriving hub for innovation and economic prosperity.

Providence's population is also growing. Data from the 2020 US Census shows that Providence has grown significantly since 2010. Within a decade, the Providence population grew by nearly 7%, from 178,042 to 190,934. As the city's population expands, there is a noticeable shift in demographics. A growing trend towards diversity is evident, particularly with Hispanic residents constituting 44% of the population, marking a 19% rise since 2010. New arrivals to Providence have demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit, particularly with small businesses, retail, restaurants, and services.

Data also demonstrates changes in household incomes in Providence. The number of households earning less than \$45,000 or exceeding \$99,000 annually has risen, while those in the middle-income bracket, ranging from \$45,000 to \$99,000, have experienced a decline. This dynamic has led to a notable increase in wealth disparity within the city. Despite this disparity, the Providence adult population is achieving higher levels of education; nearly 32% of all residents over 25 hold a 4-year college degree or higher.

In response to the question of "where and how do we grow," the Comprehensive Plan takes a holistic view of where to direct job growth, informed by strategic land use and policy goals across topics like housing, climate and sustainability, and transportation. Whereas one type of economic growth, in emerging professional sectors, for example, may require integration with quality public transportation and the amenities of mixed-use urban neighborhoods, industrial sector growth requires jobs districts that are protected from residential uses to encourage expansion, mitigate conflicts and avoid market pressures that would restrict economic development. Providence also aims to capitalize on the growth

of the blue economy by preserving and improving the environmental quality of important land along the working waterfront and deep-water port, for the growth of offshore wind and other emerging ocean tech industries.

Growth corridors are outlined in the Growth Strategy and Future Land Use Maps of the Land Use chapter and illustrate areas that are prime for business development and can sustain an increase in density. As traditional daily commutes to Downtown business district workplaces decline as work from home (WFH) continues to rise, the City must both encourage a more mixed-use Downtown and invest in its neighborhoods to encourage small businesses growth, industry clusters, local collaborative incubators and scalable business opportunities. Most neighborhoods in Providence have excellent connectivity amongst each other as well as to major highways, interstates and rail and bus service which facilitate travel to other business hubs and TF Green Airport, allowing workers who may be employed elsewhere or require frequent business travel, to call Providence their home.

Investing in what makes Providence the "Creative Capital" is another important component in growing the City's economic base, while preserving the cultural assets that residents love. Providence's arts and culture sector serves as a formidable economic engine, contributing over \$2 billion to the Rhode Island economy, and generating more than \$200 million in Providence in 2022 alone. These figures only partially capture the transformative influence of a thriving arts and design sector, which can have interdisciplinary benefits when integrated into STEM industries (STE*A*M), for example. Moreover, the city's longstanding reputation for its arts and culture attracts a talented workforce and contributes to the city's overall quality of life.

Providence's reputation in the arts, intact historic fabric, walkable neighborhoods, culinary offerings, and cultural events and attractions also draws growing levels of tourism. The number of annual visitors to Providence has returned to pre-pandemic levels (estimated at over 7 million in 2022), with close to \$2 billion dollars in traveler economy spending in 2022 alone, almost 10% higher than pre-pandemic levels. The tourism and hospitality sector is a key and growing employer in Providence, which is bolstered by growing cultural events like Waterfire, PVD Fest, and RI Pride Festival and Parade.

In addition to the City's physical and cultural assets, its workforce remains a top economic driver. The City manages and supports numerous programs to ensure City-wide equitable access to high-quality jobs that provide life-sustaining careers. According to the 2020 US Census, Providence is home to nearly 84,000 currently employed adults, a number that has increased by almost 7% in the past decade. Most of Providence's workforce is employed within city limits.

Providence is also home to 8 colleges, universities, and satellite campuses. The City must continue to support and link to the strengths of its academic institutions. Knowledge and technology transfers from higher education to the innovation economy, local start-ups as well as mature industries in health care, manufacturing and service industries require nurturing, collaboration, and retention of recent graduates to support economic growth and diversity and provide paths for upward mobility.

Providence is well-positioned to become a major economic hub regionally, as it offers residents a higher quality of life at a lower price point than other New England cities. Recognizing this opportunity, the City is investing in vibrant public spaces and amenities such as public art, improved infrastructure and connectivity, greater tree canopy cover, and other beautification efforts. These investments cultivate a positive quality of life and showcase Providence as an attractive destination to live, work, and play. Quality of life improvements also encourage business and capital influx, while bolstering Providence's

national and international profile. By adopting smart, equitable strategies that build upon its unique assets, Providence is growing an economy that is more varied, resilient, and attractive to businesses and investors, while strengthening its ability to withstand economic shock.

Objectives and Strategies

Objective ED 1: Invest in key sectors including the Blue Economy, Health & Life Sciences, Arts & Culture, Tourism & Hospitality, Food

Strategies:

- A. Work with anchor institutions to align their growth with economic development targets.
- B. Pursue funding from relevant federal agencies for the attraction and growth of these industries.
- C. Combine city and state efforts to ensure that maximum resources are available to prospective industries.
- D. Ensure that marketing efforts are focused on highlighting the success in these key sectors to build Providence's related brand.
- E. Invest in Providence's waterfront for economic growth.
- ~~E.~~ F. Promote the continued growth of the I-195 Innovation and Design District and its cluster of life-sciences, blue economy, and other businesses and start-ups.

Objective ED 2: Ensure that Providence is the best-run city for businesses and residents

Strategies:

- A. Make long-term investments in city infrastructure including streets and sidewalks
- B. Utilize the city's 311 systems to ensure that constituent complaints are addressed in a timely manner
- C. Partner with businesses in commercial corridors to address quality of life issues
- D. Simplify planning and permitting processes to ensure that projects that are in compliance with city regulations can move quickly to implementation
- E. Work with the City Council to evaluate and support TSAs that align with economic development goals
- F. Study and implement reductions to commercial tax rates to ensure Providence's business environment is competitive

Objective ED 3: Support & grow our small business community

Strategies:

- A. Provide dedicated customer service to Providence small businesses
- B. Support MWBE businesses to become certified and compete in local city procurements
- C. Invest in high quality local business support programs

- D. Work with business incubators to ~~coordinate~~rationalize approaches and implement strategies to incentivize new businesses to stay in Providence

Objective ED ~~4~~3: Facilitate access to capital for new and growing businesses

Strategies:

- A. Utilize the Providence Business Loan Fund to support a diverse community of small businesses.
- B. Prioritize the allocation of funding to the Providence Redevelopment Agency for gap funding of priority projects

Objective ED ~~5~~3: Invest in and develop our workforce

Strategies:

- A. Utilize federal workforce dollars to invest in career pathways programs that result in family sustaining jobs
- B. Establish a vision and plan for the city's First Source program to ensure that Providence residents have access to today's jobs
- C. Establish core learning standards across all city-funded youth employment programs
- D. Link industry partners to PPSD CTE programs
- E. Work with local institutions of higher education to incentivize graduates with high demand credentials to stay in Providence

Housing

GOAL: Grow, improve, and preserve Providence’s housing stock to expand affordable, accessible, healthy, and sustainable housing options for all residents.

The City of Providence is deeply committed to making housing more accessible and affordable, and ensuring

that all residents have the opportunity to live in decent, safe, and price-appropriate housing. The City has a responsibility to ensure that its policies encourage a wide range of housing; do not impede housing production; encourage maintenance and preservation of the existing housing stock; increase housing choice; and provide assistance to enable all residents of Providence to live in safe, habitable homes.

The City of Providence commissioned its first **Anti-Displacement and Comprehensive Housing Strategy** in 2020, a plan which sought to build upon past and present efforts to craft a concise vision for housing production in Providence. This study, conducted by a national consulting team, included a thorough real estate market, socioeconomic, and financial feasibility study to understand current and projected housing need in the City (2020-2030). Utilizing this data analysis and community input, the Strategy laid out a 10-year plan to boost housing production in the City via programmatic changes, new funding strategies, recommended policy changes, and recommended new programs to be explored.

Additionally, every five years, the City conducts an **Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice**, a federally-required planning effort which seeks to identify any barriers to fair housing choice in the jurisdiction so that the City can identify and pursue appropriate actions to overcome the effects of any impediments identified or eliminate such impediments.

The City must encourage a dramatic increase in the production of new housing over the next 20 years to meet the needs of Providence’s growing population. Within this 20-year timeframe, the condition and suitability of the City’s aging housing stock will also have to be addressed through redevelopment and rehabilitation.

Changes

Evolving Housing Market

The real estate market in Providence has seen significant fluctuations influenced by local and national economic trends as well as the global pandemic. Since 2015, Providence’s housing market experienced steady price appreciation, driven by factors such as job growth, low mortgage rates, and a relative affordability compared to nearby cities like Boston. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges and disruptions to the housing market. While there was initial market uncertainty, Providence, like many other markets, saw a surge in demand for single-family homes and a shift towards remote work prompted some individuals and families to seek out larger homes or homes in less densely

populated neighborhoods. Concurrently, Providence attracted new residents who left larger cities yet desired to inhabit an urban context that provided a walkable neighborhood with proximity to arts, culture, cuisine, and vitality.

Demand for housing in Providence remains strong overall, fueled by a combination of factors including population growth, revitalization efforts, and the presence of universities and healthcare institutions attracting students, faculty, and medical professionals. Numerous challenges have exacerbated affordability concerns for many residents, including limited housing stock and land availability and rising construction costs and materials shortages, which have led to reduced housing production, especially in certain price ranges. Additionally, economic uncertainties and external factors like changes in mortgage rates and tax policies have influenced buyer behavior and market dynamics.

Cost of Housing

Providence's housing market is experiencing significant cost increases. At +9.5%, the sale value increase in housing prices in Providence is 6% higher than the overall state increase. Both values have doubled in the yearly appreciation value at the end of 2021. In 2023 alone, the median sale of a single-family house increased at an annual average of 7.7% and rental prices increased 7.5%. The 2023 average cost of rent in Providence is \$2,074 per month, and median sale for a single-family home is \$330,000.

The rise in housing prices, combined with the decreased total number of homeowners and increase in population has forced a squeeze on the housing market. The citywide vacancy rate in 2020 was 2.6%, a historic low. However, several neighborhoods are still challenged by high rates of foreclosure, vacancy and abandonment.

Providence's housing stock grew approximately 5% to 75,257 units from 2010-2020, while the overall population grew over 7%. In 2023, 60% of Providence households were renters and 40% owned their home. 2023 estimates show that over 33% of Providence home-owners and 46% of renters are cost burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing expenses. As of 2022, 14.3% of housing units in Providence had an affordability restriction of at least 30 years, which exceeds the 10% minimum of the Rhode Island Low and Moderate Income Housing Act.

Housing Development

In recent years, the city has seen a significant increase in the construction of single and multi-family residences, both infill development on vacant lots and rehabilitation of existing structures. City permits show an increase of 3,957 units from 2015 to early 2024. However, historic development levels in prior decades have resulted in a supply shortage and growing rates of housing cost burden.

Downtown Providence is both a residential neighborhood as well as a commercial destination. Some office-to-housing conversions are expected in the next few years, however, opportunities are limited by floorplate configurations and the success of early conversion initiatives in decades past. As exemplified by the lingering attempt to reposition the iconic "Superman Building," construction costs and a menagerie of grants, low-interest loans, tax treaties and tax credits continue to be insufficient to move

the project beyond the planning phase. A number of the colleges and universities in Providence have built new dormitories and/or converted existing buildings to dormitory use, but growing enrollments continue to increase demand for off-campus rental housing on nearby neighborhoods.

Demographics

As of the 2021 Comprehensive Housing Strategy, 60% of the City's households earned less than 80% of area median income, meeting the federal definition of "low- and moderate-income" to qualify for many U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD")-funded housing programs (such as Section 8). In 2021, more than 29% of the City's households earned less than 30% of AMI, which is considered "extremely low income." 64% of Providence households (as of 2021) were considered "cost-burdened" (paying more than 30% of their gross income for housing and essential utilities), placing them at greater risk of displacement and housing instability. This is a 15% increase since 2010. Almost a quarter of Providence households (24%) were "severely cost-burdened" (paying more than 50% of their gross income on housing costs). While housing and other costs have risen in recent years, the median income of City residents has remained relatively stagnant.

Demand for special needs housing has increased locally and is projected to continue to grow. Providence residents who are living with multiple disabilities has increased in recent years, and consistent with regional and national trends, the City's population continues to skew older, meaning more residents who may require modifications to their homes or alternative housing types in order to safety and affordably age-in-place.

Challenges

Housing for All

For Providence to retain and attract businesses and workers, the City must offer an ample supply and wide variety of housing types for people across the income spectrum. The City must also work to link the types of housing available to the types of jobs available and work to develop housing in areas near transit to create more affordable living for those working in Providence. An adequate supply of workforce housing is crucial to attracting quality jobs to Providence. It is also crucial to retaining existing residents. In addition to ensuring that there is affordable housing for those who need it, the city must have housing available for young professionals including those with moderate and higher incomes.

Without housing for all, the city will continue to experience out-migration, "brain drain," and displacement of long-time residents. Cuts in entitlement funding sources year-over-year also make it more difficult for community development corporations (CDCs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and other developers to develop new affordable and supportive housing. The competitive nature of the housing market has also impacted the availability of affordable housing, as many rental property owners have chosen to rent to students by bedroom rather than families to maximize rents charged per unit. Affordable housing also needs to be distributed equitably throughout the city. Developing mixed-income neighborhoods is critical to the future economic sustainability of the city as a whole.

High property tax burden for homeowners in the city can make it difficult for property owners, especially seniors on fixed incomes, to retain their homes, and commercial property taxes (the highest rates in the State) are often passed to tenants via rents. In 2023, commercial tax rates paid by apartment buildings with six or more units were decreased by 4% in part to alleviate upward pressure on rents.

Providence, like other major cities with tight rental markets, higher home median values, and median rental prices, experienced an unprecedented rise in homelessness (70% increase since 2020 according to HUD 2023 Point-in-Time data). Ability to shelter and rehouse constituents efficiently is predicated on the City having an adequate supply of supportive housing options, such as shelters, recovery housing, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing for those with higher service needs, ideally integrated within an array of neighborhoods with access to transit and amenities. To that end, this Comprehensive Plan update eases restrictions on siting transitional shelters and group homes, enabling these facilities to locate in residential and mixed-use zones by right.

Lead Paint & Healthy Housing Hazards

Almost 90 percent of Providence's housing is over 50 years old. These structures run the gamut from single family homes to larger apartment buildings. Ongoing investment in these buildings is required to avoid decline and decay. Focus must be paid to preserve Providence's unique, historic housing stock to promote healthy living conditions. Due to the age of the housing stock, lead paint hazards are a significant issue and pose health and safety issues for many families.

Limited Resources

Over the last ten years federal and state resources for developing affordable housing had been largely stable. However, in most recent years, the federal allocation of Community Development Block Grant and HOME funding to the City has been decreasing. The City and State must use its funds more efficiently and pursue new funding sources and innovative partnerships, such as housing bonds and other tools. In addition to the reduction in funding provided to the City, the cost of developing housing has dramatically increased. The state legislature's modification of the state historic tax credit program, combined with the overall state of the economy, has slowed the preservation and redevelopment of historic structures in Providence. The City expects the federal share of housing development costs to continue to decrease over the next 20 years.

Opportunities

Commitment

The Anti-Displacement and Comprehensive Housing Strategy details the vision and priorities of the City in addressing pressing housing needs in Providence. The City has incorporated many of the objectives and strategies of the Strategy into this comprehensive plan, including identification of new funding streams.

The City utilizes its annual HUD entitlement grants, HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to address housing rehabilitation and construction for low-moderate income populations. The City receives approximately \$5M in CDBG and \$1.5M in HOME annually and will continue to braid these limited resources with other public and private funding sources to amplify impact.

The City is also committed to providing affordable housing through the Providence Housing Trust, administered by the Providence Redevelopment Agency (PRA). The Housing Trust provides resources to create, rehabilitate, and preserve affordable housing throughout Providence. Funds from the Housing Trust may be used for acquisition and development of affordable units. The fund also provides flexibility to ensure that projects move forward by providing critical gap financing via bridge or permanent loans. In 2020, the Providence City Council capitalized the Trust Fund through 10% of annual Tax Stabilization revenues. This revenue also enables the PRA to bond to capitalize the Trust (the first \$24.75M bond closed in 2021). Treasury State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds were also recently used to further capitalize the fund. These initial investments are expected to generate close to 1,000 new units of housing by 2025.

In 2023, the City also created a rehabilitation Revolving Loan fund via Housing Court fine revenue to provide lending for correction of code violations. This new fund is targeted to properties prosecuted or violated for code deficiencies with a demonstrated financial hardship.

Livability

People want to live in Providence even if they do not work here. Post-pandemic, remote work or hybrid work has further attracted professionals to Providence. Residential development in areas such as Downtown builds upon our historic housing stock, making Providence a desirable place to live.

Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program

The most significant source for affordable housing development in Rhode Island remains the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program, a federal program created by the Tax Reform Act of 1986 as an alternative method of funding housing for low- and moderate-income households which has been in operation since 1987. Rhode Island receives the small state allocation, which is approximately \$3M in “9%” LIHTCs. These tax credits are used to leverage private capital into new construction or acquisition and rehabilitation of affordable housing. In Providence, LIHTCs are used to create and preserve rental housing in many neighborhoods.

In 2023, the State of Rhode Island also introduced a pilot “State Low Income Housing Tax Credit,” which will provide up to \$30M in tax credits to qualified projects per year.

The City will continue to target its gap financing to many projects that leverage these state and federal credits.

Objectives and Strategies

OBJECTIVE H1: IMPROVE & PRESERVE EXISTING HOUSING

Revitalize, modernize, and preserve Providence's housing stock.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage the retention and revitalization of the existing housing stock and discourage the demolition of housing units.
- B. Strictly enforce property maintenance codes and encourage housing rehabilitation by providing funds for repairs to existing structures.
- C. Enhance and expand housing improvement loan and grant funds available for critical safety repairs and correction of code deficiencies.
- D. Use the Lead Safe Providence Program to provide low-barrier, no-cost lending for lead-based paint hazard mitigation and provide other health and safety upgrades to eligible Providence rental properties throughout the City's neighborhoods.
- E. Use techniques such as land banking, land assemblage and strategic acquisition by the Providence Redevelopment Agency to develop affordable and mixed-income housing while revitalizing residential structures and blighted areas.
- F. Increase environmental enforcement of vacant and blighted lots.
- G. Utilize the Providence Housing Trust Fund and HUD entitlement grants to preserve properties with expiring affordability covenants, and to acquire and deed-restrict naturally occurring affordable housing.
- H. Pair assistance types cited above with rental restrictions to discourage displacement.
- I. Expand knowledge of, access to, and investment in energy efficiency and weatherization programs that aim to both decarbonize buildings and lower energy costs for low-income residents.

OBJECTIVE H2: PRODUCE NEW HOUSING FOR ALL

Support the creation of new ownership and rental housing citywide at all price points.

Strategies:

- A. Provide for diversity in the type, density and location of housing within the city to provide an adequate supply of safe, sanitary housing at price levels appropriate to the financial capabilities of all city residents.
- B. Promote a diverse housing market to meet increasingly specialized housing requirements including elderly, disabled, and student population.
- C. Encourage and develop home ownership and rental opportunities for all income groups.
- D. Encourage the development of housing in rehabilitated older commercial buildings and in new structures. High-quality adaptive reuse of mills and offices offer opportunity for revitalization.
- E. Encourage the development of housing opportunities for artists and craftspeople in old commercial and industrial buildings that enable artists to live and work in the unit.
- F. Enable and encourage the development of accessory dwelling units and "missing middle" housing types that have the potential to increase residential density and add units, while preserving neighborhood character and design standards.
- G. Encourage the development of housing on existing and potential transit corridors.

- H. Focus on the rehabilitation of foreclosed and/or blighted multi-family houses for affordable owner-occupied rental housing or CBO-owned rental housing.
- I. Encourage the development of housing for residents at all points of the income spectrum, low, moderate and high.
- J. Encourage and support equal access to housing throughout the city for all people regardless of race, color, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, or physical or mental ability.
- K. Work with Rhode Island Housing and Department of Housing to preserve affordable housing throughout the city.
- L. Work with Providence Housing Authority to modernize and redevelop public housing assets with the goal of preserving and expanding the number of long-term low-income and affordable housing units.
- M. Continue to support programs that encourage developers to build housing that is affordable to all, including by evaluating the market feasibility of inclusionary zoning.
- N. Develop a process to streamline the permitting process for developers of affordable and workforce housing.
- O. Support for-profit and non-profit organizations and encourage their collaboration for the active development of affordable housing.
- P. Develop programs and regulations to increase the development of affordable housing throughout the city, particularly in neighborhoods identified as having limited housing choice.
- Q. Require colleges and universities to develop plans for additional on-campus student housing.
- R. Continue to study and implement best practices in anti-displacement strategies and work with residents and neighborhood organizations to address concerns about resident displacement.
- S. Ensure processes related to tax stabilization agreements and other tax incentives are clear, predictable and designed to incentivize development at all price levels.

OBJECTIVE H3: SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING

Promote the maintenance and development of supportive housing and facilities to ensure that all residents with special needs have access to safe and affordable housing in all neighborhoods.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage programs that will increase the supply of accessible housing in the City.
- B. Expand or partner with programs that allow elderly homeowners who wish to age in place to modify their homes.
- C. Work with the owners of subsidized elderly housing complexes to maintain the buildings as affordable housing for the City's elderly residents.
- D. Encourage and support the rehabilitation of housing units to make them accessible.
- E. Provide incentives to developers to encourage the construction of accessible housing units. Encourage and preference those projects applying for Providence Housing Trust or other city subsidies which utilize universal design.
- F. Encourage and support the creation of permanent supportive housing for persons with special needs.
- G. Encourage the development of programs that will assist the homeless in acquiring permanent residences.

- H. Support the continued operation of emergency shelters including by enacting land use and zoning changes that allow emergency shelters, transitional shelters, and special needs facilities of appropriate size by right in residential and mixed-use areas.
- I. Support agencies that provide housing and supportive services to homeless persons and families.

OBJECTIVE H4: HOUSING DESIGN

Promote high quality residential design throughout the City.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage energy-efficient residential design and construction through the use of LEED, Energy Star and other green building standards.
- B. Encourage the decarbonization of residential buildings through best practice regulations and initiatives including expanding energy efficiency programs, encouraging heat pumps, requiring energy performance disclosures, and discouraging gas hookups in new construction, with emphasis on programs that prioritize investment in disadvantaged communities.
- C. Prepare for more frequent extreme weather events by studying and implementing best practice resilient housing design standards and stormwater management practices (e.g. increased permeable surfaces) that address conditions including sea-level rise, riverine and nuisance flooding, and extreme heat.
- D. Create design standards for quality residential construction complementary to the character and qualities of Providence’s historic neighborhoods.
- E. Refine regulations for quality residential site design.
- F. Develop a pattern book of pre-approved residential designs and plan sets based on Providence's vernacular architecture, including of two, three, and multi-family dwelling types, “missing middle” housing types, and accessory dwelling units.
- G. Determine appropriate residential densities to accommodate growth in areas of change, while valuing the preservation of local communities and their built character.

OBJECTIVE H5: HOUSING AND TRANSIT

Promote the integration of housing and transit services.

Strategies:

- A. Amend the zoning ordinance to create nodes to focus medium density and high-density development, including institutions, in transit-oriented development areas along current and future high use transit lines, in line with the State’s Transit Forward 2040 Plan.
- B. Work with RIPTA and developers to promote transit-oriented development as a tool for growth in housing and as an economic development.
- C. Place new residential developments at locations that increase potential ridership on the transit system and support Providence as the region’s employment and cultural center.
- D. Work with RIPTA to locate transit-oriented development nodes near amenities like parks, schools, job centers, and grocery stores to maximize the benefits of the public’s investments to as many households as possible.

OBJECTIVE H6: HOUSING AND THE REGION

Work with the state and other local governments to address housing needs in Providence and throughout the state.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage the state to develop special needs and affordable housing in other communities and enforce other municipalities' compliance with the Low-Moderate Income Housing Act.
- B. Encourage the state to continue to create new, dedicated funding sources (such as the State Housing Tax Credit Program launched in 2024) for housing development; with a dedicated percentage of the funds set aside for Providence and other urban core communities.
- C. Encourage the state to reinstate the state Historic Tax Credit Program to facilitate further preservation and redevelopment in Providence.
- D. Encourage the state to facilitate development within growth areas through targeted financial incentives and zoning requirements.

Mobility

Goal: Provide a range of quality choices for getting around Providence with options that are safe, affordable, convenient, sustainable, and resilient. Strengthen access to opportunity and spaces for community interaction, regardless of mode of travel. Boldly embody our values in Providence’s mobility initiatives and become a leader in people-first mobility.

Providence's transportation and mobility options not only determine how and where people and materials move throughout the city; they also impact the ways in which residents, visitors, and

commuters interact with nearly every facet of their built environment. Multimodal transportation systems, which integrate different forms of transport such as cars, buses, trains, bicycles, and pedestrian paths into a cohesive network, play a crucial role in supporting and sustaining Providence’s quality of life and continued growth.

In and around Providence, an intricate network of highways, railways, and public transit systems currently link residential neighborhoods, commercial and industrial zones, educational institutions, and recreational areas. This infrastructure supports everything from local businesses and tourism to housing and community services, shaping the city’s economic landscape and the quality of life in every neighborhood. As transportation infrastructure continues to evolve and expand, Providence aims to strengthen access to multimodal transportation that is safe, affordable, convenient, sustainable and resilient.

These improvements offer a range of benefits to enhance quality of life for residents. Improved infrastructure, such as better-lit roads and safer pedestrian paths, reduce accidents and crime rates. Safe and secure mobility options encourage more people to use them, which further enhances safety through increased public presence. Creating an “All Ages and Abilities” bicycle network provides residents and visitors of all demographics, regardless of age or mobility limits, a safe, convenient and sustainable option for navigating the city. Enhanced transportation and mobility also allow residents to enjoy more [free](#) time, greater accessibility, cleaner environments, and more cohesive, integrated communities and neighborhoods.

By improving links between residential areas, business districts, industrial zones, and recreational assets, [a](#) multimodal transportation systems ~~s-are~~ [is](#) key to ~~supporting-a~~ [ensuring](#) Providence ~~that~~ is better positioned for resiliency and growth. Cities with modern multimodal systems are attractive to residents, visitors, and businesses. Enhancing Providence’s infrastructure will draw new industry, talent and investment, advancing the City’s goals for furthering economic prosperity and innovation. The City of Providence has outlined numerous strategies to support these developments, including bus service

improvements, greater train connection to Boston and TF Green Airport, and infrastructure enhancements throughout the city to improve connectivity and safety for all.

Mobility and Transportation

There are subtle but important differences between the terms “transportation” and “mobility”. “Transportation” focuses narrowly on how people and goods move from A to B, whereas “mobility” looks more broadly at how ease and access affect how people and goods move around a city. Transportation networks, policies and infrastructure should provide safe, convenient, and affordable options which allow individuals to move through the city, while helping to reach goals of resiliency, efficiency, safety and affordability. As Providence plans for the coming decades of growth and development, the city’s mobility system must ensure access to the places people need to go, while prioritizing safety, sustainability, and equity.

Why a multi-modal transportation system?

A multi-modal transportation system allows residents, visitors, and employees to make the choice about how to move around the city in the way that best suits each individual [and trip](#). In a small, compact city like Providence that is poised for growth, it would be impossible to accommodate new cars with each new resident that chooses to live in the city. A multi-modal transportation system that is safe, convenient, and affordable to get around without a personal [motor](#) vehicle helps to relieve congestion, improve air quality and enhance the quality of life.

With limited ability to expand roadways or add extensive numbers of new single-occupancy vehicles to the city’s roadways, improving traffic in the city is primarily possible by shifting trips normally taken by car to other modes of transportation. Dependence on private automobiles limits the types of growth and development that can happen in the city due to the requirement to provide large amounts of parking and roadway infrastructure. A multi-modal transportation system limits the need for parking and allows greater density in housing and commercial/retail development, which can also enhance tax revenue to the city.

A multi-modal transportation system also contributes to safety for all road users. Virtually all roadway fatalities and serious injuries involve at least one motor vehicle. Most collisions occur at intersections, where deference is given to the efficiency of moving private vehicles through more quickly rather than ensuring pedestrian safety. When more people are walking, biking or taking the bus, fewer cars are on the road and drivers become more aware of other road users, creating a safer environment especially for those more vulnerable road users.

Multi-modal transportation networks help to decrease carbon emissions and help the city and state reach adopted climate goals. The transportation sector is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, with 97% of Rhode Island’s greenhouse gas emissions [from transportation](#) generated [by](#) ~~from~~ private motor vehicles.

Providing a multi-modal transportation system provides additional benefits, including enhanced affordability for residents, improved public health outcomes, ~~less carbon emissions pollution,~~ and cost savings due to less roadway damage and lower infrastructure costs.

Aligning City Policy with State and National Goals

The U.S. Department of Transportation promotes a “Safe System Approach” to mobility as part of its National Roadway Safety Strategy. This approach is widely embraced in the field of transportation planning and engineering, and incorporates six principles:

- **Death and Serious Injuries are Unacceptable:** A Safe System Approach prioritizes the elimination of crashes that result in death and serious injuries.
- **Humans Make Mistakes:** People will inevitably make mistakes and decisions that can lead or contribute to crashes, but the transportation system can be designed and operated to accommodate certain types and levels of human mistakes and avoid death and serious injuries when a crash occurs.
- **Humans Are Vulnerable:** Human bodies have physical limits for tolerating crash forces before death or serious injury occurs; therefore, it is critical to design and operate a transportation system that is human-centric and accommodates physical human vulnerabilities.
- **Responsibility is Shared:** All stakeholders—including government at all levels, industry, non-profit/advocacy, researchers, and the general public—are vital to preventing fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways.
- **Safety is Proactive:** Proactive tools should be used to identify and address safety issues in the transportation system, rather than waiting for crashes to occur and reacting afterwards.
- **Redundancy is Crucial:** Reducing risks requires that all parts of the transportation system be strengthened, so that if one part fails, the other parts still protect people.

These principles have become the basis of widely-adopted Vision Zero policies, which the City adopted in 2024, to ensure Providence’s transportation system and policies work to eliminate deaths and serious injuries on its roadways.

In addition to the above national principles, many state and local plans have outlined goals related to mobility in Providence. Notably, the 2020 Providence Great Streets Plan and RIPTA’s 2020 Transit Forward Transit Master Plan contain many recommendations for infrastructure and policy. Other plans also incorporate occasional mention of mobility goals ~~as well,~~ and many of these plans are referenced below, where pertinent.

The State of Rhode Island’s adopted Long-Range Transportation Plan envisions “a multimodal transportation network that connects people, and communities, provides access to jobs and services, and promotes a sustainable and competitive Rhode Island economy.” The plan identifies five high-level goals, which can be summarized into: support economic growth, promote environmental sustainability,

strengthen communities, maintain transportation infrastructure, and connect people and places. The goals and objectives put forward below seek to align City policy with State adopted plans.

Mode, Congestion, and Emissions

When considering mode share in Providence and possible improvements in line with City, State, and Federal goals, it is helpful to compare Providence’s existing “mode split” with national and global benchmarks:

	2022 Level	National context	Global context
Driving alone	62%	Lowest 22% (NYC)	Lowest 12% (Tokyo)
Carpooling	8%		
Bus	2%	Highest 33% (Union City, NJ)	Highest 53% (Brussels)
Train	1%		
Walking	8%	Highest 28% (Cambridge, MA)	Highest 45% (Zaragoza)
Bicycling	1%	Highest 17% (Davis, CA)	Highest 40% (Amsterdam)
Taxi or other	2%		
Working from home	17%		

Traffic congestion and total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are influenced both by the percentage of trips occurring by car and a city’s overall population growth. Just to keep traffic congestion the same as Providence’s population grows, the percentage of commuters getting to work alone in a motor vehicle or the total number of trips would need to decrease.

To meet the goals and mandates of the Climate Justice Plan, RI Act on Climate, and other policy documents, transportation emissions will need to be dramatically cut via reduction in VMT through ~~mode-shifts~~ [to carbon neutral modes of transport](#) and an increase [in](#) the percentage of car trips taken in electric vehicles (EV). The chart below shows the **annual tons of carbon dioxide equivalent** based on various EV and VMT scenarios:

EV transition	Same traffic	10% VMT reduction	15% VMT reduction	20% VMT reduction
2% of vehicles	454,500	409,000	386,300	363,600
5% of vehicles	443,600	399,300	377,100	354,900
10% of vehicles	425,600	383,000	361,700	340,400
20% of vehicles	389,400	350,400	331,000	311,500
40% of vehicles	317,000	285,300 (37% reduction)	269,500	253,600
80% of vehicles	172,300	155,100	146,500	137,900 (70% reduction)

Carbon Dioxide Emissions Scenarios: EV Transition and VMT Reduction

Objectives and Strategies

OBJECTIVE M1: BUS

Encourage bus service improvements such that it is a reasonable transportation option for many trips in Providence and makes up a higher share of trips than in 2024.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage RIPTA and the State to improve the transit experience in Rhode Island
- B. Advocate for sufficient funding to not only maintain existing service levels but increase them in line with the recommendations of the state-adopted Transit Master Plan (\$250-\$400 million per year)
- C. Advocate for expanded eligibility for free or reduced fare bus passes provided that the overall system is adequately funded
- D. Advocate for increased frequency of bus service in line with the recommendations of the state-adopted Transit Master Plan
- E. Advocate for new bus routes between neighborhoods and stopping at grocery stores, including on Valley Street (N7 in the 2020 Transit Master Plan), along Dean Street from the VA Hospital to RI Hospital (N9), and between Olneyville Square and Eddy Street (N13)
- F. Advocate for reduced emissions from buses especially in environmental justice areas through the introduction of more electric buses
- G. Advocate for frequent service on more routes later into the evening
- H. Improve infrastructure to prioritize buses and bus passengers especially on the highest-frequency corridors including the creation of dedicated roadway right-of-way to the exclusive use of buses in high-frequency corridors
- I. Establish and implement clear standards for prioritization of curb uses, including the preference for bus stops, where needed, over on-street parking
- J. Ensure sufficient sidewalk and ADA infrastructure exists at bus stops and to access bus stops
- K. Encourage large employers and institutions to offer subsidized transit passes
- L. Ensure that the bus hub feels clean, safe, and welcoming for all users
- M. Focus residential growth around existing high-frequency transit corridors, such as North Main Street
- N. Support RIPTA in its process to establish a new, world-class transit center that meets the needs of RIPTA operations, transit users and Providence's planning and economic development goals

OBJECTIVE M2: RAIL

Encourage an effortless connection to Boston and RI TF Green Airport by train, such that rail makes up a higher share of trips than in 2024.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage RIDOT and MBTA to provide more frequent and faster regional rail service to Boston and RI TF Green Airport, especially in off-peak hours
- B. Focus growth within ¼ miles of Providence Station
- C. Advocate to electrify MBTA line to enable faster service with reduced emissions

OBJECTIVE M3: WALKING

Make walking a plausible choice for many trips in Providence, such that walking makes up a higher the share of ~~commute~~-trips ~~made-on-foot is~~ higher than in 2024.

Strategies:

- A. Improve safety where pedestrians must cross motor vehicle traffic, prioritizing pedestrian safety over traffic flow.
- B. Update all traffic signals to provide pedestrian phasing such as Leading Pedestrian Intervals or exclusive pedestrian phasing and keep signal cycles short and efficient to minimize waiting and unsafe crossing
- C. Where possible, restrict right turns from a red light at any location where unrestricted turns are detrimental to pedestrian safety
- D. Add crosswalk markings and accessible ramps to every crosswalk location where they are absent
- E. Work with RIDOT to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrians on highway crossings
- F. Install sidewalk bump-outs at corners to increase pedestrian visibility and enforce illegal parking rules adjacent to crosswalks, where possible
- G. Create more and better spaces that are designed for walking.
- H. Improve maintenance of sidewalks so that accessible paths compliant with federal ADA and Public Right of Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) are available throughout the city
- I. Improve design standards for street trees to both provide more shade to sidewalk users and avoid trip hazards created by tree roots up-lifting the sidewalk
- J. Focus residential and commercial growth in locations within ¼ mile of commercial districts
- K. Improve policies around clearance of snow from sidewalks and bike lanes
- L. Create a clear and implementable strategy to mitigate issues where tree growth is reducing sidewalk accessibility, while ensuring that overall urban tree canopy expands in line with targets set in the PVD Tree Plan.

OBJECTIVE M4: BICYCLING

Make bicycling a plausible mobility choice for many trips in Providence, such that bicycling makes up a higher share of trips than in 2024.

Strategies:

- A. Provide a connected, safe and intuitive “All Ages and Abilities” network of spaces to bike without fear of car traffic within ¼ mile of all residents, by implementing and updating the Great Streets Plan
- B. Increase the number of intersection crossings that provide dedicated bicycle signal phases
- C. Work with RIDOT to improve the safety and comfort of bicyclists on highway crossings and state-owned roadways
- D. Continue and expand programs that encourage more people to make trips by bicycle.
- E. Establish a program to assist private property owners in upgrading bicycle parking to a useable standard
- F. Continue to provide shared micromobility services, improving parking compliance and service levels; consider establishing a city-owned bike share system
- G. Encourage events such as Cyclovia and social bike rides accessible to a wide range of residents
- H. Consider supplementing State incentives for e-bikes with a City incentive

OBJECTIVE M5: DRIVING

Reduce the share of ~~commute~~ trips taken in private automobiles by encouraging and investing in alternatives, while still maintaining quality infrastructure and connections, such that driving alone makes up approximately half the share of commute trips that it does in 2024.

Strategies:

- A. Mitigate negative impacts driving has on quality of life and quality of mobility options.
- B. Consider traffic congestion mitigation measures at any locations under City jurisdiction in the RI Congestion Mitigation Plan
- C. Consider lowering statutory speed limits on local residential streets to 20 mph.
- D. Expand the use of Speed Safety Cameras, which reduce speeding in school zones by 63%, crashes on urban principal arterials up to 54%, and fatalities and injuries by 20% to 37%
- E. Expand camera uses to enforce other moving violations namely, blocking the box.
- F. Improve driving behavior, potentially by working with the state and local driving instructors on Driver’s Education
- G. Prohibit right turns at red lights in more locations.
- H. Work with industrial stakeholders to reduce diesel emissions in frontline communities
- I. Upgrade all city vehicles and school buses to electric
- J. Advocate for sound barriers and pollution-mitigating features such as vegetation between urban highways and abutting residential areas
- K. Discourage the development of new gas stations within City limits

- L. Encourage the installation of electric vehicle charging stations when existing gas stations are updated/rehabilitated
- M. Restrict the development of new drive-thru businesses, particularly in high priority growth corridors
- N. Improve Overnight Parking Permit program to increase participation
- O. Eliminate parking minimums for new development and considering the establishment of maximum parking levels.
- P. Discourage new surface parking lots while encouraging the redevelopment of existing surface parking lots [and more efficient use of existing on-street paved areas.](#)
- Q. Expand snow parking pilot to allow reverse-side parking during snow events
- R. Encourage employers that offer free or subsidized parking to offer workers the option to cash-out their parking on a daily or monthly basis.
- S. Create and implement standards to increase the frequency of accessible parking spaces and loading zones in business districts.

OBJECTIVE M6: FREIGHT

Improve the efficiency of freight traffic in Providence, while reducing or eliminating negative impacts on quality of life.

Strategies:

- A. Improve facilities to facilitate more efficient movement of freight within Providence.
- B. Pursue creation of consolidation facilities to allow large vehicles organized by supplier to distribute goods into smaller vehicles organized by destination, of a more suitable scale for Providence's streets. Such facilities could be located at the periphery of the urban core with easy access to regional freight routes.
- C. Work with RI Statewide Planning, [RI Freight Committee](#), and stakeholders to designate truck routes and feasible restrictions on other streets including such policies as specific hours of use and parking limits
- D. Implement the State's EV truck charging plan, including installation of charging infrastructure for heavy-duty trucks at the Port of Providence
- E. Consider improving access from the Port of Providence onto I-95 South. According to the State Freight Plan, "Solution could add direct access to I-95 SB, identify alternate route, or add pavement/ restriping to improve turning radii. Would improve marine port access, reduce truck activity on local roads, and improve operational efficiency for trucks accessing the port."
- F. Consider improving access between Route 146 and West River Street: According to the State Freight Plan, "Trucks serving the USPS RI Central facility and West River industrial area have difficulty turning left off Route 146 onto Admiral, due to need for wide turn which conflicts with auto traffic."
- G. Advocate for improved infrastructure to ensure freight rail traffic through Providence Station can be made efficiently and safely
- H. Work with Port of Providence stakeholders to ensure access roads to the Port of Providence are in adequate state of repair
- I. Mitigate negative impacts freight traffic has on quality of life and other modes of travel

- J. Enforce idling regulations to minimize unnecessary tailpipe pollution.
- K. Utilize existing rail right-of-way to allow freight traffic to avoid city streets.
- L. Encourage the use of and advocate for requiring Lateral Protective Devices (LPDs) on large trucks to minimize risk to vulnerable road users.
- M. Establish incentives to shift freight deliveries on city streets to less congested times of day.
- N. Encourage the use of urban-scale delivery vehicles such as cargo bicycles, medium-duty trucks, and light-duty trucks for last-mile deliveries within the city by creating regulation and incentives for companies to down-size their fleets.
- O. Develop an active curbside asset database showing the location and size of existing loading zones, curb cuts, hours of operation, and other pertinent infrastructure, markings, and signs.
- P. Evaluate and modify traffic patterns to reduce emissions in frontline communities: Work with the state and frontline communities to reduce transportation related air pollution, beginning with areas of high cumulative pollution. Conduct a study of truck traffic and identify corridors and neighborhoods where truck routes and related infrastructure should be eliminated or rerouted to reduce diesel emissions burden in high residential and air pollution areas. Ensure involvement of frontline community members in future corridor planning, especially related to on-ramps and other major highway projects.
- Q. Advocate for reducing emissions from trucks: Identify resources and programs to improve efficiency and EV infrastructure for buses, garbage trucks, construction and other commercial trucks working in Providence's frontline communities.
- R. Incentivize more efficient shipping practices including infrastructure for more fuel-efficient vessels coming in and out of the Port.
- S. Set short-, medium- and long-term emissions reduction targets and create plans to meet targets.
- T. Work to reduce fossil fuel and other hazardous materials import and export.

Arts and Cultural Resources

GOAL: Foster an equitable and vibrant artistic and creative culture, reimagine public spaces, and enhance civic life by uplifting and incorporating artists and culture-bearers in all planning and policy-making.

Providence's Department of Art, Culture and Tourism envisions a Providence that is a global destination for arts, humanities, and design,

where neighbors celebrate diverse cultural and artistic experiences, and where all residents and visitors feel a connection to arts practice, making, and culture in everyday lives.

Providence stands proudly as the cultural capital of the state, boasting a rich tapestry of arts and culture that reflects its diverse community and storied history. The city is a welcoming destination for artists, craftspeople, writers, musicians, innovators and art enthusiasts, offering a plethora of experiences that cater to all tastes and interests. From its historic theaters to its avant-garde galleries, Providence provides a platform for artists to thrive and express themselves freely.

One of the cornerstones of Providence's cultural scene is its thriving theater community. The city is home to renowned venues such as the Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC), which brings Broadway shows and national tours to the heart of the city, and the Trinity Repertory Company, which has been producing world-class theater for over half a century. The Wilbury Theatre Group and Teatro ECAS anchor Providence's Valley Arts District with a variety of award-winning and thought-provoking productions. The city's many performance venues, from large concert halls to independent bars and clubs, and also public spaces and stages, host concerts and performances spanning all genres, ensuring there's something for every taste. Notable venues include the Amica Mutual Pavillion, the Strand, Vets Auditorium, and Fete Music Hall, among many others.

Beyond traditional theater, Providence also embraces experimental and avant-garde performances, with organizations and venues like AS220, the Dirt Palace, the Steel Yard, and Waterfire Arts Center showcasing boundary-pushing works from local and emerging artists. The city's creative spirit is palpable in its numerous galleries and museums, such as the RISD Museum, the Providence Children's Museum, the Museum of Natural History and the Art Club, which exhibit works ranging from traditional to contemporary, showcasing the talents of local and international artists alike. Young people from neighborhoods across Providence connect with art, music, and creativity at an early age through organizations like DownCity Design, New Urban Arts, Community Music Works, and the Manton Avenue Project.

The City has elevated its profile as a tourism destination in Southern New England over the past decade and welcomes both leisure and convention tourism. The RI Convention Center is a 130,000 sq foot exhibition hall that includes a main hall, ballrooms and meeting rooms to all full convention needs. Located within walking distance of the Convention Center, Downtown is home to 14 hotels, including 7

major franchised hotels and 3 boutique hotels. Downtown hotels and several others throughout the city contribute to a total of more than 3,000 rooms, welcoming tourists from around the world, year-round.

Providence is also home to a vibrant array of summer festivals, ranging from PVDFest, PrideFest, and Day Trill to cultural heritage celebrations such as the Dominican, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, and Cape Verdean Festivals. These and many other events celebrate the unique cultural identities of Providence's community, while boosting tourism and hospitality and supporting local artists and musicians.

Providence's cultural landscape includes the culinary arts, adding another layer to its cultural richness, fueled, in part, by the creative spirit of Johnson and Wales University's College of Food Innovation & Technology (CFIT), buoying a diverse array of restaurants, shared kitchens, food trucks, and markets that offer a variety of cuisines from around the world. From innovative farm-to-table eateries to authentic ethnic fare, foodies can embark on a culinary journey that reflects the city's multicultural identity and gastronomic creativity.

Providence is steeped in history, captivating visitors from near and far with architectural treasures and compact, walkable neighborhoods. Additionally, Providence's renowned WaterFire installation, a mesmerizing display of bonfires lit on the city's rivers, pays homage to its industrial past while offering a unique and enchanting experience for tourists. From guided tours of historic neighborhoods like Benefit Street, College Hill, and Elmwood, to RI Latino Arts' Barrio Tours of Broad Street and visits to the Roger Williams Park Zoo, one of the oldest zoos in the country, Providence offers a wealth of attractions that share its history and culture with all who seek it.

Providence tourism also benefits from its proximity to other regional destinations allowing visitors to experience a variety of experiences within a short distance. Newport, Boston, Mystic Ct., and Cape Cod are a short distance away, allowing Providence to serve as a hub to explore the region's charms and beauty.

As cities' economies continuously change and evolve, Providence must leverage and lean into arts and cultural foundations and night-time economies to support its business climate and attract tourism. Overall, Providence's arts, culture and tourism scene is a testament to its dynamic and inclusive spirit, drawing inspiration from its rich heritage while embracing innovation and diversity. Whether you're a lifelong resident or a first-time visitor, there's always something new and exciting to discover in this vibrant cultural capital.

Background

Between 2019 and 2022 Providence's Department of Art, Culture and Tourism (ACT) developed *PVDx2031: A Cultural Plan for Culture Shift*. ACT invited the public into its thinking and processes through planning studios, surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews. This comprehensive document outlines Providence's vision and strategies for fostering a vibrant and inclusive arts and culture scene. The plan's seven themes frame the ways that the City and its partners will fund and invest in arts and cultural resources for the next ten years:

Art and Well-being: The City recognizes that health inequities in our country are deeply embedded and that they redouble the effects of historical traumas. Civic policies, investments and support of creative practitioners and their communities focus specifically on the intersections of art, health, and the environment.

Placekeeping in Neighborhoods: Providence has an abundance of artists, arts organizations and creative businesses that are the bedrock of their local, geographic communities. The City centers their needs.

Creative Workforce: The ideas, goods and services developed by Providence's creative workforce drive its economy. In kind, the City prioritizes fair wages, affordable housing, and accessible spaces to create/exhibit and develops sustainable resources that make creative work possible.

Creative Economy: Providence relies on revenue generated by the sale of art, culture and design-based goods and services to drive its local creative economy. The City understands that barriers to growth and sustainability in the creative sector must be identified and removed to ensure its vitality and longevity.

Resilient Nonprofits: Providence's nonprofit arts, cultural, and humanities organizations anchor its local and regional creative sector. They provide spaces for artists and public historians to develop and exhibit and work; offer educational opportunities and entertainment for all communities; and act as welcoming venues for visiting tourists.

The Future of Arts Teaching and Learning: Art and culture stimulate curiosity; cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills; and help audiences and producers find common ground across differences. The City incorporates art in all curricula and offers fair wages to arts educators.

Public Awareness, Advocacy and Tourism: Providence is Rhode Island's Creative Capital, a unique landscape of cultural abundance. BIPOC communities, including BIPOC artists and arts organizations, are centered in its stories about itself.

Overall, "PVDx2031: A Cultural Plan for Culture Shift" serves as a roadmap for Providence to realize its aspirations as a dynamic and culturally vibrant city, guided by principles of equity, diversity, and sustainability in its cultural endeavors. The document outlines long-term goals for Providence's cultural evolution, envisioning a city where arts and culture are fully integrated into everyday life, driving social cohesion, economic growth, and community well-being.

The following objectives and strategies are adapted from the PVDx2031 Cultural Plan.

Objectives and Strategies

For more detailed implementing activities and measurable outcomes, view Providence’s cultural plan *PVDx2031: A Cultural Plan for Culture Shift*.

Objective AC1: ART AND WELL-BEING

Acknowledge and address inequities by focusing support for creative practitioners and their communities on the intersections of art, health, and the environment.

Strategies:

- A. Integrate the arts in K-12 learning to advance environmental and community health.
- B. Increase support for artists who foster social cohesion and collective healing; create land-based projects and preserve ancestral knowledge.
- C. Draw attention to the intersection of art, culture, and well-being.
- D. Use creative strategies to support well-being in Providence communities impacted most by systemic racism and climate change.
- E. Fund artist-led design processes that connect art, health, and climate resiliency at the grassroots level.

OBJECTIVE AC2: PLACEKEEPING IN NEIGHBORHOODS

Uplift and support unique and diverse neighborhoods through placekeeping initiatives that center the need and agency of communities and their bedrock artists and arts organizations.

Strategies:

- A. Support neighborhood-based artists, organizers and businesses who bring relevant art and live events to their neighborhoods.
- B. Commission artists to produce events, show work and perform in unexpected sites.
- C. Support public projects that advance a spatial justice framework.
- D. Invest in placekeeping strategies that preserve neighborhood-based cultural expression and strengthen a sense of belonging.

OBJECTIVE AC3: CREATIVE WORKFORCE

Support the economic well-being and growth of Providence’s creative workforce.

Strategies:

- A. Address artists’ basic needs, including developing and implementing strategies relating to fair wages and benefits, housing needs, accessible creative space, and other needs.
- B. Centralize resources for creative practitioners, including by facilitating opportunities for connection and professional development between artists and cultural organizations.

- C. Support creative entrepreneurs, including by highlighting creative businesses, training artists in business, and providing technical assistance and small business supports.
- D. Establish new and fortify existing pathways for young adult artists to explore careers in the creative sector.
- E. Hire artists and engage creatives in the development of civic projects and public policy, including by employing and supporting artists specializing in civic engagement and facilitation.

OBJECTIVE AC4: CREATIVE ECONOMY

Identify and remove barriers to the growth and sustainability of the creative sector to ensure its vitality and longevity.

Strategies:

- A. Develop a more equitable and regenerative creative economy, including by adopting practices like providing general and flexible financial support to artists and arts businesses, offering more participatory budgeting opportunities, and sharing workspaces and resources.
- B. Dismantle barriers for arts businesses and organizations to grow at a sustainable pace and to build resiliency, including by government and non-profits prioritizing local creator and arts business hiring and improving procurement, permitting, and licensing processes.
- C. Further develop Providence's life at night and music economy, including by funding and facilitating a life at night study and implementing its recommendations.

OBJECTIVE AC5: RESILIENT NONPROFITS

Foster sustainable, healthy, and resilient arts, cultural, and humanities organizations that anchor the creative sector and provide myriad benefits to artists, their communities, and visitors.

Strategies:

- A. Develop racial equity goals and accountability structures.
- B. Develop shared leadership models between government, non-profit, and community-based organizations.
- C. Re-evaluate grant application and reporting processes to center accessibility, including language access and taking specific steps to rid applications of embedded racial bias.
- D. Develop interdisciplinary programs and collaborative cross-sector projects.

OBJECTIVE AC6: THE FUTURE OF ARTS TEACHING AND LEARNING

Commit time, space, and funding to support arts teaching and learning to ensure the benefits of art and culture can be enjoyed by everyone, from the youngest to the eldest in our communities.

Strategies:

- A. Foster culturally responsive school communities.
- B. Develop neighborhood-based, all-ages arts learning opportunities.

- C. Create pathways for BIPOC arts educators and teaching artists to work in established creative businesses, nonprofit cultural organizations and schools.
- D. Standardize systems for teaching artists working with PPSD.
- E. Create incentives for students and recent graduates to build creative careers in Providence.
- F. Support nonprofit cultural organizations that serve BIPOC, immigrant, incarcerated and queer/trans youth.

OBJECTIVE AC7: PUBLIC AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND TOURISM

Defend and advocate for the importance of the local art and culture sector while finding equitable, profitable ways to share it with visitors and center BIPOC communities in doing so.

Strategies:

- A. Develop marketing strategies that elevate BIPOC residents, artists and cultural offerings.
- B. Promote the work of independent practitioners, nonprofit cultural organizations, and creative businesses.
- C. Strengthen access and equity through cultural offerings and the commemorative landscape .
- D. Promote Providence as a world-class cultural destination through initiatives including supporting live events in the public realm, supporting life at night, enhancing physical accessibility at venues and cultural facilities, marketing and lighting initiatives that encourage winter tourism, promoting walkability and multimodal access in public realm projects, and more.

People And Public Spaces

GOAL: Create a sustainable, high-quality, and innovative parks system that reflects the unique identity of Providence.

Access to urban parks can greatly increase the quality of life for those living in Providence, and shape the look and feel of our communities, as well as support the local economy and environment.

One tenth of the city's total acreage is public park space and all residents live within a ten-minute walk of a quality public park. Within this system, there are 120 unique neighborhood parks, which feature playgrounds (at more than half), active municipal cemeteries, miles of walking, biking and hiking trails, ballfields, basketball, outdoor fitness centers, tennis and pickleball courts, skateboard/biking features, waterparks, boat ramps, a zoo, the Museum of Natural History, the Botanical Center, historical buildings, an ice rink, and the largest historical park in Rhode Island, Roger Williams Park.

Open space, parks and outdoor recreation facilities are essential to the vitality and quality of life in Providence. They are not only the heart of local communities, but they are often regional destinations for visitors from near and far. They provide direct contact with nature and a cleaner environment and opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and community building.

“Vibrant parks and green spaces are at the center of resilient and equitable cities, and increasingly, agencies and public officials are leveraging the many benefits of parks to meet their city-wide equity goals. Through community engagement and applying an equitable approach to park funding, park leaders, public, private, civic, and philanthropic partners are directing investments to communities in greatest need.” – City Parks Alliance

Furthermore, open spaces provide an interconnected system of green spaces that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions, sustains clear air and water, and provides a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife. Green infrastructure is a community's natural life support system, the ecological framework needed for environmental and economic sustainability.

Providence has a diversified public park system. As the city's population increases and changes, so will the city's facilities. This section sets forth objectives and strategies to meet the changing needs for open space, parks and outdoor recreational facilities within the city.

Public Space Changes

New Facilities. During the last decade, Providence saw substantial new development of parks and the restoration of many more. \$49 million was invested in park improvement projects, including 277 major projects completed, with 90 additional major projects in the pipeline. 90% of parks received major improvements, with 100% of parks to have received major improvements by end of 2024. \$23 million were invested in the revitalization of Roger Williams Park, including roadways, green infrastructure,

signage, landscaping, building revitalizations, mechanical/HVAC repairs, biking/walking/running trails, sidewalks, public art, and state of the art visitor's center. 8 new parks were also developed in the last decade, including the beloved Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Bridge and its surrounding park area. Other investments include renovations to downtown parks, outdoor learning spaces at select schools, 60+ stormwater management features, and much more.

Programming. The Parks Department has a robust and integrated series of programs designed to bring people together outside to promote health and wellness, as well as promote wildlife and conservation education. We are going into our second decade of the Urban Wildlife Conservation Partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service wherein we provide activities that engage students in outdoor learning that aligns with core curriculum and Next Generation Science Standards, as mandated by the district. Furthermore, free USDA meal service and corresponding PlayCorps Programs ensures that students will be fed in our 40% of our parks and engaged when school is out of session. These programs are further supplemented with free fitness classes for all ages and abilities at over 20% of our parks. Some of our key institutions play an integral role in supplementing the core curriculum and providing activities for Providence children, youth and families. The Museum of Natural History, Providence Rink, Botanical Center, Zoo, RWP Visitors Center, and the North Burial Ground all work together to bring free innovative and integrated programs to the public. The Edward Ely Performing Arts Series further supports free performing arts performances in 10% of our parks.

Brownfields to Greenfields. Over the course of the past ten years, the department has transformed several brownfield sites into public spaces. The Woony Adventure Park at the former site of Lincoln Lace and Braid, and Mashapaug Park at the former Gorham site are both great examples of this use. Due to competing demands with housing and public space, and the cost of transforming Brownfields into Greenfields, the Parks Department does not have any plans to develop any additional brownfield areas.

Historic Preservation. In the past ten years, all of the historic buildings under the purview of the Parks Department have been fully renovated or restored. Many of these buildings are within Roger Williams Park and others are in neighborhood parks. In RWP, the Museum of Natural History, Betsey Williams Cottage, the Seal House, Temple to Music, Dalrymple Boathouse, Mounted Command, and Casino have all received major investments that have stabilized further decline and greatly enhanced curb appeal. In city parks, Garvin House on Mashapaug Pond, Esek Hopkins Homestead in Hopkins Park, and Wanskuck Cottage in Wanskuck Park have all been renovated and have found new use as artist-in-residence sites, City offices, or training program sites. Due to aging infrastructure, the Museum of Natural History, and the Casino, will continue to need significant capital investment for the foreseeable future. For the next 5 years, Esek Hopkins Homestead will be the site for an innovative partnership with Providence Preservation Society. The interior of the building is being renovated as part of a workforce development project.

There are many historic statues located throughout the parks system that require on-going maintenance. With all these memorials, the department seeks to work with the organizations that commissioned and/or installed these significant markers to ensure they are well-cared for. Going

forward, all new monuments and memorials must be approved by the Special Committee on Commemorative Works to confirm social significance and a maintenance plan.

Green Measures. Parks aims to improve bio-diversity and adapt to the challenges of climate change. Where possible, we are chemical-free, prioritize sustainably harvested natural materials, use integrated pest management, plant and manage native trees and perennials, manage invasive plants, develop stormwater mitigation features, and implement *leave the leaves* and *low mow/no mow* practices. We have also started to make the transition to electric turf management equipment. Along with other partners, we developed the nationally renowned Providence Stormwater Innovation Center. Our new visitor center is also the City's first net-zero energy building in the city. In winter 2024, we will open the region's first urban wood waste depot that will allow for us to repurpose waste that would otherwise be bound for the landfill.

Street Tree Inventory. The Parks Department maintains an updated inventory of street trees to determine numbers, locations, and condition. The inventory quantifies the environmental benefits of street trees and their contributions to energy savings, carbon storage, pollution mitigation, stormwater management, beautification, and property value.

Tree Planting, Care and Preservation. Tree planting has increased substantially and has grown through the partnership with the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program. The goal is reducing heat islands and a net gain of trees each year, factoring in mortality and tree removal while also ensuring mobility and access for pedestrians in city neighborhoods. The Parks Department has taken steps to ensure healthy trees, including increasing the soil volume of tree wells wherever possible to allow greater absorption of water, nutrients and oxygen. The "tree rescue" program removes tree-choking tree grates, pavement and other harmful infrastructure. Other new initiatives include tree planning and pruning in partnership with community members and organizations.

Key Public Space Assets

City Cemeteries: Roger Willams Family Cemetery, Locust Grove Cemetery, and North Burial Ground. The mission of North Burial Ground (NBG) is to memorialize the deceased, comfort the living, and be a cultural, historical and conservation destination for the community. Going forward it is essential that NBG has the capacity to continue to provide space for municipal burials, and meet the community's needs for open space, conservation, and programs, while being responsive to the finite availability of land for this use. Additionally, the infrastructure and curb appeal must match the use and vision.

Roger Williams Park Museum of Natural History & Planetarium. The Museum of Natural History and Planetarium continues to grow as a local and regional learning and discovery destination for all. It is the state's only Museum of Natural History and public planetarium. Annually, it hosts approximately 40,000 visitors, including students and special program attendees. We are especially excited about our innovative field trip programs, that include planetarium shows and hands-on workshops, for schools, homeschool families, camps, scouts, community groups, and student mentorships, as well as our college internships. The 2023 renovations will allow the museum to host additional public and private events.

Roger Williams Park Botanical Center. The Roger Williams Park Botanical Center hosts over 100,000 visitors annually and provides related education and conservation programs to over 1200 children and adults at local schools, community groups, homeschool families, and more. Not only is it a living museum that connects people to nature, but it also serves as a regional destination and event center. With the 2023 expansion of the grounds and new event pavilion the Botanical Center's role as a premier event location will be codified.

Rink and Providence City Center. The Providence Rink has expanded into a year-round destination and events center. 2023 infrastructure improvements and the new shade sail allow for an extended period of ice-skating as well as a forum for events and programs.

Roger Williams Park Zoo. Roger Williams Park Zoo welcomes approximately 800,000 guests annually. Recently included in their list of the top 26 zoos in the country by U.S. News & World Report, RWPZ is a must-see activity for out of state visitors and a long-standing traditional must-do for local community members. Committed to providing captivating experiences that inspire guests to participate in wildlife conservation, Roger Williams Park Zoo is actively enhancing existing animal habitats for the well-being of its residents. As part of a long-term master plan, the zoo is currently developing an education center and events pavilion that will more than double the size of an existing facility, enhancing its capacity as a destination.

City Center Rink at BankNewport City Center. The City Center Rink has become the center for year-round downtown parks programs. Working in Partnership with 195 District parks, and other partners, we have developed well-loved community initiatives that happen at rink and throughout the extensive network of downtown parks. The addition of an artistic and utilitarian shade sail and rink renovations scheduled for the spring of 2024 will further secure the rink as the downtown event and recreation space.

Roger Williams Park Gateway. The 2023 Gateway showcases the best of what we do at parks, sustainable, innovative urban park design, and connects our flagship park, Roger Williams, to the surrounding communities. Going forward, the center will become a local and regional destination for community, cultural, arts and environmental programs. We will continue to promote all that we do in Roger Williams Park and promote this flagship park as a single campus with many venues and opportunities for programming, conservation, and historical, cultural and community connections.

Neighborhood Park Renovations. Parks renovations have been informed by the mission and vision to offer state of the art facilities that foster community building, passive and active recreation, increase of green space through sustainable management practices, welcoming and accessible play spaces encouraging free and open play, and unique creative expression through participation of local craftspersons and artisans.

Waterfront Parks. The vision for a series of connected waterfront parks is almost realized. The addition of the Michael S. Van Leesten Memorial Bridge and the 195 District's new park spaces on the east and

west side of the Providence River provide for a seamless connection from Gano Park, India Point Park, the Hurricane Barrier, and through to Waterplace Park. What is missing from this picture is a climate resilient, enhanced, and naturalized waterfront park that will provide for boat dockage, visitor's center, as well as basic services and eating and drinking establishments. In the next 5 years, we plan to see this project completed.

Public Space Challenges and Opportunities

Climate Resiliency. The greatest challenge facing our parks system is the management of stormwater and reduction of flooding against sea level rise and storm surge, while also restoring and creating new park features and marine habitats. Parks approaches design for resiliency and adaptation to the changing climate and its effects. Design considerations focus on practices to mitigate heat island effect, decrease soil erosion, and provide for on-site stormwater infiltration.

Available Land. Being mostly built out, Providence has limited areas for new open space and recreational facilities; existing park space is often overused by athletic leagues. Going forward it is imperative that field use is scheduled and sustainable.

Limited Resources. While resources are limited, the Parks Department takes advantage of opportunities to bring in additional funds through revenues, grants, and partnerships. We will continue to inform and promote the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) bonding process. We also use data to ensure that our spaces and facilities are maintained to ensure longevity. We have robust training, inventory, and work order management systems that enable us to do preventative maintenance and schedule replacement equipment/features before issues arise.

Meeting Demand. While Providence is an evolving City and the demographics change over time, what remains constant is the need for quality outdoor spaces and diverse programs. We will continue to work with over 50 friends and neighborhood groups to help inform the decisions and priorities for public spaces. We encourage the development of new ways of connecting with the community.

Connected and Clean Waterways. Building on the aforementioned, all of the waterways in Providence are connected and most run through our park system. It is of vital importance to ensure this water is clean for recreation use, community health, and fish/wildlife habitat. Additionally, a fish passage facility is needed at Roger Williams Park. The Cunliff Lake Dam, located at the downstream end of the network of water basins in Roger Williams Park is a short distance up from the mainstem of Pawtuxet River. Cunliff Lake and connected water basins in the park will provide opportunity for a significant expansion to the current self-sustaining population of diadromous fish (river herring) in the Pawtuxet River, providing an increase in the forage base for important species of fish in Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound. This heavily visited park, located in a densely populated neighborhood also provides an outstanding opportunity to inform the public about the efforts and the importance in restoring and managing the living natural resources of our coastal streams and estuaries. The new boardwalk and fishing dock at Roger Williams Park will further promote these connections.

Well Designed and Maintained Network of Parks. While everyone lives within a ten minute walk of a quality public park, it is essential that every facet of these parks not only be, unique, include state-of the art facilities and equipment, and reflect the needs of the community, but also comprise a comprehensive network of parks with diverse amenities and ease of access to all. This network will connect children and families to nature, offer opportunities for free and open play, provide traditional and non-traditional recreation opportunities, connections to the arts, and be climate resilient. Priority projects are determined by equity and community need. The Parks Department has a team of landscape and graphic design specialists that ensure the best practices in urban park design and maintenance are considered.

Objectives and Strategies

OBJECTIVE PS1: PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

Provide and enhance outdoor recreational, cultural, arts, and performing arts programming throughout the city.

Strategies:

- A. Provide a diversity of programming at park facilities throughout the city.
- B. Diversify and expand programmed athletic opportunities in parks.
- C. Expand parks programming opportunities for youth.
- D. Develop new space(s) in the city for large-scale festivals.
- E. Support and encourage public art in park spaces.
- F. Expand use of school facilities for programs through interdepartmental collaboration.
- G. Collaborate with organizations to enhance access to programming and educational opportunities.
- H. Adapt programming in parks facilities to changing demographics of the city.
- I. Support federal and state parks and recreation plans that help implement this comprehensive plan.

OBJECTIVE PS2: SUSTAIN OUR PARK ASSETS

Provide the necessary resources to build and maintain a parks system that offers a diversity of recreational opportunities for all residents.

Strategies:

- A. Supplement City funding with additional funds from user fees, concession and lease agreements, and grants.
- B. Supplement City maintenance resources with maintenance sharing agreements.
- C. Collaborate with institutions, businesses and organizations to sponsor and fund programs.
- D. Ensure balance between services, fees and programming.
- E. Establish reasonable and feasible maintenance standards.
- F. Increase park maintenance staff during peak seasonal periods.

- G. Incorporate low maintenance designs into park renovation projects.
- H. Investigate and implement innovative park maintenance plans with public and private partners.

OBJECTIVE PS3: LINK PUBLIC SPACES

Connect neighborhoods and open spaces through a network of bicycle and pedestrian friendly streets and trails.

Strategies:

- A. Continue to develop a connected system of greenways for continual access along the entire waterfront and through adjacent neighborhoods.
- B. Strategically acquire parcels to link open spaces.
- C. Explore opportunities involving public and private land to provide continuous public access to the waterfront along rivers and ponds without land acquisition.
- D. Collaborate across City departments and with community organizations to identify and implement improvements to the city's bicycle and pedestrian networks.
- E. Through development incentives, negotiation, and other mechanisms, create publicly accessible open spaces through private land development.

OBJECTIVE PS4: INCREASE ACCESS TO PARK FACILITIES

Provide for a regular program of park and recreation improvements that reflect resident interests in recreation and physical fitness.

Strategies:

- A. Prioritize development of new parks and improvements to existing parks based on neighborhood need, incorporating equity analysis of factors like access to green space, neighborhood tree canopy, and level of urban density.
- B. Provide public park and recreation facilities in proximity to schools.
- C. Expand and diversify park use opportunities.
- D. Increase accessibility of park facilities for residents of all levels of physical abilities, including incorporating universal design and PROWAG principles into park improvements and investing in infrastructure like accessible picnic tables.

OBJECTIVE PS5: STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES

Protect natural and cultural resources by incorporating them into the fabric of an overall system of public open space and enhance their climate resilience.

Strategies:

- A. Promote public access to the waterfront and water-based recreational activities.
- B. Explore opportunities to create new open spaces along waterways (rivers, ponds, streams) where none currently exist.
- C. Encourage the conservation, restoration and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas through means such as evaluating expansion of conservation areas.
- D. Continue to study and implement best practices in climate resilient design of park and conservation areas to support citywide management of increasing levels of stormwater, sea

level rise, and extreme heat.

- E. Encourage pedestrian access to and passive use of designated conservation areas.
- F. Identify and protect key vistas and view corridors.
- G. Ensure the stewardship of historic park facilities and landscapes.
- H. Promote the restoration of historic park sculptures through public/private partnerships.

OBJECTIVE PS6: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Ensure the success of public spaces by involving the community in planning and maintenance efforts.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage community ownership of neighborhood parks and other civic and public spaces through “friends of...”, “park watch dogs” and similar programs.
- B. Develop an ongoing process for updating neighborhood and citywide resident interests and needs for park and recreation facilities and public programming.
- C. Provide opportunities for community input in park and recreation facility renovation efforts.
- D. Increase public knowledge about existing park and recreation spaces as well as athletic, arts and performing arts programming activities.
- E. Promote a civic culture of properly caring for public spaces.

OBJECTIVE PS7: COMMUNITY GARDENING

Continue to identify, establish, maintain and expand city park sites for community gardens.

Strategies:

- A. Work with residents and community groups to identify viable community garden sites.
- B. Identify and prioritize community garden expansion in neighborhoods lacking community gardens or access to health food.
- C. Expand community gardening opportunities on under-utilized park land.
- D. Investigate ways to identify and match potential park-owned garden sites with growers.
- E. Continue to aspire to every Providence resident living within a ten-minute walk of a community garden.

Community Services and Facilities

GOAL: Sustain a high quality of life by providing efficient, responsive, and cost-effective city services, and maintaining quality community facilities.

In the coming decades, the City of Providence will face challenges including a changing climate, new

technologies, new ways of living and working, and a growing population. The city's community services and facilities must anticipate change and adapt to provide adequate service and continue acting as hubs of civic life. At a minimum, public services and facilities ensure the ability of a community to live in a safe and adequate environment. When designed with people and their environment in mind, quality services and facilities have the potential to build community capacity, support economic mobility, enhance the natural environment, and more.

Community services include both the visible and unseen systems that enable urban life. This includes management of water, wastewater, stormwater, and solid waste, as well as energy production and consumption, and the interface through which residents engage with these services: PVD 311.

Community facilities are often the most direct way that residents engage with government. Facilities such as fire and police stations, libraries, schools, and community centers are often the heart of neighborhoods in which they are located and viewed as amenities, anchors, and stabilizing influences.

Not every service or facility discussed in this chapter is provided by the City of Providence. Some, like libraries and wastewater management, are provided by partner agencies or organizations. The City must remain aware of the limited resources and capacity of the various public, not-for-profit, and private entities that manage vital services, while working collaboratively to ensure the highest possible quality of life for the Providence community.

Objectives and Strategies – Community Services

City Service Coordination and PVD 311

Launched in 2015, the Mayor's Center for City Services (MCCS) and the PVD311 system has transformed how services are requested, managed, and advocated for in Providence. Constituents now have one central hub where they can ask a question or request services, either by walking into the MCCS office at City Hall, calling 3-1-1, or downloading the PVD311 app on a smartphone and submitting a request.

To date, more than 130,000 city service requests have been made through the 311 system since 2016. The most common request types include reports of trash or debris on public or private property, potholes and sidewalk issues, housing code issues or violations, missed trash pickup, illegal parking, and tree maintenance requests.

The 311 system has undergone continuous improvement since launching, with a significant upgrade expected in 2024 that will improve the user experience and better integrate service requests into City department workflows.

OBJECTIVE CS1: CITY SERVICE COORDINATION

Provide and advocate for accessible, transparent, efficient, and proactive city services.

Strategies:

- A. Continue centralizing constituent service requests through a central public facing hub (PVD 311).
- B. Improve public awareness of PVD 311 through additional signage, community outreach events, public advertising, and other best practices.
- C. Improve accessibility and user experience of PVD 311, potentially through additional channels of communication, such as virtual chat and email.
- D. Continue to expand the services and information that can be requested via PVD 311.
- E. Continue improving the integration of PVD 311 requests and City department workflows, with transparent and regular progress updates reported back to constituents.
- F. Study how innovative new technologies, like generative artificial intelligence, can be used to improve PVD 311.

Police, Fire and Public Safety

Providence's violent crime rate has steadily declined in recent decades. The Providence Police Department continues to be acknowledged as a national example of community policing, with deep relationships in Providence neighborhoods and partnerships with community organizations that help deter and respond to crime and violence. Initiatives like partnerships with ride-along mental health clinicians have helped tailor police responses to community needs, prioritizing de-escalation and supporting victims.

Understaffing continues to impact the police force. However, recent police academy graduating classes have increased staffing levels, while continuing to add diversity to the force so that it more closely reflects the Providence community. Providence Police are also expanding their capacity to respond to issues like traffic safety and quality of life crimes, by cracking down on illegal ATVs and unsafe driving behavior through speed cameras and other tools. Investments in new technology and training are also helping to tackle long considered "hard-to-enforce" issues like noise, which negatively impacts quality of life across Providence neighborhoods.

The Fire Department has also expanded services beyond fire response and prevention in the last decade, especially to combat the opioid overdose epidemic in response to an increase in basic and advanced life support. The Safe Stations program opens fire stations to anyone seeking addiction recovery services. A new Fire EMS bike unit has been deployed in high population areas of the city to respond more quickly to calls for overdose prevention, first aid, and mental health support.

OBJECTIVE CS2: POLICE, FIRE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Ensure the safety and well-being of residents by providing fire and police protection and adequate resources, technology, and training to perform these vital services.

Strategies:

- A. Support innovation in methods and technology to advance the work of the police and fire departments.
- B. Coordinate the operations of the police and fire departments and support inter-operational systems like dispatch.
- C. Maintain and support programs to address substance use and prevent overdoses, including emerging best practices in public health, exemplified by RI's first overdose prevention center and in the City of Providence's overdose prevention plan.
- D. Coordinate disaster operations and Homeland Security functions with the Providence Emergency Management Agency (PEMA).
- E. Promote ongoing training and certification of police and fire personnel.
- F. Promote fire prevention and safe buildings.
- G. Maintain and improve public education efforts such as the smoke and carbon monoxide detector program.
- H. Coordinate fire and police operations with code enforcement.
- I. Promote accessible routes for fire and emergency response; this also entails effective and legible street and directional signs.
- J. Improve traffic safety citywide, emphasizing pedestrian and bicycle as well as automobile safety.
- K. Educate the public on the proper use of the 911 system and non-emergency line to reduce abuse of the system.
- L. Continue to support and emphasize the importance of community policing and community engagement in all departments.
- M. Improve enforcement of traffic regulations citywide, including by studying and utilizing new technology and best practices.
- N. Review and develop public safety strategies around nightlife, to ensure that Providence is a safe destination for active nightlife that contributes to and does not detract from quality of life in the city.

Emergency Management

Studies have shown that every dollar spent on hazard mitigation and emergency preparedness saves an average of six dollars in future disaster costs, in addition to lives saved and injuries avoided (National Institute of Building Sciences, 2019).

Emergency prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery in Providence is led by the Providence Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) in collaboration with public safety personnel and several other public, non-profit, and private partners. PEMA also acts as the local Office of Homeland Security and is supported by both the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The emergency management landscape has changed dramatically since 2014. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, PEMA quickly pivoted to lead the coordination of vaccination clinics and distribution of

supplies like test kits, masks, and sanitizer. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, notably coastal, riverine, and nuisance flooding, which have become a major focus of PEMA's prevention and response efforts in recent years. The opioid overdose epidemic is now an official nationwide public health emergency and year-over-year increases in overdoses in Providence have informed an urgent expansion of NARCAN training, among other actions.

At the time of this draft in spring 2024, Providence is in the final stages of updating its Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) in accordance with the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. With help from a consultant team and a Local Hazard Mitigation Committee made up of City departments, state agencies, universities, non-profits, and other stakeholders, the plan assesses the risk of various potential hazards, ranging from the natural (ex: drought, disease, flooding), to the human-caused (ex: civil unrest, terrorism, cyber attack), and technological (ex: utility failure). The plan includes specific mitigation actions and is guided by a set of goals reflected in the strategies below that aim to reduce the risk of hazards to the City of Providence.

OBJECTIVE CS3: EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Enhance the City's capacity to mitigate, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from major emergencies and disasters.

Strategies:

- A. Update hazard assessments to incorporate the latest data and scientific understanding with an emphasis on future projections to ensure readiness for evolving threats.
- B. Before designing mitigation measures, study and leverage nationwide best practices, explore nature-based solutions, perform a "root cause analysis," and understand the design of legacy systems in the context of current and future capacity needs.
- C. Foster collaboration between different systems and agencies to create more cohesive and efficient mitigation opportunities.
- D. Leverage emerging opportunities presented by new regulations (e.g. Executive Order 20-01: Advancing a 100% Renewable Energy Future for Rhode Island by 2030) and technological advancements, while concurrently mitigating the risks or challenges that they introduce.
- E. Tailor hazard mitigation strategies to align with the evolving landscape and its novel ramifications.
- F. Increase public involvement in disaster preparedness through education and outreach programs.
- G. Uplift community organizations in emergency response by encouraging community-driven ideas and solutions and providing resources to ensure success.
- H. Build up the financial resilience of Providence communities and provide aid after catastrophic losses.
- I. Ensure that policy, building code, and investment decisions are proactive and adaptive, aligning with the current and future risk environment and mitigation best practices to safeguard communities.

Water

Drinking water is supplied to Providence households and businesses by the Providence Water Supply Board (PWSB), also known as Providence Water. PWSB maintains the Scituate Reservoir and its purification plant, as well as the infrastructure that serves drinking water to 600,000 people across Rhode Island. The Scituate Reservoir watershed is strictly protected and managed by PWSB, RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and private and municipal landowners.

Based on demand projections and capacity estimates in the 2018 Water Supply System Management Plan, PWSB anticipates having ample water supply for projected future average demand, with reserve system storage available to help meet maximum day demand projections. Several drought events in the last decade, most recently in summer 2022, left the reservoir below average levels for a period of months, but never dangerously low. As climate change leads to more frequent extreme weather events in the decades to come, assumptions informing water supply and demand projections will need to be further studied.

PWSB has invested \$547 million into capital improvements and infrastructure replacements since 1990, with an additional \$615 million of capital improvements planned to be spent from 2021-2040. In recent decades, the public health dangers of lead service lines have become more widely understood. Responsibility is divided amongst ownership of lead pipes, with homeowners owning the sections of pipe on private property, making it more difficult to replace full lead service lines. However, recent federal grants and the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law have funded free private lead service replacement to qualified families.

OBJECTIVE CS4: WATER

Provide a safe, sustainable, and adequate water supply for residential, commercial and industrial users.

Strategies:

Protect the city's water supply by:

- A. Implementing a watershed protection plan for the entire Scituate Reservoir system watershed area.
- B. Continuing use of the watershed protection surcharge for watershed land acquisition.
- C. Protecting and preserving the watershed land of the Scituate Reservoir by mandating additional regulations to restrict pedestrian and vehicular access to the reservoir.
- D. Continuing to support all watershed protection efforts, including use of the power of eminent domain to acquire property rights.
- E. Working to create emergency connections with other water providers throughout the state and region based on the recommendations of the supplemental water supply study.
- F. Working to amend the enabling legislation for the PWSB to allow the City to reserve enough water for its future needs.
- G. Working with the State to plan for statewide water supply challenges and needs.

Maintain the City's water supply by:

- H. Discouraging industrial use of potable water when other water sources can be made available or technology can minimize the need.
- I. Encouraging users to create gray water systems to lessen demand on the potable water supply.
- J. Meeting and exceeding all applicable water quality regulations.
- K. Continuing to upgrade and maintain infrastructure throughout the system, including the replacement of lead service lines, with proper notification and outreach to eligible families about incentive programs and health risks.

Upgrade the water supply system by:

- L. Addressing storage and distribution problems in order to cope with predicted long-term growth in the service region and population served.
- M. Conducting studies of water system demand, safe yield, and facilities needs to ensure that future needs for water are met.
- N. Improving the water distribution system with the installation of state-of-the-art equipment and infrastructure.
- O. Completing installation of automated water meters throughout the system.
- P. Exploring new areas for potential to serve as reservoirs for additional water supply.

Wastewater

All Providence households are served by a “partially combined” sewer system that carries both wastewater and stormwater. Wastewater is treated at the Field’s Point Wastewater Treatment Facility and has been managed in conjunction with the quasi-public Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC) since 1980.

In addition to technology, facilities, and renewable energy upgrades at the Fields Point Treatment Facility in the last decade, NBC’s multi-decade Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Abatement Project completed Phase II in 2014 and advanced into its final Phase III, scheduled for completion in 2028. When completed, this project will end [most](#) CSO discharges into Narragansett Bay, one of the largest point sources of pollution affecting the Bay. Work in the last decade diverted outfalls in several Providence neighborhoods and separated stormwater and wastewater flow on the East Side of Providence, leading to a significant improvement in water quality in the Woonasquatucket, Providence, Moshassuck, and Seekonk rivers.

The City of Providence does not receive funding from the Narragansett Bay Commission to help maintain and upgrade City-owned sewer lines. In the last decade, the Providence Department of Public Works has utilized local Capital Improvement Plan and federal American Rescue Plan Act (2021) funding to study and map the sewer system, as well as make the first proactive repairs to City sewer lines in decades. Further study is required to understand and proactively improve the condition and capacity of the entire system, an increasingly urgent task given the changing climate and the anticipated frequency of extreme weather events in the coming decades.

OBJECTIVE CS5: WASTEWATER

In conjunction with the Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC), provide an efficient and sanitary wastewater treatment system that adequately serves the entire city, operates in full compliance with all state and federal standards, and improves water quality in Narragansett Bay.

Strategies:

The City shall ensure efficient operation of city wastewater facilities by:

- A. Pursuing funding opportunities to maintain and improve City owned wastewater lines and storm water treatment systems.
- B. Pursuing legislation for revenue sharing with NBC to ensure maintenance of City-owned wastewater lines.
- C. Continuing to ensure that all new development and redevelopment projects include separate wastewater and storm water lines.
- D. Incorporate Best Management Practices (BMPs) for storm water to limit storm water flow into the city's rivers and combined sewers, reducing outfall, flow and capacity issues.
- E. Expand and incentivize the use of innovative storm water management interventions, such as green infrastructure, de-paving and rain gardens, especially in anticipation of increased extreme weather events associated with climate change.
- F. Amending regulations to allow the operation of grey water systems to reduce the amount of wastewater entering the treatment system.

Encourage NBC to ensure the efficient and effective operation of its wastewater facilities by:

- G. Completing Phase III of the Combined Sewer Overflow Abatement Project.
- H. Continuing the Combined Sewer Monitoring and Metering Program which provides capacity and maintenance analysis.
- I. Making sewer improvements which include: video inspection of all sewer lines, development of an asset management program linked to GIS and upgrading infrastructure as needed.
- J. Ensuring ability to maintain and upgrade infrastructure through review and enforcement of all overland maintenance easements.
- K. Preparing treatment facilities for the effects of climate change, including sea level rise and storm surge risks at Field's Point.

Solid Waste

Refuse and recycling programs in Providence are administered by the Department of Public Works' Environmental Services Division with household curbside garbage and recycling pick-up under contract with Waste Management. The Department of Sustainability also leads several programs and grants relating to solid waste, including composting initiatives and plastic bag ban compliance.

Waste and recycling are brought to Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC) in Johnston, which includes a central landfill, materials and residential recycling, eco-depot for hazardous waste, and leaf and yard debris composting. According to *Solid Waste 2038*, an element of the State Guide Plan, the Johnston Central Landfill is expected to reach capacity in 2038 unless disposal rates change.

In an effort to improve Providence’s low rates of recycling and diversion (7.8% and 8.3% of all solid waste respectively in 2023 – well below the 35% and 50% state goals), the city and RIRRC launched a new “Recycle Together” public education program in 2022 that aims to raise recycling rates and save the estimated \$1M spent by the city annually on rejected truckloads of contaminated waste. Recent community outreach initiatives relating to mattress disposal have saved the City hundreds of thousands of dollars and reduced dumping.

The Providence Climate Justice Plan sets a target of eliminating all local food waste by 2040. Providence has seen a significant increase in backyard, indoor, and pick up composting in the last decade, indicating a demand for further expansion. Programs like Groundwork RI’s Harvest Cycle, Bootstrap Compost, and others pick up food waste directly from paying or qualifying households as well as dedicated drop off locations at community gardens and libraries. In 2024, the City of Providence received a major grant from the US Department of Agriculture to subsidize training and supplies in support of food waste diversion and composting in Providence. According to RIRRC, almost one-third of all municipal waste that goes to the land fill can be composted. In addition to expanding the life of the landfill beyond 2038, achieving this level of composting could also save over 44,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually in Rhode Island.

OBJECTIVE CS6: SOLID WASTE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL

Reduce the amount of waste disposed of in landfills by prioritizing participation in recycling and composting programs, and promoting solid waste and litter reduction.

Strategies:

- A. Expand recycling and composting public education and enforcement measures to increase citywide recycling rates to meet and exceed the 35% recycling and 50% diversion rates required by the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC).
- B. Encourage, invest in, and dramatically expand recycling and composting programs to reduce the amount of solid waste sent to the landfill, and consider implementing incentives to do so.
- C. Study and consider launching a municipal compost program that collects food waste and yard debris and sells compost back to residents for use.
- D. Promote the beneficial reuse of materials.
- E. Work with RIRRC and RIDEM to have multi-family housing solid waste reclassified as municipal waste rather than commercial to facilitate recycling at these properties.
- F. Encourage and support the work of non-profit groups and community organizations to help reduce litter and dumping in the city’s neighborhoods and promote the proper disposal of solid waste.
- G. Educate consumers regarding the impact of purchases on waste generation and reduction, and materials recovery, through the purchase of recycled content products, and the purchase of products with reduced toxicity and packaging.
- H. Encourage industrial processes that generate reduced amounts of waste.
- I. Encourage local businesses and industries to recycle and to use recycled and recyclable products.
- J. Promote litter prevention efforts at the local and state levels, stressing the protection of waterfront areas and waterbodies, and establishes a culture of stewardship of public spaces.

- K. Continue to modernize the City’s solid waste management system.
- L. Investigate the feasibility of a municipal Pay as You Throw program for Providence.
- M. Work with RIRRC to expand the list of acceptable recyclables (i.e. colored glass, plastic types 3 through 7).
- N. Work with RIRRC and RIDEM to expand the Recycle Together public education program.

Energy

In Providence, electricity and natural gas are delivered to households and businesses by Rhode Island Energy, which is regulated by the Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission. Most Providence residents and businesses receive energy supply via a competitive bidding process under Providence Community Electricity, a “community-choice aggregation” program launched in 2023 that allows the municipality to aggregate buying power to seek more competitive prices and a higher share of renewable energy sources.

The City and State are transitioning to a more clean, diverse, and secure energy system in the coming decades. Goals and mandates set by the Paris Agreement, RI Energy 2035 Plan, Rhode Island Act on Climate, and Providence Climate Justice Plan – to reduce emissions by 40% by 2030, 80% by 2040, and 100% by 2050 – reflect an urgency to decarbonize and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the worst effects of Climate Change. Strategies to achieve these goals are included in several Comprehensive Plan chapters (including Land Use, Sustainability, and Mobility), but must include improving energy efficiency across sectors, promoting renewable energy (especially from local sources), reducing vehicle miles traveled and transitioning to alternative fuel and electric vehicles, addressing gas leaks and outdated infrastructure, and reducing costs.

OBJECTIVE CS7: ENERGY

Provide for the energy needs of City residents and the State, while phasing out the use of fossil fuels and lessening impacts on the environment.

Strategies:

- A. Work with local generators and distributors by providing them with city plans for growth and change as they plan for the future utility needs of city and state residents.
- B. Discourage the development of private generators using fossil fuels as a primary fuel and encourage the development of generators using renewable energy sources and heat pumps.
- C. Transition energy supply to renewable sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and tidal.
- D. Encourage utility companies to use best and most advanced technology to minimize environmental impacts on air quality.
- E. Encourage co-generation of electricity, including home and community solar programs.
- F. Promote conservation of existing energy resources through education programs.
- G. Create standards for the siting and design of physical plants, service vaults, transformers, and electric and gas meters within the city limits.
- H. Work with the city’s institutions to incorporate energy sustainability and net-zero, LEED, and passive building standards into their master plans.
- I. Increase participation in RePOWER PVD the City’s voluntary energy challenge program.

- J. Prioritize electric and alternative fuel vehicles when adding to the City's fleet.
- K. Develop plans and strategies to ensure all municipal buildings are carbon-neutral by 2040.
- L. Determine locations where wind turbines and solar farms could be constructed in the city, under certain conditions.

Objectives and Strategies – Community Facilities

Schools

As of School Year 2023-2024, the Providence Public School District (PPSD) serves approximately 19,400 students across 36 schools: 19 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, and 10 high schools. PPSD schools are racially and linguistically diverse learning communities. Approximately 69% of PPSD students identify as Latino, 14% Black, 6.5% White, 4% Asian, 5.5% multi-racial and 1% Native American. Approximately 40% of PPSD students are multilingual learners, and about 17% of students receive special education services.

In addition, roughly 6,505 students attend charter schools, representing 25% of Providence students. Because these schools are located in various geographies and serve students from both in and outside the City of Providence, this summary and comprehensive plan discusses only PPSD buildings and programs.

Over the last decade, two key initiatives have been driving changes to PPSD buildings and educational programming: the Rebuild PVD Schools and the District Turnaround Action Plan.

Rebuild PVD Schools

Following decades of deferred maintenance, a statewide moratorium on facility reimbursements and inadequate resources, PPSD's school facilities have over \$900 million of reported deficiencies that require repairs and upgrades. Supported by both City and State issued bonds, as well as State reimbursement incentives, PPSD and the City of Providence have begun an ambitious capital plan to reimagine school facilities under the umbrella of the Rebuild PVD Schools Plan.

Under this plan, PPSD and the City of Providence have built three new or like-new schools – the first in over a decade – with nine additional schools already approved and underway. Through strategic use of swing space, construction timelines are able to move faster and with less disruption to students. These projects represent over \$500 million in construction, repair, and renovation. City and state officials approved an additional \$400 million of projects in February 2024.

Reflecting national trends in demographics and the growth of private and charter schools, PPSD has had an enrollment decline of 3,000 students since 2018, a trend that is projected to continue, with a decline of another 3,000 students expected by 2030. Without any changes to school programming and facilities, this decline would leave the district with 5,500 excess seats by the 2029-30 school year. PPSD capital and programmatic planning aims to align school buildings to these shifts, ensuring a thoughtful right-sizing of district facilities and classrooms.

District Turnaround Action Plan

In November 2019, PPSD entered State Intervention, putting the district under control of the state Department of Education. Drafted in collaboration with Community Design Teams and using district outcome data, state and district leaders crafted a Turnaround Action Plan (TAP) to guide the district's work from 2020-2025. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders Acknowledge the impact the global pandemic has had on the improved outcomes of the turnaround action plan. The TAP has four pillars: (1) Engaged Communities, (2) Excellence in Learning, (3) World Class Talent, and (4) Efficient District Systems. Under each of these pillars, the TAP details specific goals following key metrics to track turnaround efforts, as well as strategies for driving change.

Additionally, the City of Providence has convened an interdepartmental working group, the Return to Local Control Cabinet, that includes city departments, City Council staff and Providence School Board members. This Cabinet is tasked with identifying an outline of what the city needs to do to responsible repair for a return to local municipal control, whenever that is determined to be by the RI Department of Education and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

OBJECTIVE CS8: SCHOOLS

Ensure that all Providence children have the learning environment, tools, and opportunity to succeed in school and their future workplace and become active members of civic society.

Strategies:

Improve academic achievement for all children and increase the graduation rate by:

- A. Increase the number of PPSD school that are rated 2-stars or higher by the state evaluation system.
- B. Increase the number of parents and caregivers engaged with PPSD formal community engagement structures.
- C. Increase the percentage of students who are present 90% of the school year.
- D. Increase the percentage of students who are meeting and exceeding their Multilingual Learner (MLL) targets on the ACCESS assessment
- E. Increase the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations in 3rd grade ELA RICAS.
- F. Increase the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations in 3rd grade Math RICAS.
- G. Increase the percentage of PPSD students who graduate within four years.
- H. Increase the percentage of students who graduate with college credit, AP credit or a CTE credential.
- I. Developing partnerships with local colleges and universities, as well as major employers and foundations to ensure students have access to opportunities.
- J. Recruiting highly effective teachers and school leaders who reflect Providence's diversity and are focused on student growth and achievement.
- K. Collaborating with local colleges and universities on teacher training, education curriculum and continuing education opportunities to ensure teachers are highly qualified.
- L. Working with local businesses, institutions and non-profit agencies to develop school-to-career

programs and cooperative work experiences that provide practical application of academic knowledge and prepare students to join the workforce.

- M. Exploring partnerships with libraries and local colleges and universities to increase access to resources and programming.
- N. Collaborating with community organizations to expand Eat Play Learn and other year-round out of school educational, recreational and cultural activities for children of all ages.

Develop physical and social environments that are conducive to learning by:

- O. Utilizing state and local bond funding to improve school facilities to meet current and future educational needs.
- P. Preserving the continuity of school communities and transform the middle school experience through the expansion of pre-kindergarten through 8th grade school models.
- Q. Building new schools in strategic locations where Providence families are concentrated.
- R. Building “newer and fewer” schools, to right-size the number of buildings to align with current and future projected enrollment.
- S. Modernizing security and educational technology at all school buildings.
- T. Ensuring that new and rehabilitated schools are models of environmental sustainability and design excellence.
- U. Improving pedestrian and bicycle access to schools from the surrounding neighborhoods.
- V. Opening grounds and facilities for community use, such as recreation and joint landscaping projects, to create additional urban green space in neighborhoods.
- W. Exploring opportunities for the creation of joint-use facilities such as athletic, recreational, and libraries, with community organizations.
- X. Implementing maintenance programs for buildings and grounds.
- Y. Ensuring that schools are free from physical violence and psychological abuse such as bullying.
- Z. Support efforts to create a predictable and fair school funding formula statewide that recognizes the particular challenges and needs of urban school systems.

Library Services

Providence’s library system is managed by two non-profit organizations, the downtown Providence Public Library ([PPL](#)) and nine community libraries managed by Community Libraries of Providence ([CLPVD](#)), both of which receive significant public funding.

Since Community Libraries of Providence was founded in 2009 to take over the management and operation of the neighborhood libraries, both [PPL and CLPVD organizations](#) have completed significant capital improvements and program expansions to better meet the needs of Providence communities. The Covid-19 pandemic forced both institutions to rethink their delivery of services and programs, but American Rescue Plan Act dollars and other initiatives have continued to expand programming and increase library visits. Providence Public Library completed a major modernizing renovation of its building in 2020, which has enabled a significant expansion of community programs and services. Community Libraries of Providence also completed several renovations at neighborhood branches, including ADA accessibility improvements, new “maker spaces,” and technology improvements.

OBJECTIVE CS9: LIBRARY SERVICES

Encourage Community Libraries of Providence and the Providence Public Library to provide residents of the city with a full range of library services.

Strategies:*The Providence Community and Public Libraries will:*

- A. Acquire, organize and maintain comprehensive collections that reflect diversity and a wide spectrum of views.
- B. Provide specialized reference services.
- C. Refine and expand library services statewide through the development and implementation of cooperative services and individual programs, with and for community and professional groups and individual experts.
- D. Improve the effectiveness of library services for children by developing and implementing programs, in cooperation with other organizations, that serve the child in the context of her/his family and the larger community.
- E. Expand library services to adolescents.
- F. Provide sufficient hours at all library locations to ensure that the needs of the community are met. Maintain a high standard of customer service in library staff to ensure that the needs of users are met.
- G. Bridge the gap between those with ready access to information and those without by providing access to technology through the provision of up-to-date computer equipment, programs and access to the Internet.
- H. Continue training and educational programs to inform and aid individuals accessing and using the library's electronic and physical information resources.
- I. Provide remote access to library resources utilizing electronic databases.
- J. Provide access to library resources to individuals with disabilities including the provision of assistive technology for the vision and hearing-impaired.
- K. Host community events at libraries to increase community awareness of library services and continue expanding library spaces as hubs for community connection.

Recreation and Community Centers

Providence's neighborhoods are also anchored by 12 recreation centers, more than 10 senior centers, and several community centers. These facilities are the heart of their diverse and vibrant communities and host programming serving residents of all ages and backgrounds.

Providence recreation centers are managed by the Department of Recreation and have a long history of serving Providence's youth through early childhood development and athletic programs. Facilities include indoor gyms, indoor and outdoor pools, and computer rooms. Programs range from the popular \$5/week summer camps as part of Providence's Eat Play Learn program, to basketball, soccer, and swim leagues, and arts and crafts groups. Recent projects include the renovation of various recreation center gyms and pools, a major rehabilitation project at the Elmwood Community Center, and the establishment of a "Resilience Hub" at Olneyville's Joslin Recreation Center, which aims to meet the

needs of residents around climate change mitigation, emergency management, and community capacity building.

Senior centers are managed by various non-profit organizations, with programs and services coordinated by the City's Senior Services Division. The City provides transportation for seniors from private houses, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities to community centers, day centers, supermarkets, and other event locations.

OBJECTIVE CS10: RECREATION AND COMMUNITY CENTERS

Support the continued growth of recreation, senior, and community centers to meet the needs of and promote connection between constituents of all ages and backgrounds.

Strategies:

- A. Analyze changing neighborhood demographics and conduct community outreach to assess what community needs can be served by community facilities and programming.
- B. Enhance the physical infrastructure of recreation center buildings through capital improvements and grand funds, with attention to accessibility and climate resiliency.
- C. Consider developing new recreation centers in neighborhoods where there are lacking youth and community recreation opportunities.
- D. Improve the accessibility, outreach, and communication of recreation center programs and initiatives through improved technology, website, and use of social media.
- E. Expand relationships with community organizations to expand programs in line with the mission of the City and Department of Recreation
- F. Create opportunities for programming and initiatives that will enrich the experience of children, families, and community members by establishing opportunities to address athletics, health and wellness, food insecurity, and extended learning.
- G. Hire and train staff to advance the mission of the Department of Recreation.
- H. Develop relationships with elementary and secondary schools to build expand programming and extended learning opportunities.
- I. Develop relationships with senior centers and assisted living facilities to expand programs for community members of all ages.

Land Use

GOAL: Promote and manage growth through land development while sustaining Providence’s high quality of life and preserving its unique attributes.

Land development continually shapes the growth and transformation of Providence. The Comprehensive Plan must address where and how these changes occur. This land use element focuses on both questions, based on

input from previous comprehensive plans; neighborhood, area, and corridor plans; and from the public engagement process for this plan. This element has the most significant influence on the zoning ordinance, land development and subdivision review regulations, and ultimately on the projects that get built in the city.

The land use element of the 2014 comprehensive plan was predicated on two key principles: protect residential neighborhoods and direct higher density development to the downtown, major commercial corridors, and industrial areas. With the adoption of a new zoning ordinance in 2014, growth has largely followed these principles.

Several important trends have emerged in the past several years regarding land use in Providence. First, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the commercial real estate market has seen a downturn, resulting in high vacancy rates for commercial storefronts and office spaces. Another trend is a significant deficit in housing units relative to demand. Prices have increased while housing production has not kept pace. Adding to the stress on housing supply and upward pressure on costs are the recent phenomena of short-term rentals that reduce the availability of housing units available to long-term residents, and the significant expansion of off-campus student housing that is purpose-built or renovated for large numbers of students who often pay more than what a household of non-students pays. Providence needs to ensure that its land use policies and regulations adapt to these types of changes in the economy while appropriately managing growth.

In late 2023, Providence amended its zoning ordinance and land development and subdivision review regulations in response to the most significant changes in state land use laws in 30 years. These new laws sought to address the housing shortage by removing barriers to development of housing throughout the state. While Providence had already made significant strides in this regard, the new rules that were adopted relax certain regulations to allow for more housing and create more opportunity for administrative review of compliant projects, rather than review by a board or commission. This can significantly reduce timeframes for approval. As outlined below, there are still opportunities to improve our land use regulations to address a multitude of issues.

This chapter has two important maps. The first is the “growth strategy” map. This map is a general overview of where significant growth is most appropriate. It also shows the areas of the city where change should be more carefully managed. This map aims to direct growth in a controlled way that complements and builds on the assets of our city. The second map in this section is the official “future land use” map that forms the basis for the zoning map. It is more detailed than the growth strategy map, but not as precise as the zoning map.

This element is organized in three parts:

- “Where do we grow?” introduces a general approach to growth for the city using Map 11.1 “growth strategy” and lists the goals and objectives for all areas identified on the map.
- “How do we grow?” identifies specific details of how the city should be developed using Map 11.2 “future land use.”
- “Land use in relation to other plan elements” links the land use section to the other sections of the plan by identifying goals and strategies that are specific to land use for each of the other topics.

Where do we grow?

GOAL: Ensure the continued strength and stability of Providence’s neighborhoods and direct growth to appropriate areas.

Map 11.1 “growth strategy,” describes general themes for how growth should be managed throughout the city. The map was developed through an analysis of land use patterns and

trends, along with considerable community engagement. It identifies eight distinct areas, descriptions of which are below. The purpose of this map is to inform the more detailed future land use map.

Growth Strategy Map Designations:

Historic Districts: Areas with buildings and sites of historical, architectural, and cultural significance deemed worthy of preservation. The map depicts existing local historic districts, but for purposes of clarity does not depict individual sites throughout the city that are appropriate for preservation, including those within the scattered-site Providence Landmarks District. These individual sites are as worthy of preservation as the larger districts.

Managed Growth – Residential: Primarily residential areas of varying densities with some areas of mixed use or non-residential use. New development in these areas should not change the overall existing development patterns.

Enhanced Growth – Residential: Primarily residential areas of varying densities with limited mixed use that are suitable for higher-density residential growth due to their proximity to Downtown, high degree of mobility options, and the existing built environment that contains a significant portion of high-density housing.

Growth Corridors – Mixed Use: Commercial and transit corridors with areas and nodes suited for mixed-use and higher-density residential infill development.

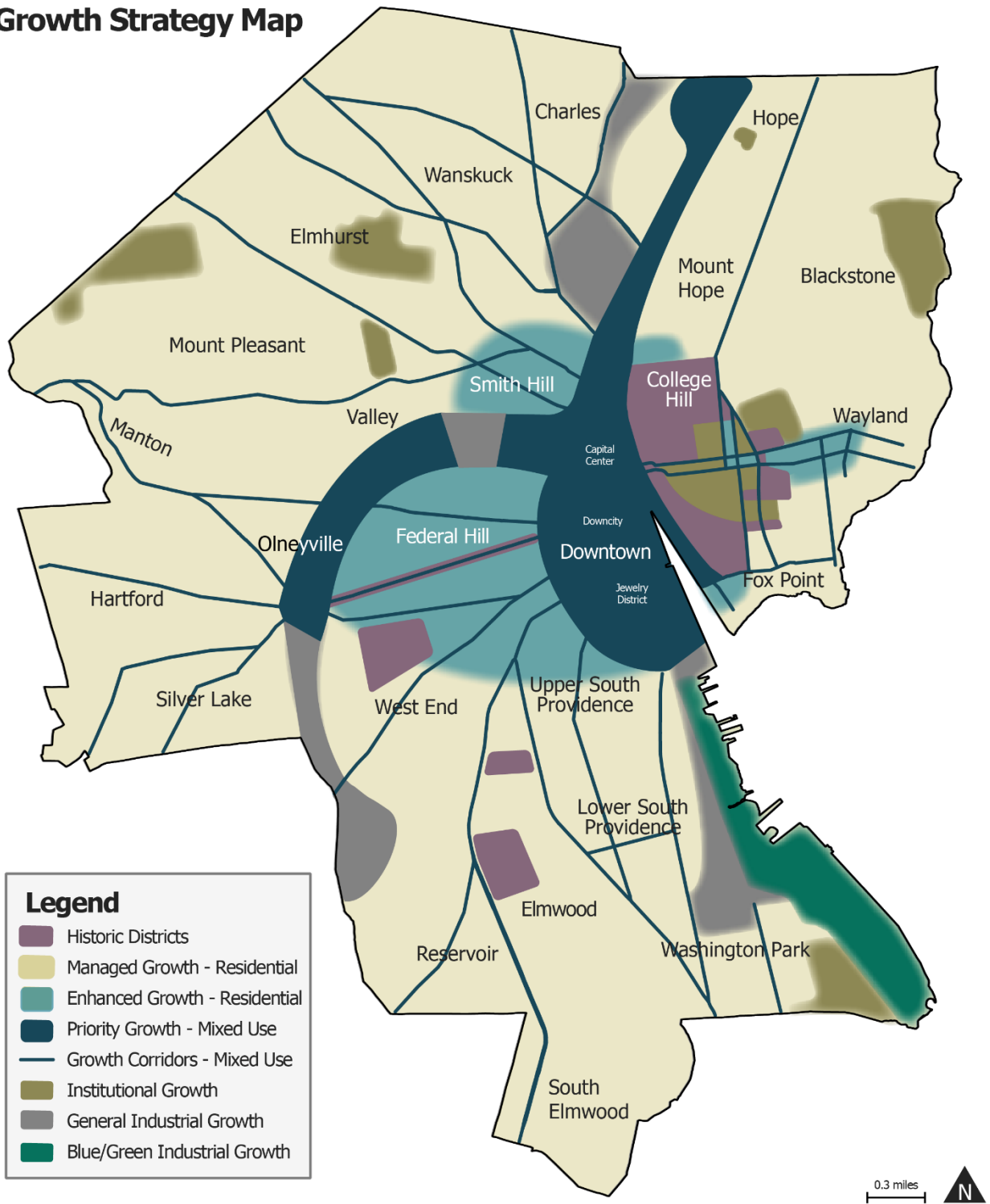
Priority Growth – Mixed Use: High-amenity areas with the best transit service and mobility options, suited for large scale, dense, mixed-use development.

Institutional Growth: Areas for growth of educational and healthcare institutions.

General Industrial: Areas for business and industrial growth without residential uses, and prioritizing clean, sustainable, and resilient economic development.

Blue-Green Industrial: Areas for growth of water-dependent industry, prioritizing clean, sustainable, and resilient economic development.

Growth Strategy Map



Map 11.1 Growth Strategy

OBJECTIVE LU1: PROTECT AND ENHANCE STABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

Reinforce the stability, character, and diversity of the City’s neighborhoods by respecting valued development patterns and attributes.

Strategies:

- A. In Historic Districts:
 1. Strictly regulate alterations and new construction in these areas to preserve buildings and sites of historical, architectural, and cultural significance and to ensure compatibility of new construction with existing historic fabric. The historic district commission may regulate land and buildings more strictly than the underlying zoning in order to achieve this mission.
 2. Review, evaluate, and amend regulations for historic districts to ensure that they are appropriate to modern preservation practices.
 3. Continue to evaluate properties or areas that may be suitable for historic district designation.
- B. In Managed Growth Areas:
 1. Allow for infill development in line with existing scale and patterns of use.
 2. Review, evaluate, and amend regulations to protect the integrity of these areas.
 3. Use zoning to allow for different types of housing than currently allowed, such as accessory dwelling units, apartment buildings, rowhouses, and cluster development, in a manner that protects and enhances the existing built environment.

OBJECTIVE LU2: DIRECT GROWTH

Direct growth to areas well suited for larger-scale development and high-density housing.

- A. In Enhanced Growth – Residential areas: Allow for residential development at high densities with reduced parking requirements, but with building height and massing compatible with existing development patterns.
- B. In Growth Corridors – Mixed Use areas: Allow for commercial and residential development at high densities, with moderate building heights.
- C. In Priority Growth – Mixed Use areas: Allow for commercial and residential development at high densities, with taller building heights.
- D. In Institutional Growth areas: Allow for the growth of healthcare and higher educational institutions, while respecting the surrounding neighborhoods.
- E. In General Industrial Growth areas: Allow for the growth of business, with no residential uses, prioritizing clean industry.
- F. In Blue-Green Industrial Growth areas: Allow for the growth of water-dependent economic development, prioritizing clean business and industry.

How do We Grow?

GOAL: Promote a balance of uses to support sustainable patterns of development providing healthy and walkable neighborhoods, thriving business districts, and a high quality of life.

The previous section addressed generally where future growth should be directed. This section refines that vision with the more detailed Map 11.2,

“Future Land Use.” This map depicts specific land use designations for each area of the city and is the official future land use map. This section goes on to identify the types of land uses found in these designations and the uses that are promoted going forward. Though most land use areas contain multiple uses, the description of each designation refers to the typical uses found there.

Future Land Use Map Designations:

Low-Density Residential: These areas are characterized primarily by single-family dwellings in detached structures on separate lots. Buildings typically range in height from one to three stories. Lot sizes vary by neighborhood with most ranging from 3,200 to 6,000 square feet. Some areas have lot sizes upwards of 7,500 square feet. These areas may contain other compatible uses and some residential development at higher, but appropriate densities.

Medium-Density Residential: These areas are characterized primarily by single-, two-, and three-family dwellings in detached structures on separate lots. Buildings typically range in height from one to three stories. Lot sizes vary by neighborhood, with most ranging from 3,200 to 5,000 square feet. In some areas, small-scale commercial uses, such as neighborhood commercial establishments and professional offices, may be appropriate. These areas may contain other compatible uses and some residential development at higher, but appropriate densities.

High-Density Residential: These areas are characterized by multifamily dwellings, with some one-, two- and three-family dwellings interspersed. Multifamily buildings typically range from three to four stories in height. In some areas, small scale commercial uses, such as neighborhood commercial establishments and professional offices, may be appropriate. These areas may contain other compatible uses.

Density and Character

Two terms that are used frequently in this plan are **density** and **character**. As these terms are sometimes subjective and open to interpretation, it is important to define what we mean when we use them. First, density in an urban context is the size, scale and massing of a building or collection of buildings; their proximity to each other; and the number of people the buildings accommodate. We regulate density in several ways. There are dimensional rules like building height, setback from lot lines, and the amount of a lot a building covers. The number of dwelling units permitted on a lot in a residential zone is another consideration. In some cases, we regulate the number of occupants allowed in a dwelling unit. Finally, regulations pertaining to site development, such as parking, required pervious surface, and landscaping, limit what can be built on a lot and affect density.

The density of an area is part of what gives it its character. But character goes beyond that, incorporating concepts like building design and details such as the amount, size and location of windows and doors; building materials; and character defining elements like roof lines, eaves, stoops and porches, and trim details. Many of these features come in the form of period details of historic buildings. The character of an area is also shaped by the public realm: the width of streets and sidewalks, the landscaping in the public right-of-way, and the location of public spaces. Character is most often regulated through zoning’s use, dimensional, and design standards.

Neighborhood Commercial/Mixed-Use: These areas are characterized by traditional, pedestrian and transit-oriented uses that serve local neighborhood needs for convenience retail, services, professional offices, and housing. Buildings are set close to the street, with entrances and facades oriented toward the street. Residential uses are encouraged.

General Commercial/Mixed-Use: These areas are characterized by commercial uses such as large shopping complexes and plazas that serve citywide needs for retail, services and office establishments. Residential uses are encouraged in these areas. These areas may be located along commercial corridors that accommodate large commercial uses or are clustered at a higher density to support transit.

Downtown/Mixed-Use: This area is characterized by a variety of business, financial, institutional, public, quasi-public, cultural, residential, appropriate light industrial, and other related uses. To preserve and foster the economic vitality of downtown, a mix of compatible uses is encouraged. This land use designation allows for the tallest buildings in the city. Sub-districts allow for a variety of building heights.

Business/Mixed-Use: These areas are intended to foster the expansion of business and industrial uses and medium- to high-density residential uses into areas that were once exclusively industrial in nature.

Business/Industrial: These areas are intended to foster the expansion of business and industrial uses without residential uses. Clean, sustainable, and resilient economic development should be prioritized.

Waterfront/Port: These areas are intended for waterfront port and maritime uses to promote the Port of Providence and related maritime industrial and commercial uses within the waterfront area. The purpose of this designation is to protect the waterfront as a resource for water-dependent industrial uses, and to facilitate the renewed use of a vital waterfront for economic growth and expansion. Clean, sustainable, and resilient economic development should be prioritized.

Public/Open Space: These areas are intended to ensure that open space and areas for public buildings and facilities are preserved in the city. These areas are characterized by parks, playing fields and supporting uses, and natural areas for passive recreation. Other typical uses include government-owned recreation centers and public buildings such as fire stations and schools. These areas are typically publicly owned but may include privately owned land.

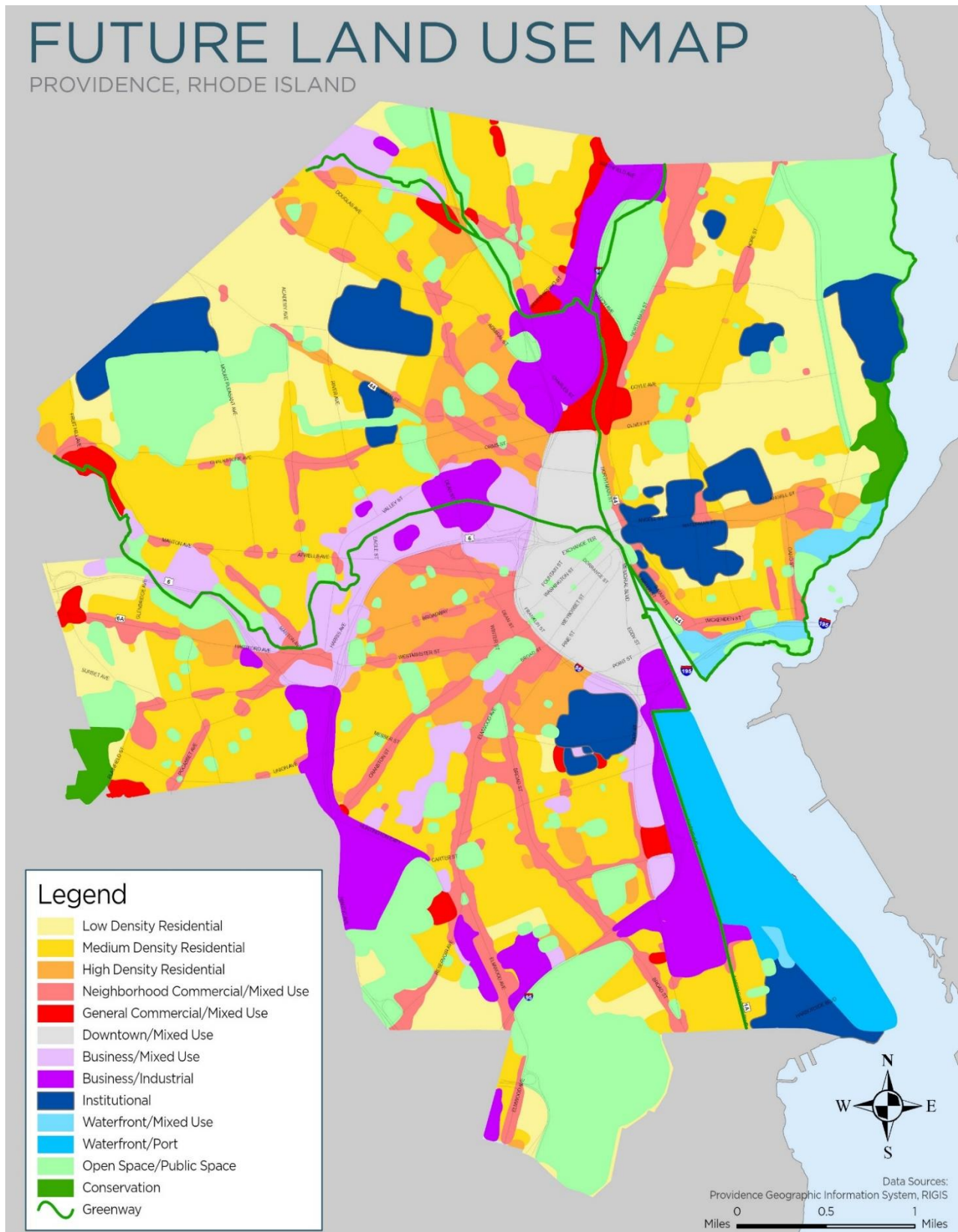
Conservation: These areas are intended to ensure woodlands, rivers, streams, ponds, wetlands, floodplains, and other sensitive natural areas are preserved in their natural scenic and ecological condition. These areas may be publicly or privately owned.

Greenway: These areas are intended to provide active and passive recreation and open space along the waterfront, and to provide continuous connections between open spaces. They may vary in width depending on the potential for adjacent public/open space or other amenities. They may be publicly or privately owned.

Institutional: These areas are designed to permit college and health care institutional growth and development while controlling and limiting negative impacts on neighborhoods.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



Map 11.2 Future Land Use Map

Residential Areas

Most of the land in the city is developed as residential neighborhoods. These areas contribute significantly to the livability of the city and the unique character of individual neighborhoods is what attracts many people to Providence. Growth should be allowed in these areas, but generally in keeping with the scale and massing of the existing built environment. Although Providence is largely built out, there remain opportunities for infill residential development. The city supports the expansion of housing opportunities in residential areas, but with safeguards to ensure that new construction respects the valued attributes and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

While residential dwellings are the predominant use in these areas, one of the things that makes Providence special is the variety of neighborhood stores and service establishments that are scattered throughout residential areas, within walking distance of residents' homes. These types of uses are appropriate in certain locations, with limits on size and design to ensure compatibility with adjacent residential properties.

In many neighborhoods there are also historic structures, such as commercial buildings, former mills, churches, and schools that are part of the urban fabric but are no longer suitable for their original uses. Adaptive reuse of these sites is desirable to promote the preservation of these buildings and create new housing.

A distinctive characteristic of Providence is that housing types aren't uniform within neighborhoods. For example, it is quite common to see two-, three-, and even multifamily buildings in single-family zones. This variety contributes to the neighborhoods residents love and allows for a range of affordability. Our zoning ordinance should recognize this and allow for contextually appropriate solutions to adding housing. Some tools to create infill housing in residential areas include allowing apartment buildings, rowhouses, cluster development, and accessory dwelling units. However, these tools should not be used to fundamentally change the urban fabric of our residential neighborhoods. Therefore, the regulations regarding height, setback, lot coverage, design, and ratios of pervious to impervious surfaces are key land use controls that must be employed for new development.

Two residential land uses that continue to be challenging in residential zones are high-density student housing and short-term rentals. These uses, if not well-managed, can have negative effects on long-term residents and can also be a hindrance to the development and preservation of affordable housing. The city has adopted some limited regulation of these uses, but more restrictions may be appropriate.

Finally, while much of Providence's housing stock is old, the diversity and character of existing housing types fundamentally define the look and feel of the neighborhoods. Housing needs to be properly maintained and the city can play a role, when necessary, by enforcing minimum maintenance standards. In addition, the demolition of existing housing should be strongly discouraged. This can be accomplished by regulating demolition where appropriate, and by providing options to property owners regarding how buildings are used and expanded for more housing.

OBJECTIVE LU3: MANAGE GROWTH IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Within residential areas designated on the future land use map, promote the development of a wide range of housing types to ensure a diversity of living options for city residents. Encourage infill residential development that is consistent with existing residential character.

Strategies:

- A. In low-density residential areas, new housing development will be single-family dwellings, some with accessory dwelling units; low-density cluster development; adaptive reuse for housing in previously non-residential buildings; and low-density rowhouse developments. Large lots or large buildings may be considered for multifamily development through a special use permit process that safeguards against student housing and short-term rentals. New buildings will be no taller than three stories. Corresponding zones: R-1, R-1A.
- B. In medium-density residential areas, new housing development will be one-, two- and three-family dwellings, some with accessory dwelling units; medium-density cluster development; adaptive reuse for housing in previously non-residential buildings; and medium-density rowhouse developments. Multifamily buildings may be appropriate at a density consistent with the surroundings through a special use permit process, and with dwelling unit density bonuses for affordable housing. New buildings will be no taller than three stories. Within this land use designation, two-family zoning should be rezoned to three-family zoning. Corresponding zones: R-3, R-P.
- C. In high-density residential areas, new housing development will be one-, two-, three-, and multifamily dwellings, some with accessory dwelling units; cluster development where appropriate; adaptive reuse for housing in previously non-residential buildings; and high-density rowhouse developments. Dwelling unit density will be defined with bonuses for affordable housing. New buildings will be no taller than four stories. Within this land use designation, areas of three-family zoning should be rezoned to allow for multifamily zoning. Corresponding zones: R-4, R-P.
- D. Allow for limited non-residential uses such as neighborhood corner stores, offices and home-based businesses while maintaining the residential character of the area.
- E. Encourage adaptive reuse of historic non-residential buildings for housing.
- F. Encourage neighborhood revitalization by identifying vacant lots for housing, green space, playgrounds, or community gardens, based on the needs of the neighborhood.
- G. Further regulate uses incompatible with stable neighborhoods, including high-density student housing and short-term rentals.
- H. Refine dimensional and design regulations to ensure compatibility of new residential development with existing land use patterns.
- I. Create mechanisms to encourage maintenance of existing structures and to discourage demolition of existing housing, particularly in historic buildings.

Mixed-Use Areas

While most areas in the city contain more than one use, the truly mixed-use areas are the city's downtown, commercial corridors, transitioning manufacturing areas and parts of the city's waterfront. Urban life and vitality are the heart of these areas, with residential, retail, office, industrial, civic, institutional, and entertainment uses jumbled together. Mixed-use takes many forms, such as small commercial blocks, commercial areas along main corridors, shopping areas and plazas, office buildings with retail uses on the ground floor, stores with apartments on upper floors, or former mill buildings with a mix of industrial, office and residential uses.

Mixing uses creates desirable places to live by improving the balance of jobs to housing and creating healthy neighborhoods where residents can walk to shops and services. It is in these mixed-use areas that concentrated development best links to transit networks. In these areas, greater residential density and buildings heights can be accommodated to create a more efficient pattern of development and protect the character of the nearby residential neighborhoods.

Building form is important in mixed-use areas. In most of these areas, to promote pedestrian activity, buildings are set to the street edge, with large areas of ground-floor transparency, entrances facing the street, and architectural interest. These features should be incorporated into new development in these areas.

The most common zoning designations along major corridors are C-1 and C-2. The regulations of these zones are very similar and the built environment of these zones is virtually identical. To simplify the Zoning Ordinance, the C-1 and C-2 zones should be combined.

OBJECTIVE LU4: PROMOTE VIBRANT MIXED-USE AREAS

Within mixed-use areas designated on the future land use map, promote the development of businesses and high-density housing along major corridors.

Strategies:

- A. In areas designated as neighborhood commercial/mixed use, promote the development of a mixture of high-density residential and neighborhood-serving commercial uses. New buildings may be up to four stories, with incentives that may add up to two additional stories. To streamline regulation in these areas, combine the C-1 and C-2 zoning districts. Zoning will be primarily C-2 and R-4.
- B. In areas designated as general commercial/mixed use, promote the development of a mixture of commercial uses that serve citywide needs and higher density residential uses. New buildings may be up to four stories, with incentives that may add up to two additional stories.
- C. In the area designated as downtown/mixed use, encourage continued investment with a high concentration of business, commercial, institutional, cultural, and residential uses. Ensure that

historic structures are preserved, and that new construction is compatible with the existing built environment. Refine design regulations and rules pertaining to height as appropriate.

- D. Encourage the development of historically industrial areas designated as business/mixed use on the future land use map with a balanced mixture of commercial, light industrial, office and residential uses.
- E. Use zoning tools to ensure that adjacent land uses are compatible and don't negatively impact each other.
- F. Allow for rezoning from residential to a mixed-use district for properties within growth corridors as identified on Map 11.1 or in locations that have historically nonconforming commercial uses.

Business/Industrial Areas

It is vital for Providence to provide opportunities for business and industry expansion while ensuring minimal impact on adjacent residential areas. These areas are designated as business/industrial on the future land use map. These areas are located throughout the city, such as Huntington Industrial Park, Silver Spring Industrial Park, West River Industrial Park, parts of the Valley neighborhood, between Allens Avenue and I-95, and the industrial area of Washington Park. Businesses need areas where they can predictably grow and expand in the future without the concern of conflicts that often arise between industrial uses and residential uses. Therefore, no residential uses of any kind are permitted in these areas.

In recent years, community concerns about the impact of industrial activity on environmental quality, public health, quality of life in adjacent neighborhoods, carbon emissions contributing to climate change and health impacts, and the resilience of port and industrial areas to extreme weather have brought together public, private and institutional stakeholders to develop strategies for making industrial areas, especially the Port of Providence, "cleaner and greener."

Providence should pursue a thriving industrial economy that is well-positioned for emerging industries (especially "green and blue industries" like off-shore wind), while also improving air and water quality, finding opportunities for public access to the waterfront that doesn't conflict with commercial uses, pursuing necessary environmental remediation, and transitioning away from carbon-intensive industries.

OBJECTIVE LU5: PROTECT AREAS FOR BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

Promote business retention and expansion in areas designated as business/industrial and waterfront/port on the future land use map.

Strategies:

- A. Encourage the growth of industrial activities by preserving industrial land primarily for manufacturing purposes in areas designated as business/industrial.
- B. Promote water-dependent industrial uses in areas designated waterfront/port.
- C. Promote the preservation of industrial parks to encourage the expansion and, if possible, the return of manufacturing companies to the city to expand the economic base.

- D. Prohibit all residential uses in these land use designations.
- E. Prioritize clean, sustainable, and resilient economic development.
- F. Study policies in partnership with state and federal authorities to regulate the environmental impact of large-scale industrial development projects in areas of concentrated industrial use.

Natural and Civic Areas

Natural and civic spaces are an extension of the community. When these spaces work well, they serve as a stage for the public lives of city residents. They can be the settings where celebrations are held, where friends run into each other, and where cultures mix. When cities and neighborhoods have thriving open and civic spaces, residents have a strong sense of community. Conversely, when such spaces are lacking, people may feel less connected to each other.

Natural and open spaces contribute to community health – socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally. They enhance the civic realm – not only visually, but also in providing a sense of character and a forum for public activities. All these assets, as well as the opportunities these places offer residents to relax and enjoy themselves, to exercise, and to recreate, add up to greater livability in the city.

Public places offer free, open forums for people to encounter art, to enjoy performances, and to participate in other cultural activities. From concerts at the Temple to Music in Roger Williams Park to outdoor art displays Downtown open spaces foster and enhance a city’s cultural life. Events such as WaterFire, PVDfest, and PrideFest all take place in our public spaces and have a positive social and economic impact.

These land uses consist of areas committed to planned open space such as parks, playgrounds, and cemeteries; and public buildings such as City Hall, public schools, and police and fire stations. Open space areas have been designated to allow for the active and recreational needs of city residents. As the population of the city continues to change, the recreational needs of city residents are also changing. Through the open space objectives and strategies presented in this plan the city will meet these changing needs, and efforts will be made to ensure that they are addressed on an ongoing basis.

OBJECTIVE LU6: MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE OPEN SPACES AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

In areas designated as public/open space on the future land use map, preserve and protect Providence’s open spaces and public facilities to enhance the overall quality of life for city residents.

Strategies:

- A. Provide opportunities for recreation and visual relief by preserving Providence’s parks, playgrounds, golf courses, cemeteries, and undeveloped city-owned open space.
- B. Preserve open space along the city’s waterbodies by creating open space corridors along rivers and ponds.
- C. Promote a diversity of recreational activities in the City’s parks, playgrounds, and other recreational areas.

- D. Protect and preserve environmentally sensitive and significant areas.
- E. Provide and encourage the provision of a variety of active and passive recreation facilities geographically distributed to serve the present and future needs of city residents.
- F. Expand the amount of public open space in Providence.
- G. Identify city and/or state-owned open spaces best suited for urban agriculture.
- H. Improve the city's public buildings to provide high-quality services.
- I. Develop a plan for the reuse of public buildings that are no longer being used for public purposes.
- J. Continue to build on the system of greenways on public and private land.

Institutional Areas

The city's universities and hospitals are important centers of employment, education, and culture for Providence and the region. The health care facilities provide vital services to residents. Both hospitals and colleges also have unique characteristics that add value above and beyond creating jobs. These institutions conduct research and impart technical expertise to their students and workers. In the increasingly knowledge-based economy, these institutions contribute to a more experienced and educated workforce, a highly desirable resource in all cities. Furthermore, their economic activities foster an entrepreneurial spirit and attract additional economic growth through small spin-off businesses and supporting uses. The city's hospitals provide vital healthcare to people who live throughout the region. Institutions contribute to the city in other ways as well, such as through education partnerships and through payments in lieu of taxes, which help to offset the loss of taxes due to the institutions' tax-exempt status.

Balanced with all the benefits that institutions bring to our city are the impacts of institutions: traffic, noise, pollution, housing shortages, congestion, and a loss of tax revenue. As many of the hospitals and colleges are surrounded by residential areas, these impacts can be significant. The city recognizes the importance of mitigating conflicts with residential areas, identifying the best locations for institutional growth and expansion in the future. We also stress the importance of payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreements with nonprofit healthcare and higher educational institutions. A significant amount of the property value in the city is not subject to property tax, and these PILOT agreements make a meaningful contribution to defray forgone taxes.

OBJECTIVE LU7: ALLOW FOR INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH WHILE PRESERVING NEIGHBORHOODS

Permit institutional growth and expansion in institutional areas designated on the future land use map while limiting their encroachment and negative impacts on the neighborhoods in which they are located.

Strategies:

- A. Use institutional zoning to regulate where and how institutions grow.
- B. Continue to require health care and educational institutions to prepare long-range master plans that will allow the city to evaluate and mitigate impacts of proposed expansions on city neighborhoods.

- C. Require institutions to use their land efficiently while ensuring compatibility of their built environment with the surrounding neighborhood.
- D. Require institutions to regularly engage with members of the community within which they are located.
- E. Encourage institutions to minimize traffic and parking impacts on neighborhoods by adopting transportation demand management strategies to reduce driving, developing parking garages to minimize surface parking lots, and studying traffic and parking around their campuses and mitigating negative impacts.
- F. Require colleges and universities to identify and address inappropriate behavior of students who live off campus.

Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map

The Future Land Use Map is the foundation of the Zoning Map. It identifies where certain zones will be located, but not with the detail of the Zoning Map. As mentioned above, the Future Land Use Map is not parcel-specific. It is intended to be general enough to support a range of zoning changes. For example, some land use designations are general enough to allow for more than one zoning district. The lines between designations are intended to be blurry to allow for a zoning change when a property is in the vicinity of the border of more than one land use designation. Also, the map does not capture the thousands of nonconforming uses and uses allowed by variance. In these situations, zoning changes are permissible to bring the zoning in line with existing conditions on the property, but only when the use is compatible with the surroundings.

Spot Zoning, Nonconforming uses, and Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

Spot zoning is an action by a zoning authority which gives privileges to a single lot or a small area that are not extended to other land in the vicinity. Spot zoning typically involves changes to a zoning map. It also includes the granting of use variances by the zoning board of review, which are permissions to use a property in a manner not allowed by the zoning district. Contrary to popular belief, spot zoning is not always illegal. Rhode Island courts have said that the crucial test for determining whether a zoning ordinance amendment constitutes illegal spot zoning depends upon whether its enactment violates a municipality's comprehensive plan.

The city is, in fact, full of legal spot zoning through decades of use variances. These spot zones do not appear on the zoning map. In recent years, the zoning board has made a concerted effort to make findings relative to the comprehensive plan and the required conditions of hardship. Consequently, today it very rarely grants use variances.

As it has moved away from use variances, the city has occasionally used spot zoning through zoning map changes to create new opportunities for housing. While these changes have all been consistent with the comprehensive plan, they have been ad hoc and at the discretion of the city council. It is the intention of this new plan to provide better guidance as to when and where zoning changes, including spot zoning changes, are warranted.

In addition to spot zoning, the city is also full of legal, nonconforming uses, which are uses that were once, but no longer, allowed by zoning. When taken together, use variances, spot map changes, and nonconforming uses create a patchwork of land use that defies homogenous land use designations.

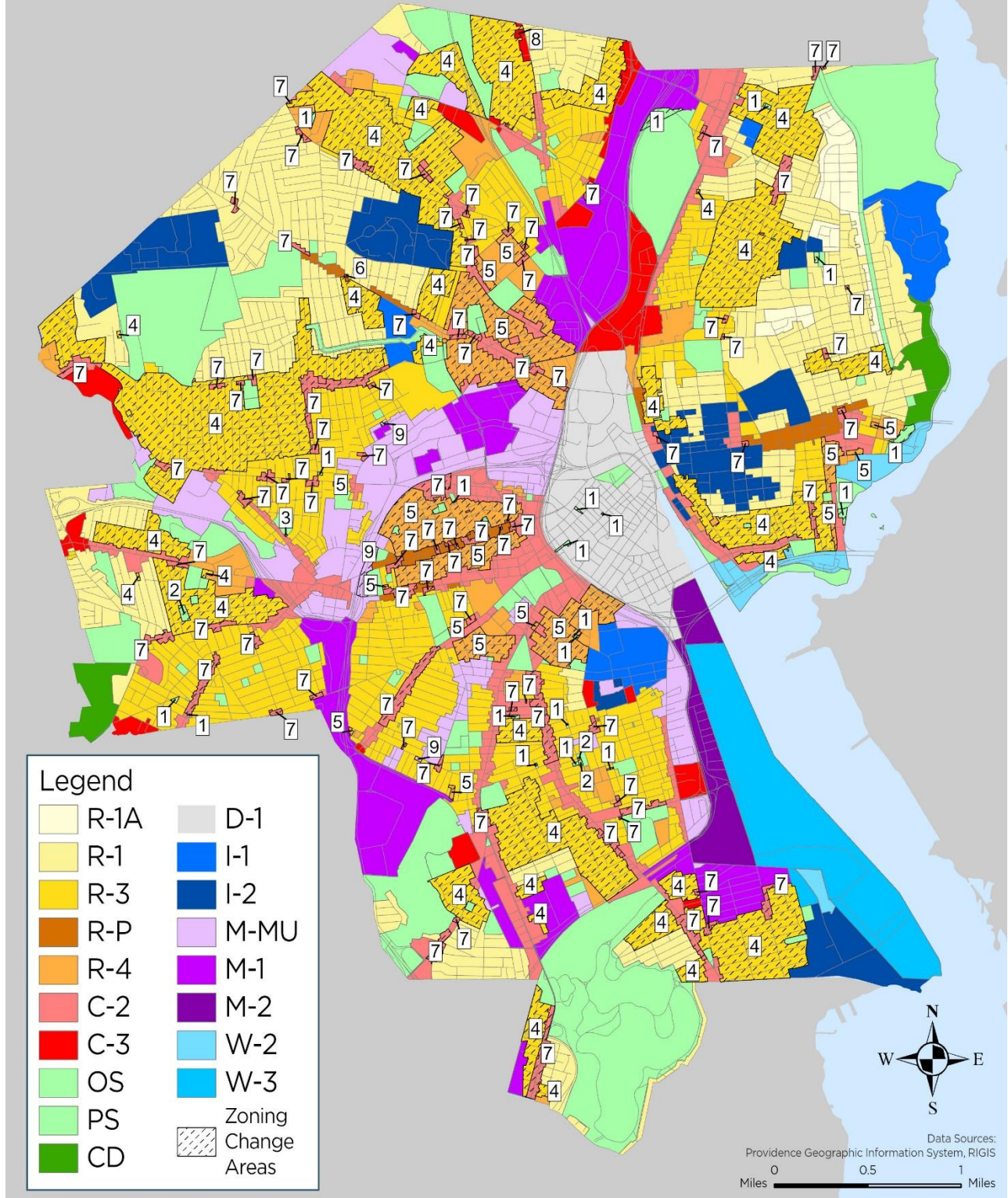
These deviations from zoning often do not have a negative effect on surrounding property. But they do complicate land use planning. Going forward, we intend to lessen our reliance on spot zoning, and rather to create better tools to deal with existing conditions and future needs. These tools will allow flexibility to appropriately alter legacy uses and to construct a variety of building typologies in each zoning district.

Zoning Changes

The following maps and tables reflect all proposed changes to the base and overlay zoning maps to be consistent with the future land use map. Any future changes to the zoning maps must be consistent with this comprehensive plan and the future land use map.

BASE ZONING MAP CHANGES

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



Map 11.3 Base Zoning Map Changes

Table 11.2 Base Zoning Changes

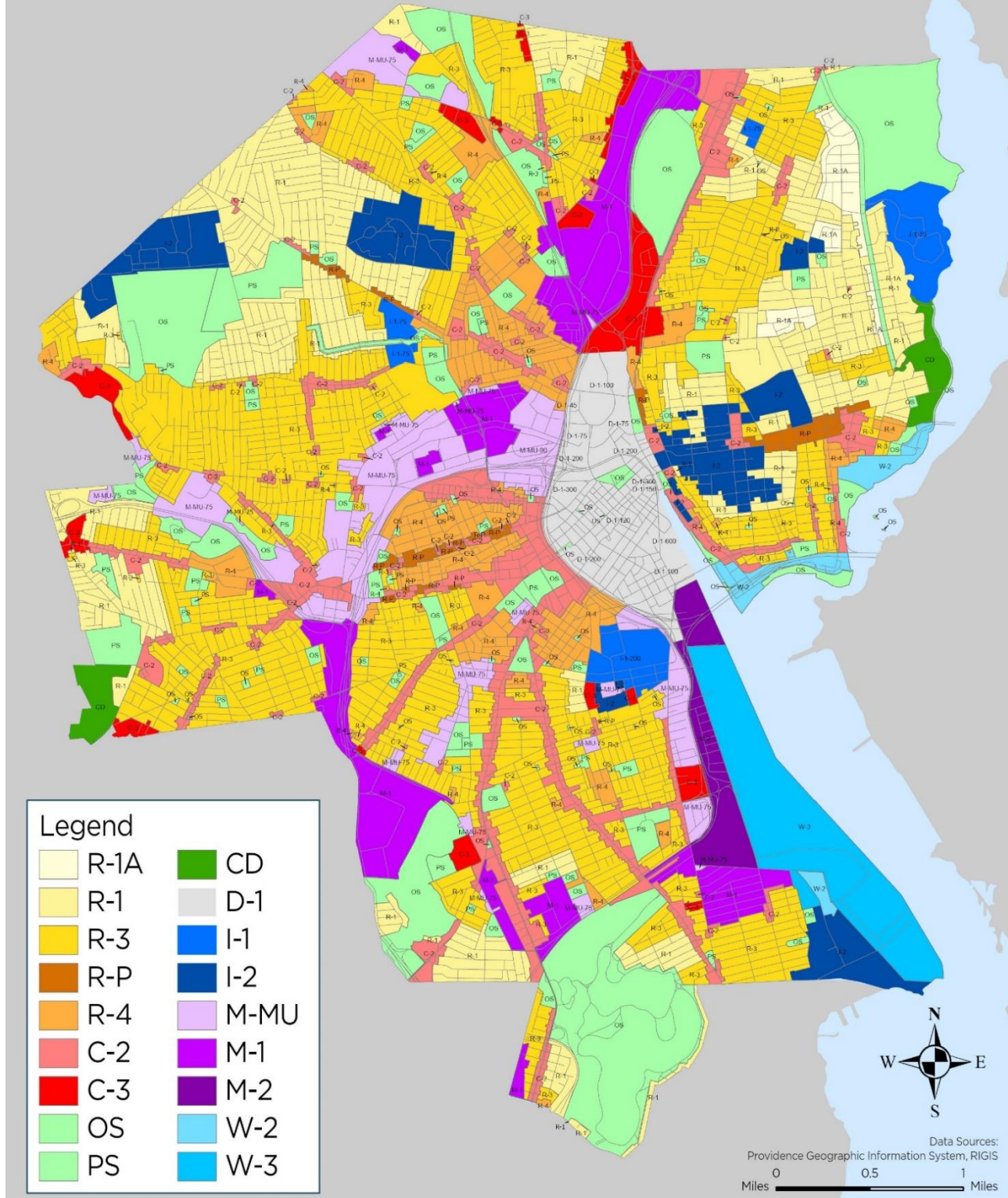
Number on Map	Current Zoning	Proposed Zoning
1	Various	OS
2	Various	PS
3	OS	R-3
4	Various	R-3
5	Various	R-4
6	R-1	R-P
7	Various	C-2
8	R-2	C-3
9	Various	M-MU-75

Map 11.4 Overlay Zoning Change Map to be added with adjustments to historic districts

Table 11.2 Overlay Zoning Change Table to be added

PROPOSED BASE ZONING MAP

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



Map 11.5 Proposed Base Zoning Map

Map 11.6 Proposed Overlay Zoning Map to be added

Land Use in Relation to Other Plan Elements

In this section, additional land use objectives and strategies are identified to implement the goals of other chapters of this plan.

OBJECTIVE LU8: SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Promote sustainability and environmental quality through appropriate land use controls.

Strategies:

- A. Identify environmentally sensitive land areas and amend regulations as necessary to ensure their protection.
- B. Through regulation and enforcement, protect existing tree canopy and increase canopy citywide, particularly in areas with low tree cover.
- C. Refine regulations to encourage cleaner uses in the business/industrial and waterfront/port areas.
- D. To protect properties from the impacts of flooding caused by extreme weather events and sea level rise, adopt regulations to achieve the protections needed.

OBJECTIVE LU9: BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Promote design excellence and historic preservation through appropriate land controls.

Strategies:

- A. Amend regulations as needed to establish incentives for greater height and density in exchange for affordable units, public open space, sustainable development, and other desirable public amenities. No additional height should be allowed in residential land use designations.
- B. Evaluate the expansion of historic district zoning where appropriate to preserve historic resources.
- C. Strengthen design regulations in residential and neighborhood commercial areas to promote a high-quality built environment.
- D. Ensure scale and massing for multifamily development in residential areas is consistent with the existing built environment.
- E. Create incentives to promote property maintenance, including proper maintenance of historic buildings.

OBJECTIVE LU10: BUSINESS AND JOBS

Promote job growth and retention through appropriate land use controls.

Strategies:

- A. Regulate land use downtown to ensure its future as Rhode Island's preeminent center for business, tourism, entertainment, while it also develops as a mixed-use neighborhood with ample housing.
- B. Reinforce existing jobs areas to allow for business growth and the development of the city's tax base without conflicts with residential uses.
- C. Ensure residential uses do not discourage business growth and expansion in the business/mixed-use areas designated on the future land use map.

OBJECTIVE LU11: HOUSING

Promote varying levels of housing density through appropriate land use controls.

Strategies:

- A. Identify opportunities for zoning regulation or map changes to promote the development of more housing.
- B. Identify and remove procedural barriers to development of housing.
- C. Strengthen regulation of short-term rentals and student housing to promote long-term housing.

OBJECTIVE LU12: MOBILITY

Promote the efficient use of land to promote transit, walking and biking through appropriate land use controls.

Strategies:

- A. Allow for greater density and higher concentrations of development along transit corridors and in dense nodes.
- B. Reduce or eliminate off-street parking requirements in areas where high-density housing is permitted.
- C. Ensure that parking regulations strike a balance between the demand for parking and the ability to develop land to its fullest potential.
- D. Encourage the use of non-auto transportation options through land use controls and transportation demand management incentives.
- E. Work with RIPTA on appropriate locations for transit infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE LU13: PEOPLE AND PUBLIC SPACES

Promote the preservation and development of parks, open spaces, and public buildings through appropriate land use controls.

Strategies:

- A. Promote open spaces and public access along the waterfront.
- B. Develop incentives for the provision of publicly accessible open spaces as a part of private developments.
- C. Develop ways to activate park spaces in conjunction with neighboring uses.
- D. Identify possible locations for additional parks and open spaces in neighborhoods that are currently underserved by these amenities.
- E. Continue to build on the system of greenways on public and private land.
- F. Appropriately regulate the development of public buildings.

Appendix A

Appendix A. Existing Conditions

This Appendix sets forth existing conditions in the city. The information in this section provides the basis for analysis and policy formulation in this Comprehensive Plan.

The People

Overview

According to the US Census, the population of Providence grew by nearly 7% between 2010 and 2020, from 178,042 to 190,934. During this same time, the state population increased by more than 4% (See Table A. 1 Population Change, 2010-2020). This marked the fourth straight decade of population growth following four decades of decline from the peak population of 253,504 in 1940. The rate of population growth from 2010 to 2020 was also much faster than the previous decade.

Table A.1 Population Change, 2010-2020

	City	Change Since 2010	State	Change Since 2010
Population	190,934	7.2%	1,097,379	4.3%
Households	64,190	2.3%	414,730	0.3%
Families	35,798	1.5%	268,718	3.5%
Public School Enrollment	21,694	-8.6%	131,984	-9.1%

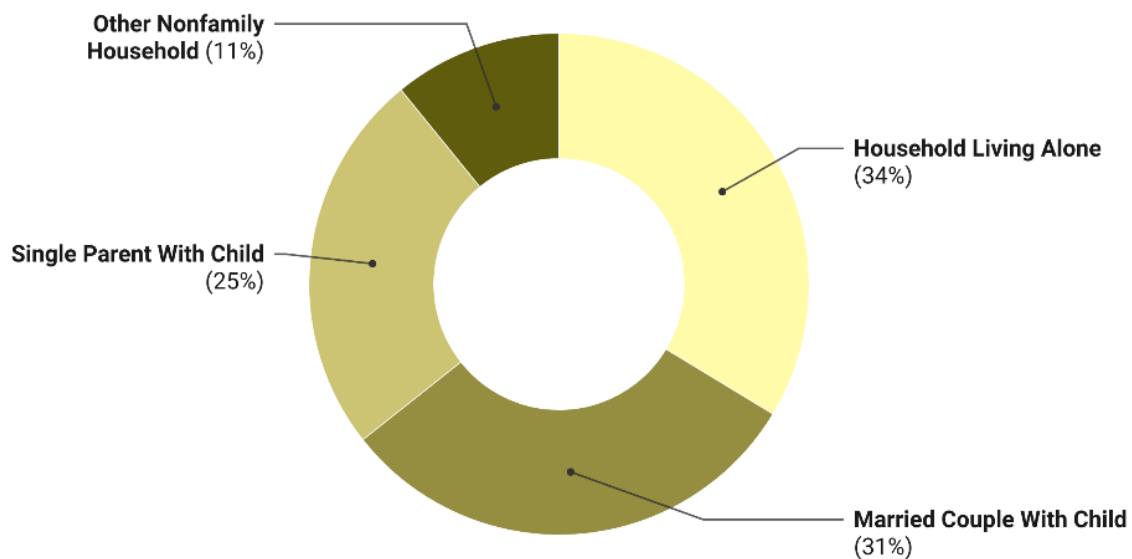
Source: US Census, Providence School Department, RI Dept. of Education

Households and Families

Overall, the number of households in Providence increased by 2.3%, from 62,718 in 2010 to 64,190 in 2020. The overall number of family households increased by 1.5% and the number of non-family households grew by 3.5% (see Figure A.1 Household Type 2020). The number of people living in households in 2020 was 174,773, with an average household size of 2.7. Family households consist of two or more individuals who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption although they also may include other unrelated people. Nonfamily households consist of people who live alone or who share their residence with unrelated individuals.

Appendix A

Figure A.1 Household Type, 2020



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Source: US Census, 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimate

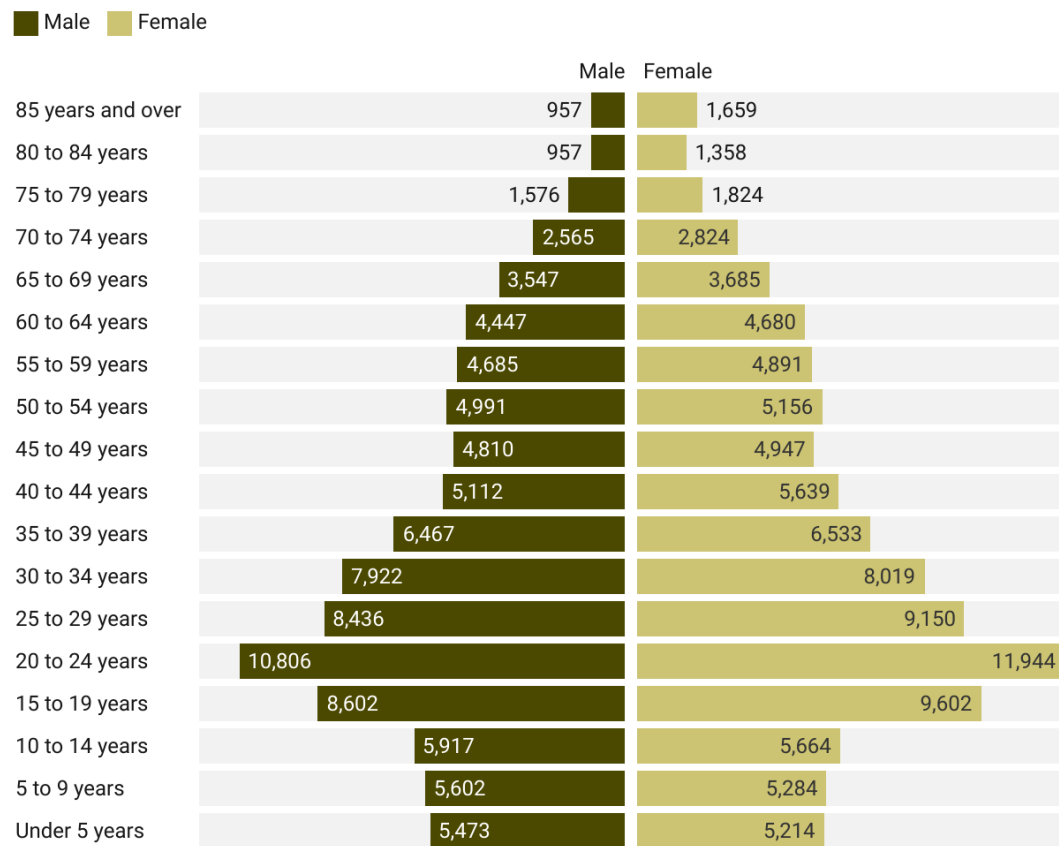
Of the 64,190 households living in Providence in 2020, 34% were households with individuals living alone, including population of 65 and over. This figure is up 2% since 2010. The remaining family households are divided between married (31%), cohabitating nonfamily household (10%) and single parent with child (25%).

Age and Race

The median age in the city in 2020 was 31.2 years. The largest five-year age cohort is 20 to 24-year-olds (11.9% of the overall population). Residents aged sixty-five and older increased by 35.3% between 2010 and 2020, while the younger 5 to 19-year-old cohort declined by 7.7% (See Figure A.2 Providence Total Population, 2020).

Appendix A

Figure A.2 Providence Total Population, 2020



Source: US Census, 2020 Decennial Census

The Providence Hispanic population increased by 19% between 2010 and 2020. This demographic now accounts for 43.9% of the city's total population. The city's Non-Hispanic White population decreased by 8% since 2010, currently making up 32.4% of the overall population. Non-Hispanic Black and African American residents decreased by 4.3% while the Asian, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population grew by 3.2% (see Table A.2 Race Composition Changes Between 2010 and 2020).

Table A.2 Race Composition Changes Between 2010 and 2020

Race	Census count 2020	% of Total Population	Change 2010-2020
Hispanic	83,815	43.9%	19.1%
Non-Hispanic White	61,917	32.4%	-8.1%
Non-Hispanic Black or African American	22,917	11.7%	-4.3%
Non-Hispanic Asian alone	11,359	5.9%	1.6%
Non-Hispanic two or more races	8,276	4.3%	31.0%
Non-Hispanic some other race	2,167	1.1%	20.3%
Non-Hispanic Indian/Native	905	0.5%	--
Non-Hispanic Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	66	0.03%	1.6%

Source: US Census, 2020 Decennial Census, 2016-2020 American Community Survey

Appendix A

Immigration & Linguistic Isolation

The 2020 foreign-born population—residents who are citizens by naturalization and those who are not citizens—was 33% of all residents in Providence. Of these 63,313 foreign-born residents, two thirds are not citizens. Between 2012 and 2022 Rhode Island became the initial home for settlement for 4,378 refugees, with more than 40% of them being unaccompanied minors (See Table A.3 Refugee Arrivals to Rhode Island).

Table A.3 Refugee Arrivals to Rhode Island 2012-2022

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Total	130	171	188	370	606	438	321	542	152	567	893	4,378
Afghanistan					17	1	4				212	234
Angola				2								2
Bhutan	58	38	13	2	4	1						116
Burma	53	15	30	9	2							109
Burundi		15	7	21		11	2	4	5	1		66
Cambodia											9	9
Colombia			14	29	2	1	3		5			54
Cuba				1	1							2
Dem. Rep. Congo		23	27	37	118	45	55	70	25	24	37	461
Djibouti						1						1
El Salvador					1	1	1					3
Eritrea	2	23	20	11	4	4	9	2				75
Ethiopia		2				1						3
Guatemala					1					3	7	11
Honduras					1							1
Iran	11		2					1				14
Iraq		25	37	33	22	22	3		1	5		148
Liberia	2	9	1	2		2	1		11			28
Nepal	1		1									2
Pakistan			3									3
Russia									3			3

Appendix A

Rwanda		4		3					2			9
Somalia	3	17	33	35	48	57	1					194
Syria					116	52		6	5	14	19	212
Ukraine						5	7	6	3			21
Unaccompanied Children				185	269	234	235	453	92	520	609	2,597

Source: DORCAS international

According to the US Census 32% of Providence residents speak English less than “very well”. 13% of Providence households are considered linguistically isolated, meaning that all members of the household have some degree of difficulty with the English language. The Providence Public School system is home to nearly 60% of students who speak a language other than English as their first language (see Table A.4 First Language of Providence Students, 2020).

Table A.4 First Language of Providence Students, 2020

First Language	Elementary	Middle - High
Subgroup with no data	3%	4%
Arabic	< 1%	< 1%
Chinese	< 1%	< 1%
English	39%	38%
French	< 1%	< 1%
Haitian Creole	< 1%	< 1%
Italian	< 1%	< 1%
Khmer	< 1%	< 1%
Portuguese	< 1%	< 1%
Spanish	32%	39%
Language not listed	3%	2%
Speak multiple languages at home	19%	13%

Source: Providence School Department 2020

Among the working age population (18-64), 3% of all Providence residents responded that they spoke English “not well or not at all” (See Table A.5 Providence Population Age 18-64 by Language Spoken at

Appendix A

Home and English Difficulty). Among the Spanish-speaking population of this age group, 26.4% have English difficulties while the 3.3% of those speaking an Asian/Pacific Island language and 4.3% of those speaking an Indo-European language. About 30% of the working age population report speaking at least some English at home.

Table A.5 Providence Population Age 18-64 by Language Spoken at Home & English Difficulty

Language Spoken at Home	Pop Age 18-64	Pct with English Difficulties
English	64,235	59.80%
Spanish	44,897	26.40%
Other languages	11,881	10.20%
Indo-European Languages	7,193	4.30%
Asian and Pacific Island Languages	5,643	3.30%

Source: US Census, 2016-2020 American Community Survey

Between 1980 and 1990, Providence grew in population by 2.5%, the City's first positive growth since 1940. Between 2010 and 2020, the population grew by 7.2%, the second highest growth in the last four decades, after 1990-2000. By breaking this growth down by race, we see the difference in change between the White and non-White populations. While the overall population continued to grow over the decades, the racial breakdown shows that the percent of Non-White residents is increasing, as the percentage of White residents is on a four-decade decline (See Table A.6 Change in Population).

Table A.6 Change in Population

Year	1990	2000	2010	2020	Change 1990-2020	Change 2000-2010	Change 2010-2020
Population	160,728	173,618	178,062	190,934	8.0%	2.5%	7.2%
White	75.0%	54.5%	49.8%	37.7%	-27.3%	-8.7%	-24.2%
Non-White	25.0%	45.5%	50.2%	62.3%	81.9%	10.5%	24.0%

Source: US Census, 2020 Decennial Census

Population growth from 2010 to 2020 can also be broken down into three different groups: individuals who moved into Providence city limits from somewhere else in Rhode Island, individuals who moved into Providence city limits from somewhere else in Providence County, and individuals who moved into the city from a different state. From Figure A.3 Population Moving Into the City of Providence 2010-2020 below, we understand that the majority of residents who moved into the city of Providence over the past decade have come from Providence County, followed by residents who moved from a different state, and lastly residents who moved to the city from another county inside of Rhode Island.

Appendix A

Figure A.3 Population moving into the City of Providence, 2010-2020

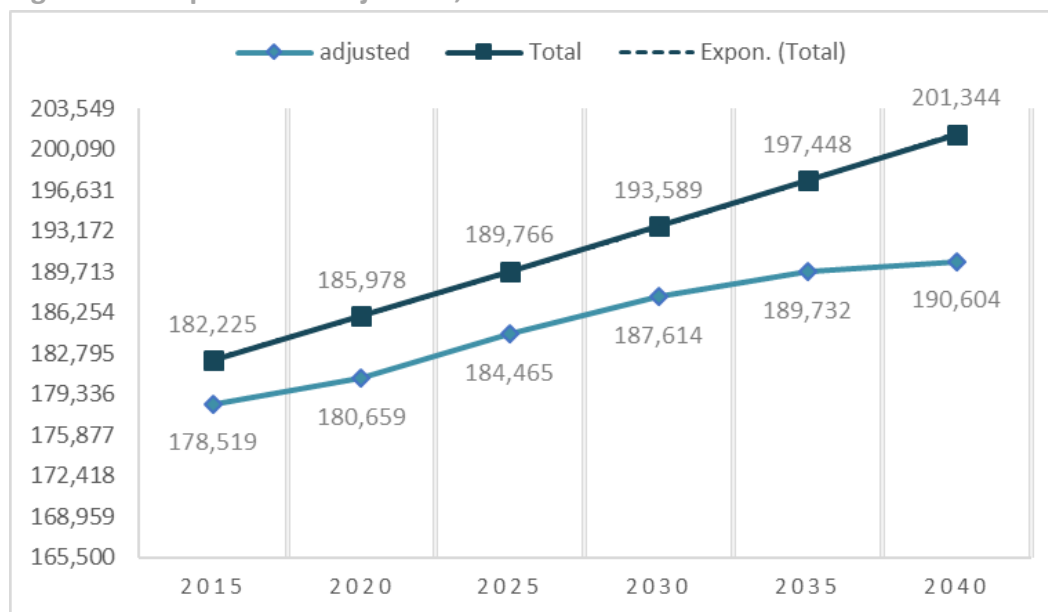
	Same County, Same State	Different County, Same State	Different State
2010	24K	2.1K	11.5K
2012	25.1K	1.5K	9.9K
2016	24.9K	2.2K	8K
2020	17.4K	1.7K	8.9K

Created with Datawrapper

Source: US Census, 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census

The most recent population projection completed by the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning in 2013 predicts the population for the city of Providence will be 190,604 (*adjusted*) by 2040 (Figure A.4 Population Projection, 2020-2040). However, these numbers should be updated to reflect current trends.

Figure A.4 Population Projection, 2020 -2040



Source: Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning

Appendix A

Income

Median household income in 2020 was \$49,065—an overall increase of 10% from 2010, when adjusting for inflation (see Table A.7 Providence Median Household Income in 2020 Dollars, 2000-2020).

Providence household incomes have steadily increased over the past twenty years, but at a slightly slower pace than statewide median income. Table A.7 depicts a more significant increase in income since 2000.

Table A.7 Providence Median Household income in 2020 Dollars, 2000-2020

Year	Median (in real dollars)	% Change (adjusted to 2020 dollars)
2000	\$26,867	--
2012	\$37,237	7.9%
2020	\$49,065	10.7%

Source: US Census, 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census

Table A.8 Percent of Providence Families in National Income Brackets, 1989-2019 conveys the difference between the distribution of Providence incomes and the distribution of incomes nationwide. The percentage of households in the middle-income bracket stayed the same in 2009 and 2020 at 42.2%. Three decades prior, Providence’s middle class was almost identical to the national standard. In the same time span, the share of families in the low-income bracket rose to 29.6% of all families. The share of families in the high-income bracket increased almost 8%, a similar increase for the period from 2009 to 2020.

Income ranges are defined as follows:

- Lower income: less than \$40,000
- Middle income: \$40,000-\$75,000
- Higher income: more than \$75,000

Table A.8 Percent of Providence Families in National Income Brackets, 1989-2019

National Bracket	Year	Providence Bracket Share
Lowest Income (Lowest 20%)	1989	30.7%
	1999	39.3%
	2009	27.5%
	2019	29.6%
Middle Income (Middle 60%)	1989	55.0%
	1999	48.6%
	2009	42.2%

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	2019	42.2%
High Income (Top 20%)	1989	14.3%
	1999	12.1%
	2009	20.2%
	2019	28.2%

Source: 2020 Decennial Census

Due to the manner in which the Census treats income, race, and ethnicity, it is possible to compare the income of Hispanic households to White households but not to households of other races, as the Census income survey of all other races does not distinguish Hispanic from Non-Hispanic head of household (See Table A.9 Percent of Providence Households by Income Range and (available) Race/Ethnicity, 2020).

Table A.9: % of Providence Households by Income Range & (available) Race/Ethnicity, 2020

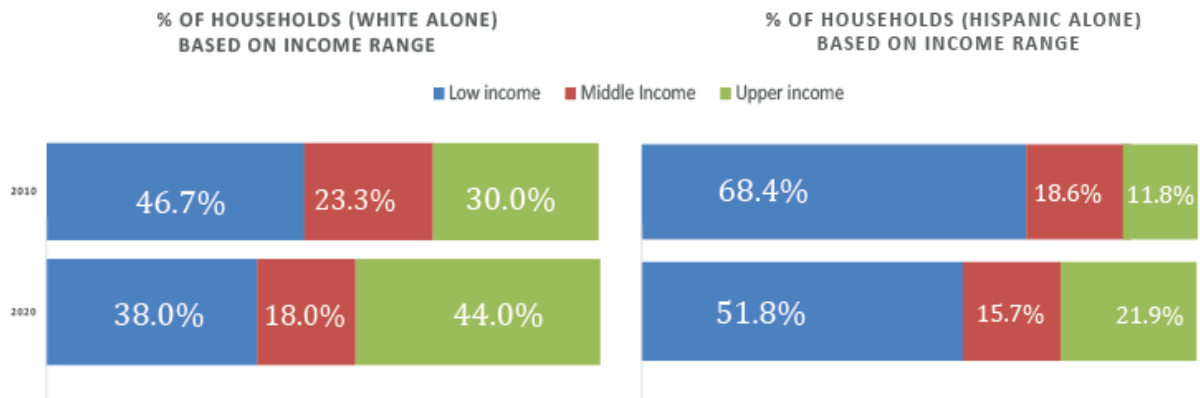
Race and Ethnicity of Households			
	All	Non-Hispanic White	Hispanic Any Race
Number of Households:	72,767	33,171	26,452
Income Range			
Less than \$20,000	20.6%	15.6%	27.7%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	8.0%	6.7%	9%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	6.0%	5.8%	6.1%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	5.3%	6.2%	5.6%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	6.7%	6.1%	6.9%
\$60,000 to \$74,999	7.8%	5.4%	10.9%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	12.9%	15%	9.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	16.7%	19%	12.3%
\$150,000 or more	16.1%	19%	12.7%

Source: US Census, 20015-2020 American Community Survey

The number of households earning between \$40,000 –\$75,000 has decreased, while the number of households earning less than \$40,000 or more than \$75,000 has increased (see Figure A.5 Percent of Providence Households by Income Range and (available) Race/Ethnicity, 2020). The decrease in households in the middle-income range is comparable to peer cities.

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Figure A.5: % of Providence Households by Income Range & (available) Race/Ethnicity, 2020



Source: US Census, 2020 American Community Survey

Poverty, Working Poor and Public Assistance

Providence's overall poverty rate decreased by about 4% between 2009 and 2020, such that under 22% of residents were living in poverty in 2020. There was a minor (1.1%) decrease in the poverty rate in Providence from 2019 – 2020 (See Table A.10 'Poverty Rate in Providence, 1989-2020').

Table A.10 Poverty Rate in Providence, 1989-2019

Year	Rate
1989	23.0%
1999	29.1%
2009	26.3%
2019	22.6%
2020	21.5%

Source: US 2020 Decennial Census

Education, Language and Workforce Training

Educational Attainment among Providence Residents

The Providence adult population has steadily become more highly educated over the past ten years: close to 32% of all residents aged 25 years or older now have a 4-year college degree or higher (See Table A.11 Educational Attainment for Providence Population Age 25 and over, 2012-2020). Despite this increase, 8% of the adult population is still without a high school diploma or equivalent.

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Table A.11 Educational Attainment for Providence Population Age 25 or over, 2012-2020

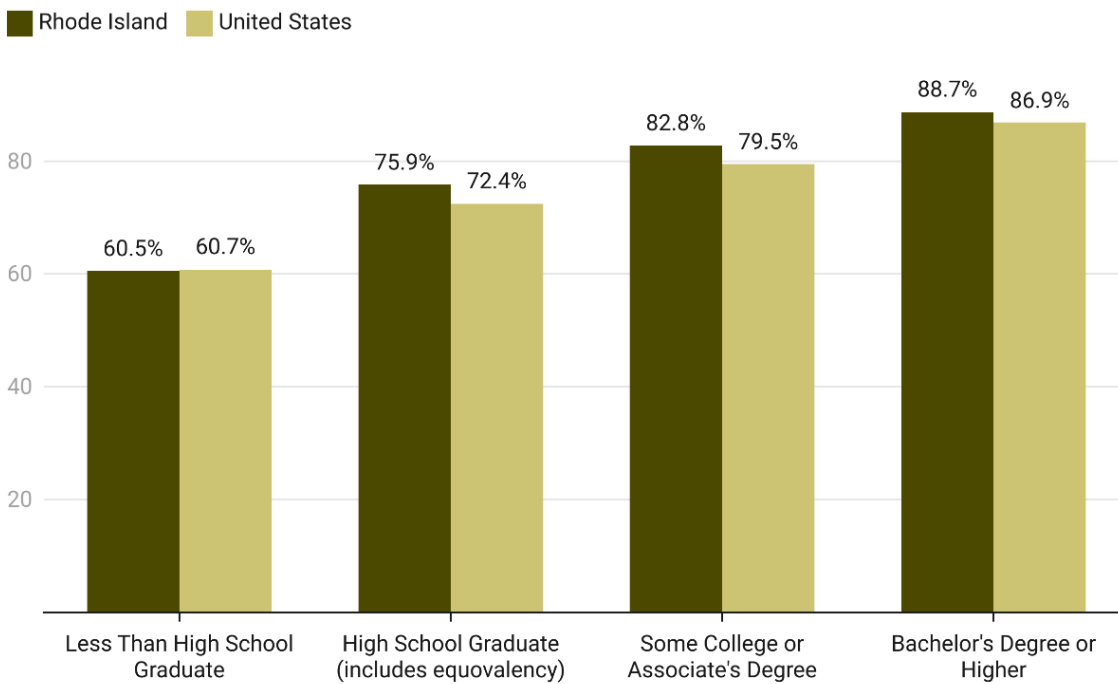
Highest Attainment	Year	Share
Did Not Graduate High School	2012	10%
	2014	13%
	2016	9%
	2018	7%
	2020	8%
High School Graduate	2012	25%
	2014	24%
	2016	29%
	2018	36%
	2020	31%
Some College or associate degree	2012	16%
	2014	16%
	2016	16%
	2018	15%
	2020	14%
College Graduate or Advanced Degree	2012	27%
	2014	30%
	2016	31%
	2018	30%
	2020	32%

Source: US Census education attainment 2012-2020

The rate of labor force participation among working-age adults with various levels of education offers insight as to who is finding employment and who is not (See Figure A.6 Labor Force Participation Rates by Education Level 2020 (R.I. and U.S)). Rhode Island rates of labor force participation closely resemble those of the nation as a whole, with 60% of high school dropouts as active labor force participants. This is more than a 10% increase from 2010.

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Figure A.6 Labor Force Participation Rates by Education Level, 2020



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Source: US Census Labor force participation, 2020

Business and Jobs

Introduction

The employment and incomes of Providence residents are examined through the characteristics of the working age population, including their occupations, education level, language skills, and commuting patterns. The strength and composition of the employment market, along with transportation options and workforce training, are also major determinants of job selection and realized earnings. As home to several colleges and universities, the city has great potential to foster a formidable workforce of creative and high-skilled workers. However, with high rates of poverty and high school dropout, challenges remain to improve adult education and public-school achievement in order to raise the earning potential of the current and future labor force.

Labor Force Participation and Unemployment

The labor force participation rate is the age of working-age people (age 16 to 64) who are either currently employed or are unemployed and looking for work. The participation rate has held steady over the previous decade at around 60% while the growth in the labor force has consistently increased. (see Table A.12 Providence Labor Force Size and Participation Rate, 1980-2020).

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Table A.12 Providence Labor Force Size and Participation Rate, 1980-2020

Year	Number in Labor Force	Participation	Growth in Labor force
1980	72,471	57.9%	--
1990	76,328	60.5%	3,857
2000	76,833	57.7%	505
2010	89,381	63.4%	12,548
2020	90,275	61.8%	894

Source: US Census, 1980-2020 American Community Survey

The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labor force that is currently unemployed. The annual average unemployment rate represents the mean of twelve-monthly unemployment calculations. In the calendar year 2019, an average of almost 4,000 members, or 4.4% of the Providence labor force, were unemployed (see Table A.13 Annual Average Unemployment Rate (unadjusted) in Providence, 1997-2019). The city's unemployment rate is in a steady decline after seeing its peak during the great recession. The unemployment rate increased significantly in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to 11.2% but has since then dropped to 4.0% in 2022. These changes mimic national unemployment patterns.

Table A.13 Annual Average Unemployment Rate (Unadjusted) in Providence, 1990-2022

Year	# in the Labor Force	Number Unemployed	Unemployment rate
2022	88,650	3,537	4.0
2021	89,244	5,830	6.5
2020	90,275	10,051	11.2
2019	89,534	3,930	4.4
2018	89,300	4,505	5.0
2017	88,844	4,810	5.4
2016	86,319	5,369	6.2
2015	86,660	6,115	7.1
2014	87,164	7,864	9.0
2013	87,075	9,227	10.6

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2012	87,556	9,970	11.4
2011	88,049	10,979	12.5
2010	88,773	11,184	12.6
2009	79,839	10,819	13.6
2008	78,924	7,241	9.2
2007	78,893	4,973	6.3
2006	79,594	5,211	6.5
2005	78,535	5,036	6.4
2004	77,617	4,922	6.3
2003	78,194	5,412	6.9
2002	76,799	4,822	6.3

Source: R.I. DLT-Local Area Unemployment Statistics

The worker count is the subset of the labor force that is employed at the time of survey. The number of employed Providence residents has increased by 17,000 over the last five decades, with a total of 83,741 in 2020. This is a 6.7% increase from the previous decade of 78,093 workers.

Table A.14 Employed Providence Residents aged 16 and over, 2020

Year	Number of Workers	% Change
1970	74,849	-
1980	65,839	-12.0%
1990	69,320	5.2%
2000	69,676	0.5%
2010	78,093	12.0%
2020	83,741	7.2%

Source: US Census, 2020 American Community Survey

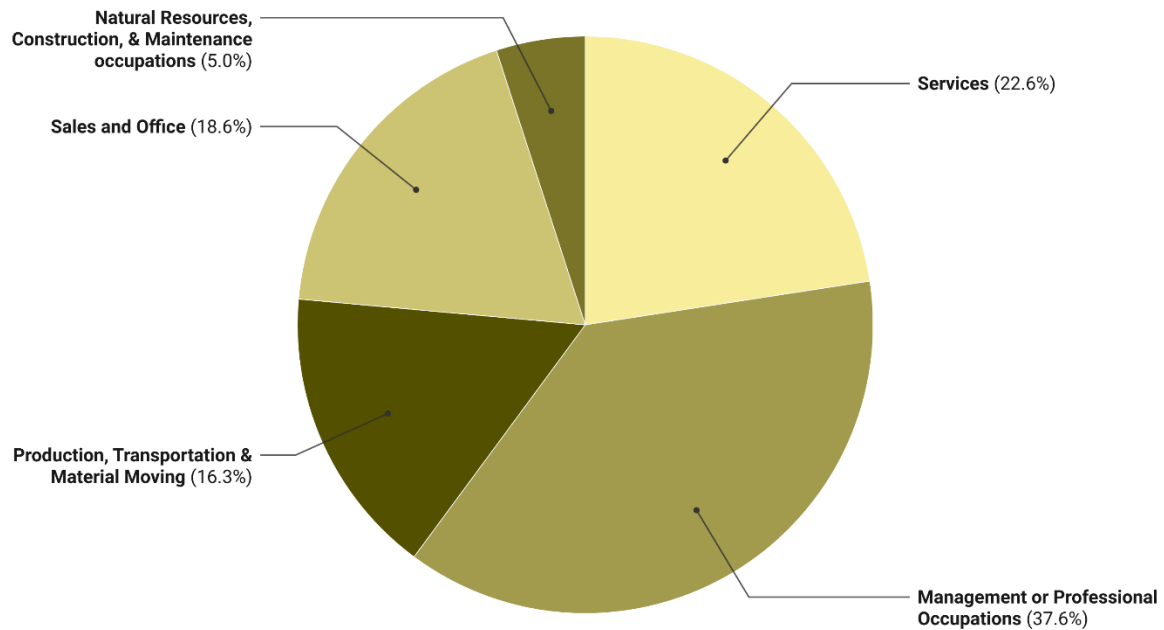
Employment of Providence Residents

According to the 2020 Census, over one-third of Providence's working residents are employed in the management or professional occupations, while more than 20% are in services. (See Figure A.7 Employment by Occupation for Working Providence Residents Age 16 and over, 2020.) The remaining

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40% is distributed among sales and offices; transportation, production, and material moving; and natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations.

Figure A.7 Employment by Occupation for Working Providence Residents age 16 & over, 2020

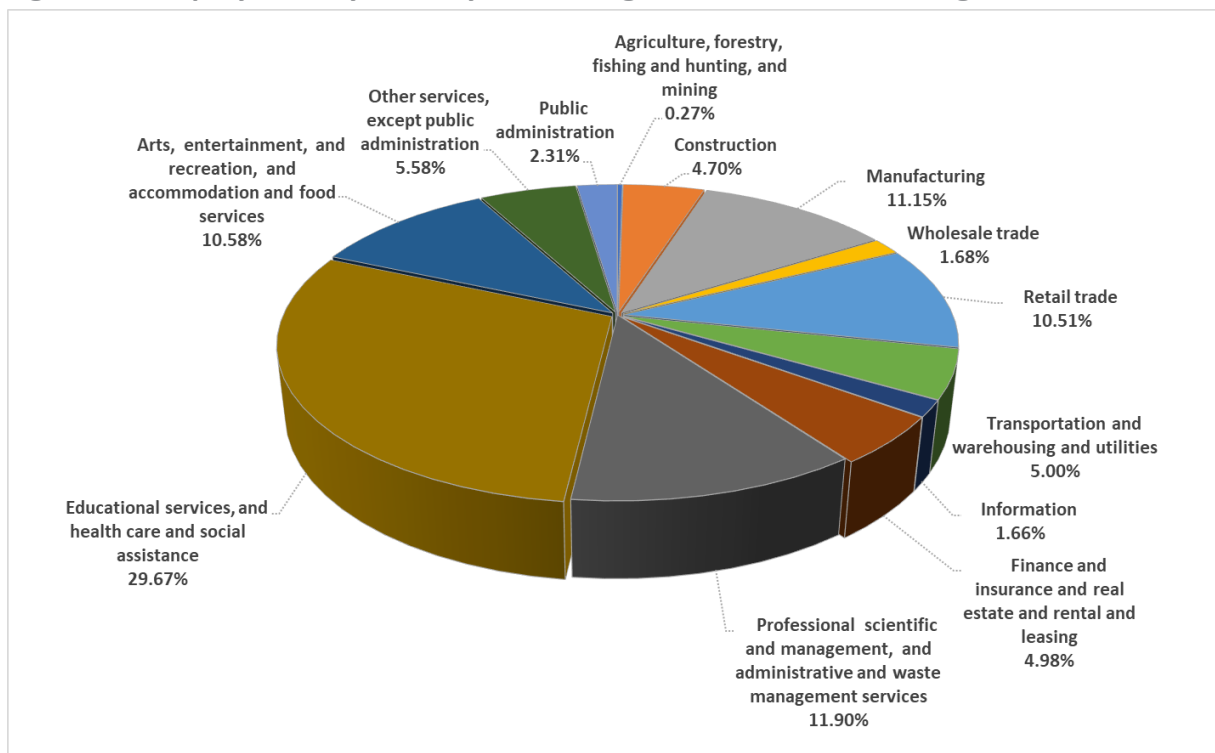


Source: US Census, 2020 American Community Survey

In terms of industries, nearly 30% of employed residents work in Education, Health, and Social Services (see Figure A.8 Employment by Industry for Working Providence Residents Age 16 and over, 2020). The next most common industry of employment is Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative and Waste Management Services with 11.9% of all working Providence residents, followed by Manufacturing at 11.1%.

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Figure A.8 Employment by Industry of Working Providence Residents Aged 16 and over, 2020



Source: US Census, 2006-2010 American Community Survey

Jobs and Industries Located in Providence

Between 2010 and 2020, Providence has seen employment decline in 10 industries. The biggest decline was in the Information industry, which experienced a 61.4% decrease in average employment. The City of Providence maintains almost 23% of all jobs Rhode Island during 2020 (see Table A.15 NAICS Industry Divisions, 2010-2020). In terms of NAICS industry divisions by state share, Educational Services is the most heavily concentrated industry in Providence, with 63.1% of statewide employment located in the city. Providence also claims at least 30% of statewide employment in two other industries, Health Care & Social Assistance (35.1%) and Professional and Technical services (31.8%). Additionally, Providence claims at least 25% of statewide employment in the following industries: Administrative Support & Waste Management (27.4%), Management of Companies & Enterprises (27.4%). Given its share in overall employment, Providence has a relatively low portion of the jobs in several industries such as Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation (7.7%), Retail Trade (13.3%), Construction (15.9%) Manufacturing (7.6%), and Transportation & Warehousing (18.6%), Providence saw employment decline in seven industry divisions (not including Government), highlighted by the fall in Information (-61.4%) and in Manufacturing (-32.0%).

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Table A.15 NAICS City wide industry divisions 2020

Industry	City wide 2010	City wide 2020	Change since 2010	State Share
Utilities		482	----	----*
Construction	1,964	2,532	28.9%	15.9%
Manufacturing	4,484	3,050	-32.0%	7.6%
Wholesale Trade	2,131	2,645	24.1%	16.7%
Retail Trade	6,641	6,109	-8.0%	13.0%
Transportation & Warehousing	637	1,616	153.7%	18.6%
Information	3,379	1,303	-61.4%	13.0%
Finance & Insurance	4,810	4,154	-13.6%	41.6%
Real Estate & Leasing	1,367	1,328	-2.9%	23.6%
Professional & Technical Services	6,072	6,648	9.5%	31.8%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	1,524	2,553	67.5%	27.4%
Administrative Support & Waste Mgmt.	7,260	6,412	-11.7%	27.7%
Educational Services	11,747	12,106	35.1%	63.1%
Health Care & Social Assistance	25,724	27,811	8.1%	35.6%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	953	583	-38.8%	7.7%
Accommodation & Food Services	8,035	7,094	-11.7%	16.9%

Source: RI DLT city wide industry division 2020

Due to the difficult nature of identifying data of a specific employer, the employment number in the Utilities industry has been removed for the year 2010. The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (DLT) has prepared projections of how statewide employment will change within occupational

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categories over the decade of 2020-2030 (estimates are not available at the city level). Jobs within Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (29.6%) and Personal Care and Service Occupation (22.1%) are expected to grow around twice the current rate of overall employment. The largest occupational category in 2020, Office and Administrative Support, is projected to remain steady at its current employment rate.

Table A.16 Statewide Occupational Outlook by major occupational group, 2020- 2030 (Top 20)

SOC Code	Occupational Title	Employment 2020	Employment 2030	% Change
11-0000	Management	22,776	25,949	13.9%
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations	35,061	39,041	11.4%
15-0000	Computer and Mathematical	16,244	18,864	16.1%
17-0000	Architecture and Engineering	8,461	9,295	9.9%
19-0000	Life, Physical, and Social Science	3,956	4,359	10.2%
21-0000	Community and Social Services	9,387	10,534	12.2%
23-0000	Legal	6,047	6,728	11.3%
25-0000	Education, Training and Library	31,400	33,804	7.7%
27-0000	Arts, Design, Entertainment, sports, and media	9,522	10,822	13.7%
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	37,057	39,446	6.4%
31-0000	Healthcare Support	24,460	28,206	15.3%
33-0000	Protective Service	11,724	13,317	13.6%
35-0000	Food Preparation and Serving Related	38,214	49,509	29.6%
37-0000	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	19,781	22,182	12.1%
39-0000	Personal Care and Service	13,255	16,178	22.1%
41-0000	Sales and Related	45,953	49,584	7.9%
43-0000	Office and Administrative Support	61,475	61,262	-0.3%
45-0000	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	778	867	11.4%

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47-0000	Construction and Extraction	20,716	23,930	15.5%
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	16,787	18,771	11.8%
51-0000	Production	27,993	28,828	3.0%
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving	29,953	35,654	19.0%

Source: RI DLT-2020 Opportunities: Rhode Island's Occupational Outlook for 2020

Commuting

At the time of the Census, 52% of all Providence's employed residents reported that they work in the capital city. Another 28% were working elsewhere in Providence County, and 20% worked outside of Providence County (See Table A.17 Work Location and Means of Commute for Working Providence Residents Aged 16 and over). 65% of workers report commuting to work by automobile, while the next most common mode is walking to work (8.1%). Public transportation as a means of commute registered at 5.4%.

Table A.17 Work Location & Means of Commute for Working Providence Residents aged 16+

Location of Work	%
In Providence City	52%
In Providence County	28%
Outside of Providence County	20%
Mode of Transit	%
Drove or carpooled	65%
Walked	8.1%
Public Transportation	5.4%
Bicycle	1.1%
Other Means	1.9%
Worked at Home	7.2%

Source: US Census, 2016-2020 American Community Survey

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Table A.18 New England States Employment

All Private Employment			
New England States	2010	2020	% Change
Connecticut	1,468,291	1,631,510	11.1%
Maine	488,932	610,600	24.8%
Massachusetts	2,967,877	3,566,000	20.1%
New Hampshire	568,043	659,220	16.1%
Rhode Island	413,584	491,000	18.7%
Vermont	264,766	293,280	10.7%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, County Business Patterns

Table A.19 Statewide Industrial Employment Outlook, 2018-2022

NAICS code	Sector title	2018	2022	absolute change	% Change
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	871	1,093	222	25.5%
21	Mining	185	178	-7	-3.8%
22	Utilities	1,140	1,362	222	19.5%
23	Construction	19,223	21,006	1,783	9.3%
33-33	Manufacturing	40,333	40,172	-161	-0.4%
42	Wholesale Trade	48,659	16,302	-32,354	-66.5%
44-45	Retail Trade	10,493	47,256	36,763	350.4%
48-49	Transportation & Warehousing	5,927	11,655	5,728	96.6%
51	information	25,929	5,726	-20,203	-77.9%
52	Finance & insurance	6,363	26,190	19,827	311.6%
53	Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	13,324	6,428	-6,896	-51.8%

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55	Management of companies & enterprises	29,591	29,738	147	0.5%
56	administrative & waste services	20,145	11,068	-9,077	-45.1%
61	educational services	80,040	29,145	-50,895	-63.59%
62	Health Care	9,512	20,472	10,960	115.22%
71	Arts, entertainment & food services	49,644	78,521	28,877	58.17%
81	Other services except public admin	17,994	3,427	-14,567	-80.95%
92	Government	60,206	11,302	-48,904	-81.23%

Source: RI DLT-2018 Opportunities: Rhode Island's Occupational Outlook for 2022.

Table A.20 Office Vacancy Rates, 2020

Area	Vacancy Rate
Northern RI	13.7%
Westbay	11.0%
East Bay	11.5%
Suburban Providence	10.4%
Aquidneck island	8.0%

Source: CBRE-New England

A little over half (54%) of Providence's downtown office space is Class-B (Table A.21 Downtown Office Supply by Office Class, 2020).

Table A.21 'Downtown Office Supply by Office Class, 2020

Class	Square Feet	Vacancy rate	% of Total
Class-A	2,420,826	12.84%	38%
Class-B	3,449,337	17.01%	54%
Class-C	504,108	5.50%	8%

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Total	6,374,271	14.52%	100%
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Source: CBRE-New England

Between 2010 and 2020, Downtown Providence went from having roughly 4,462,953 square feet of occupied Class A and B multi-tenant office supply to about 4,973,910 square feet of occupied space, an increase of 477,799 square feet of occupied office space (Table A.22 Downtown Class A and B Multi-Tenant Office Supply, 2010-2020).

Table A.22 Downtown Class A and B Multi-Tenant Office Supply, 2010-2020

Office Square Footage	2010	2020	Change from 2010 - 2020
Total	5,490,932	5,870,163	379,231
Occupied	4,496,111	4,973,910	477,799

Source: CBRE-New England

A comparison of the availability and lease rates of office space in various areas of Downtown Providence and other areas of Rhode Island are shown in Table A.23 Downtown Providence Office Market 2020 and Table A.24 Suburban Providence Office Market 2020.

Table A.23 Downtown Providence Office Market 2020

Districts	Total SF	Avail. SF	Vacancy	Absorption	Avg. Lease Rate
Capital Center	782,615	175,875	22.5%	-7,080	\$36.65
Financial	2,079,603	280,324	13.5%	27,675	\$28.08
Westminster	617,360	33,775	5.5%	-4,000	\$22.08
South Main	134,207	1,725	1.3%	0	\$21.56
Randall Sq.	201,663	30,117	14.9%	-10,344	\$23.03
Empire	562,587	12,897	2.3%	-600	\$23.84
Promenade	1,138,336	211,820	18.6%	-78,122	\$23.95
Jewelry (Richmond)	857,900	178,837	20.9%	-69,504	\$31.72
Total Market	6,374,271	925,368	14.5%	-141,975	

Source: CBRE-New England

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Table A.24 Suburban Providence Office Market 2020

Districts	Total SF	Avail. SF	Vacancy	Absorption	Avg. Lease Rate
Northern RI	2,059,127	281,203	13.7%	13,836	\$18.57
West Bay	4,000,889	441,089	11.0%	186,880	\$19.51
East Bay	1,233,761	142,189	11.5%	5,795	\$17.12
Suburban Providence	1,157,858	120,574	10.4%	-32,404	\$19.07
Aquidneck Island	1,090,360	87,660	8.0%	11,419	\$15.71
Total Market	9,541,995	1,072,715	11.2%	185,526	

Source: CBRE-New England

Asking rents throughout the region are shown in Table A.25 Average Asking Rent per SF with Comparison Areas, 2020

Table A.25 Average Asking Rent per SF with Comparison Areas, 2020

Area	Asking Rent per sq. ft.
Suburban Rhode Island	\$16.46
Providence City	\$22.81
Suburban Hartford	\$18.63
Hartford City	\$19.92
Suburban Boston	\$19.11
Cambridge	\$39.22
Boston City	\$69.50

Source: CBRE-New England

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Housing

Housing Units

The 2020 Census counted 75,257 housing units in the city of Providence, a 6% increase from 2010. By far the largest unit type increase was the no-bedrooms, which increased by nearly 47% (See Table A.26 Housing Units by Type).

Table A.26 Housing Units by Type

	2010	2020	Percent Change
No Bedroom	2,760	2,822	2.25%
1 Bedroom	11,881	16,288	37.09%
2 Bedroom	27,156	28,776	5.97%
3 or More Bedroom	31,095	29,705	-4.47%

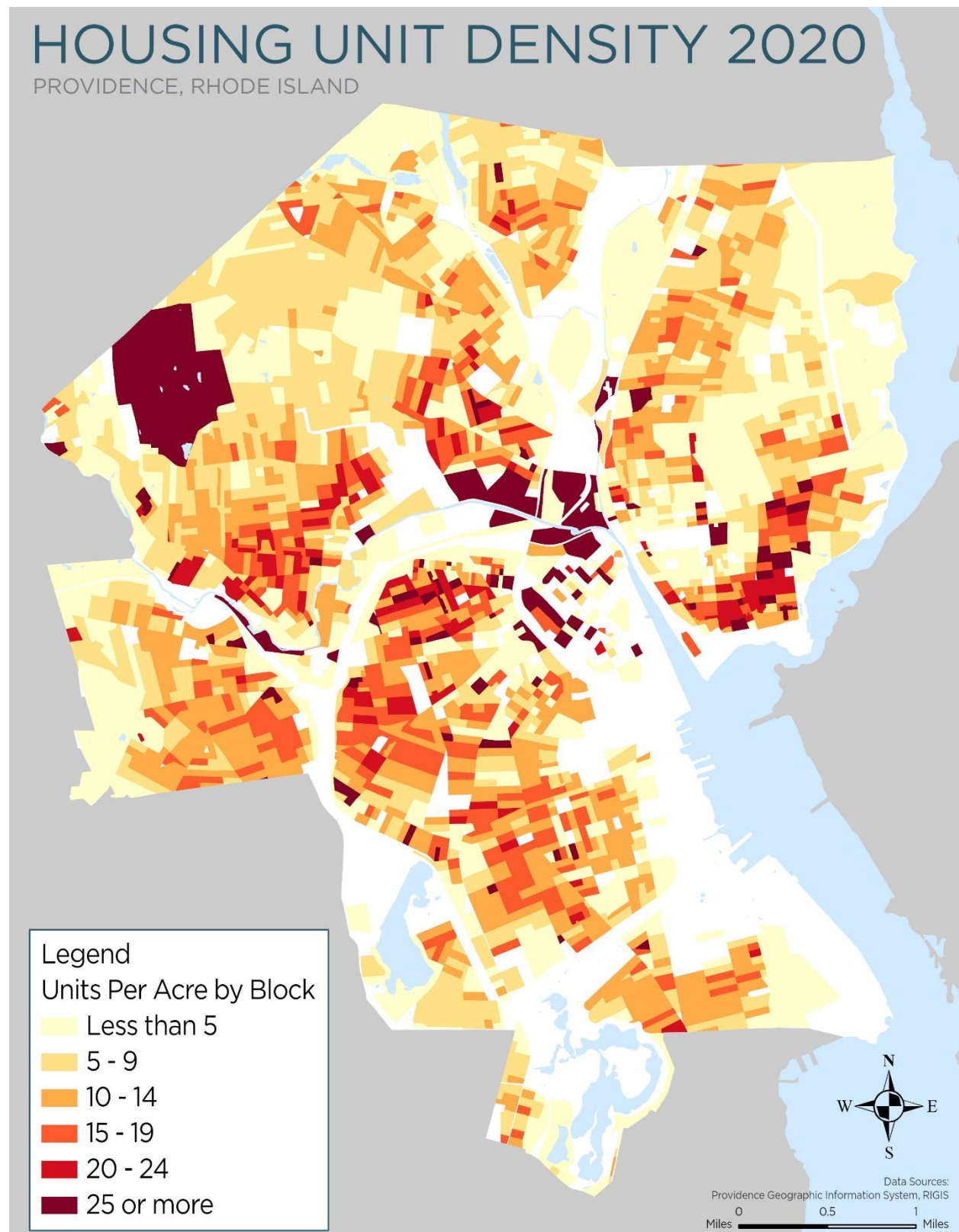
Source: US Census, 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census

Housing Density

The housing density in Providence is 6.39 units per acre of land, or 4,088 units per square mile. The density ranges from areas with no housing to 412 housing units per acre (see Map A.1 Housing Density). Of the 3,099 Census blocks in Providence, 2,347 have at least one unit of residential housing. When density is calculated using only residential zoned acres density increases to 9.99 housing units per acre, or 24.7 housing units per block. There are six blocks in the city with density over 100 units per acre.

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Map A.1 Housing Density in Providence Rhode Island

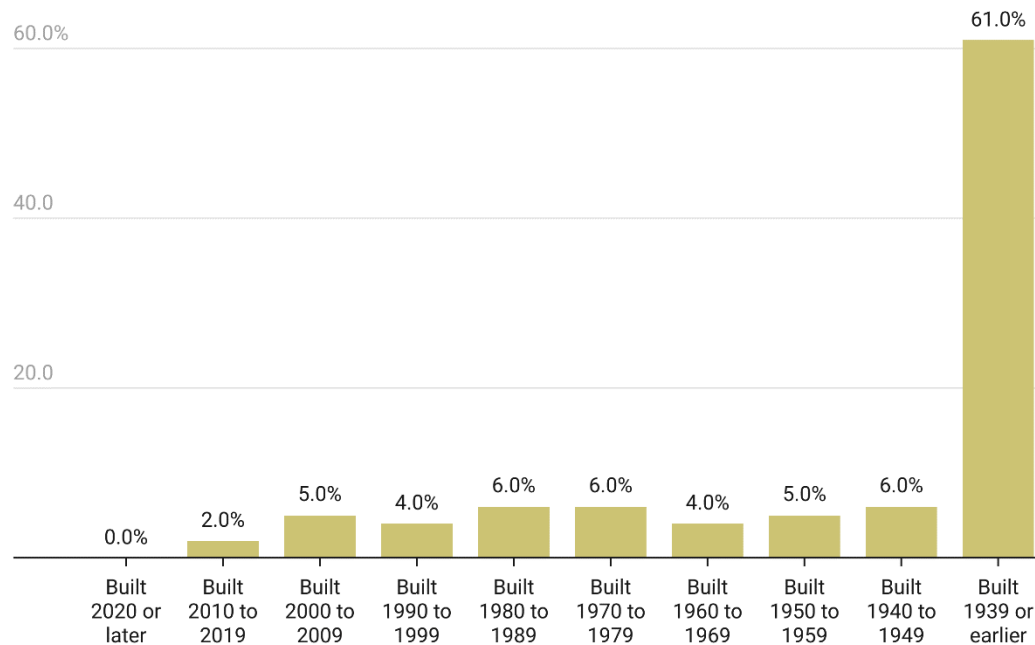


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Housing Stock: Age & Quality

The majority of structures built in the City of Providence are over eighty years old (See Figure A.9 Percent of Structures Built by Timeframe). This potentially has an impact on housing costs (heating, repairs) and at-risk property indicators, such as fire risk and lead-based paint. (See Table A.27 At-Risk Property Indicators).

Figure A.9 Percent of Structures Built by Timeframe



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Source: US Census, 2006-2010 American Community Survey

Table A.27 At-Risk Property Indicators

	2008	2009	2010	2020
Environmental Tickets	2,939	2,641	2,349	3,026
Foreclosures	1,508	754	514	--
Structure Fires	318	270	283	366

Source: City of Providence, Depts. of Public Works, Fire, Planning and Development

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Housing Occupancy and Vacancy

Homeownership

The overall homeownership rate in 2020 was 35% of all occupied housing units—a significant 23% decrease from 2010. At the same time, renter occupancy increased by 94%, with 52% of households renting their homes (see Table A.28 Housing Units, Percentage by Occupancy, Type, & Vacancy, 2010--2020) According to the 2020 Census, ownership vacancy was at 1.6% while rental vacancy was at 6.1%.

Table A.28 Housing Units, Percentage by Occupancy, Type and Vacancy, 2010-2020

	2010	2020	Percent change
Owner Occupied	36,146	23,309	35.5%
Renter Occupied	20,891	46,268	121.4%
Vacant	8,812	5,660	35.7%

Source: US Census 2020 Decennial Census

Table A.29 Residential Condominium Sales, 2017-2020

Year	Rhode Island	Providence
2017	2,169	307
2018	2,300	366
2019	2,314	357
2020	2,279	358

Source: Rhode Island Realtors Association

Median residential sales for single family homes have increased from the 1990s to 2020, in all parts of the city (See Table A.30 Median Single-Family Residential Sales Price 1985-2010). The City of Providence has more than recovered from the dramatic decline in sale prices during the recession of the early 2000s, with many residents experiencing a housing affordability crisis. Median sales prices in Providence (excluding the East Side) doubled between 2010 and 2020. East Side housing prices increased by more than 50% in the same time period but have consistently remained higher than the citywide average.

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Table A.30 Median Single-Family Residential Sales Price 1990-2022

	Rhode Island	Providence	East Side of Providence
1990	\$125,000	\$85,000	\$185,000
1991	\$121,000	\$86,500	\$170,285
1992	\$117,000	\$84,900	\$182,000
1993	\$115,000	\$76,100	\$169,000
1994	\$115,000	\$74,000	\$206,000
1995	\$115,000	\$69,000	\$190,000
1996	\$116,600	\$68,500	\$185,000
1997	\$118,000	\$69,000	\$205,000
1998	\$122,600	\$72,000	\$190,000
1999	\$126,000	\$75,000	\$248,500
2000	\$135,976	\$83,000	\$294,000
2001	\$156,000	\$97,925	\$359,500
2002	\$188,150	\$121,354	\$385,000
2003	\$230,000	\$147,750	\$392,625
2004	\$264,700	\$185,000	\$475,000
2005	\$282,900	\$210,000	\$510,000
2006	\$282,500	\$212,475	\$502,000
2007	\$275,000	\$197,000	\$468,075
2008	\$234,900	\$123,500	\$486,000
2009	\$199,000	\$85,000	\$440,000
2010	\$200,000	\$115,000	\$432,000
2011	\$195,000	\$100,000	\$426,000
2012	\$190,000	\$90,000	\$449,100
2013	\$205,000	\$105,000	\$439,500
2014	\$215,000	\$122,750	\$460,000
2015	\$225,000	\$130,000	\$480,000
2016	\$239,900	\$150,000	\$493,000
2017	\$255,000	\$168,000	\$570,000
2018	\$270,000	\$190,000	\$590,000
2019	\$285,000	\$204,400	\$625,000
2020	\$319,900	\$230,000	\$660,000

Source: RI Realtors Association

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Rental Market

Fair market rents, as determined by HUD, have increased steadily across the board from 2016 to 2020 for studio to four bedrooms. (See Table A.31 Fair Market Rent Increase by Bedroom Size). Fair Market Rent is defined by HUD as “the 40th percentile of gross rents for typical, non-standard rental units occupied by recent movers in a local housing market,” generally meaning it is the median of local market rents, not the average rent one would expect to pay in the market.

Table A.31 Fair Market Rent Increase by Bedroom Size

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Studio	\$655	\$732	\$748	\$786	\$794
1 Bedroom	\$801	\$827	\$849	\$889	\$898
2 Bedroom	\$972	\$994	\$1,014	\$1,060	\$1,075
3 Bedroom	\$1,206	\$1,244	\$1,271	\$1,32	\$1,340
4 Bedroom	\$1,452	\$1,485	\$1,508	\$1,565	\$1,591

Source: HUD

In 2020, according to HousingWorks RI, the average 2-bedroom rent citywide was \$1,781—up from \$1,111 in 2010. When adjusted for inflation, this is a 37% increase in average rents in 10 years.

Housing Affordability

According to an analysis completed by Rhode Island Housing (RIH), Providence has 10,704 units of housing affordable to people of low or moderate income. This amounts to 14.9% of the total number of dwelling units in the city. Approximately 50% of the affordable units serve families, 41% serve elderly, and 8% serve people with disabilities.

More than 40% of Providence households are housing cost burdened, with 47% of renters and 40% of homeowners paying more than 30% of their income on housing. Table A.32 Housing Cost Burden identifies both renter and owner households spending between 30% and 35% of income on housing and households spending more than 35% of income on housing.

Housing costs have increased at a faster rate than household income between 2010 and 2020—income has increased by just under 11% while rents have increased by 37% and the cost of homeownership has more than doubled in much of the city.

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Table A.32 Housing Cost Burden

Type	HH's	Type	HH's	Total
Owner occupied with housing cost burden great than 30%	1,966	Owner occupied with housing cost burden greater than 35%	6,521	8,487
Renter occupied with housing cost burden greater than 30%	3,270	Renter occupied with housing cost burden greater than 35%	14,421	17,691

Source: HUD

Public and Assisted Housing

The Providence Housing Authority (PHA) owns, manages, and maintains 2,606 units of public housing for low-income individuals and families within 12 developments and 244 scattered sites citywide. In addition, PHA administers more than 2,700 Housing Choice Vouchers (including special vouchers such as Veterans Administration Supportive Housing/VASH, Mainstream, Emergency) that allow some of the most vulnerable populations to lease units in the private rental market. PHA is committed to project-basing up to 30% of its HCV Program voucher authority to support the preservation and creation of new affordable housing for low-income households. The PHA's Public Housing Program portfolio includes over 260 buildings of various size and use dedicated to public housing for families, elderly as well as disabled residents. As the largest landlord of Providence, over 12,000 residents secure an affordable home through the agency. With over 85% of residents below 50% AMI, PHA also provides a wide array of on-site resident services that promote family economic self-sufficiency and healthy aging in place. Additional partners and policies ensure the security and safety of PHA residents and neighborhoods. As of FY 2024, over 72% of public housing residents identify as Latino, 25% Black, 2% American Indian/Native Alaskan, 2% Asian, and 22% of residents have a disability.

Homelessness

Given the high housing cost-burden for many in Providence, homelessness continues to be a significant issue. In order to address this problem, the state has 2,014 beds in emergency shelters, 538 beds in transitional housing, and 2,537 beds in permanent supportive housing. While the size of the homeless population has yet to be determined, the last Point in Time count conducted by the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness estimated that 67% of the homeless population were individuals and 33% were persons in families statewide. (See table 33. Point in Time Count summary of Homeless Population).

Table A.33. Point in Time Count summary of Homeless Population

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Point in Time Count, January 25, 2023		
Persons in Families	595	32.9%
Individuals	1214	67.1%
Unaccompanied Youth (13-17)	1	0.1%

Source: Point in Time Count 2023, The Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness

It is clear that many families are at serious risk of homelessness. A 5-year trend analysis from the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness shows a 15% increase in people experiencing homelessness. The largest increase is in persons unsheltered and in emergency shelters. Currently, there are 5,236 families with an income of less than 30% LMI that pay 50% of their income on housing.

Mobility

Bus

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) provides bus service throughout the state, and a significant portion of RIPTA service is in the urban core, especially in Providence. RIPTA provides frequent bus service on numerous routes within Providence, especially the R-Line running along North Main Street and Broad Street, passing Providence Station and the bus hub in Kennedy Plaza as part of the Downtown Transit Connector. Other corridors with frequent bus service currently include Elmwood Avenue, Broadway, Cranston Street, Smith Street, South Main Street, Angell Street, and Waterman Street. Besides RIPTA service, Providence is also served by intercity bus lines, including curbside stops downtown and service to the Peter Pan Bus Station close to the Pawtucket Line on Cemetery Street.

Rail

American passenger rail is most frequent on the Northeast Corridor between Washington, D.C., and Boston. Providence Station is served by MBTA Commuter Rail running between Boston South Station and Wickford Junction, Amtrak Northeast Regional service between Boston South Station and Norfolk, VA, and Amtrak Acela service between Boston South Station and Washington, D.C. There is also a rail spur from this Northeast Corridor rail line to the Port of Providence, which sees moderate levels of freight rail traffic.

Walking

Except for the lowest-density residential areas, Providence is served by sidewalks on both sides of the street and most major street crossings have marked crosswalks. Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods are areas of high walkability. Recreational walking is popular especially along Blackstone Boulevard, in Roger Williams Park, and in many other open spaces throughout the city.

Bicycling

Providence's Urban Trail network includes separated bicycle facilities on Broad Street; along the waterfront in Fox Point; Downtown on Empire Street, Chestnut Street, Clifford Street, and Fountain Street; and segments of the Woonasquatucket River Greenway between Olneyville and the City line with Johnston. Since 2018, the City has permitted shared micromobility services provided by private

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companies governed by extensive City regulations to create flexible mobility options for residents and visitors.

The city received a federal grant in 2023 through the USDOT Safe Streets and Roads for All program to improve urban trail connections and pedestrian safety. These projects will be implemented between 2024 and 2028. The Green and Complete Streets Advisory Council, made up of community members and established by ordinance in 2021, makes recommendations to the city for improving safety for walking and bicycling. Through these processes and through the Vision Zero resolution passed by City Council in February 2024, areas of high traffic stress are identified through both crash data and community input.

Driving

The city owns and maintains over 800 lane miles of roadway, making up 15% of Providence’s total land area. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation maintains limited-access highways Interstate 95, Interstate 195, U.S. Route 6, and R.I. Route 10, as well as various other state routes throughout the city.

One of the most common ways to measure driving is through Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) which provides useful information by itself and on a per-capita basis. Traffic models often forecast continuous growth in VMT, while the reality is usually more complex. Detailed in Table A.34, Rhode Island saw a more modest year-over-year growth in VMT than the country as a whole between 2014 and 2018 (1.095% vs. 1.73%) but only a slightly lower year-over-year increase in per-capita VMT over the same time period (1.015% vs. 1.03%). Both Rhode Island and the nationwide VMT numbers were lower during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and had not stabilized into any recognizable trends by the most recent year of data. Interestingly, Rhode Island saw a decrease in total VMT in 2019 before the start of the pandemic, which mirrors some other cities that have seen flat VMT or reductions in recent years.

Table A.34: Annual Vehicle Miles Traveled in Rhode Island and the United States

Year	Total Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)		Per Capita VMT	
	RI (million)	US (trillion)	RI	US
2014	7667	3.026	7,279	9,633
2015	7833	3.095	7,434	9,780
2016	7927	3.174	7,517	9,965
2017	8001	3.212	7,576	10,007
2018	8008	3.240	7,579	10,035
<i>Annual growth from 2014 baseline</i>	<i>1.095%</i>	<i>1.730%</i>	<i>1.015%</i>	<i>1.030%</i>
2019	7581	3.262	7,171	10,046
2020	6864	2.904	6,489	8,891
2021*	7526	3.132	6,892	9,500
<i>*2021 VMT is the latest data available and reflects ongoing impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic</i>				

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, RI Long Range Transportation Plan

Freight

Significant “final mile” freight traffic occurs by truck in Providence as it does throughout the country. The Port of Providence is New England's second-largest deep-water port and serves as a distribution

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center for the whole region. It is managed by ProvPort, Inc, whose website states “Ships from around the world utilize the deep water federal channel, bringing products in from Central and South America, Europe, East Asia, Russia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand... bulk products pass through the port, utilizing the intermodal opportunities presented by the interface of two major highways (Interstates 95 and 195), the deep water seaport, and a railway capable of supporting double stack service.”

The RI Freight Plan adds that “the Port of Providence is an important regional hub, particularly for the state’s leading export commodity, scrap metal. This commodity arrives from Massachusetts and Connecticut, as well as other nearby states. It is then shipped to Canada, Turkey, China, and other countries, providing regional connectivity to the rest of the world.”

One pipeline carries natural gas under the Providence River into Providence at Collier Point.

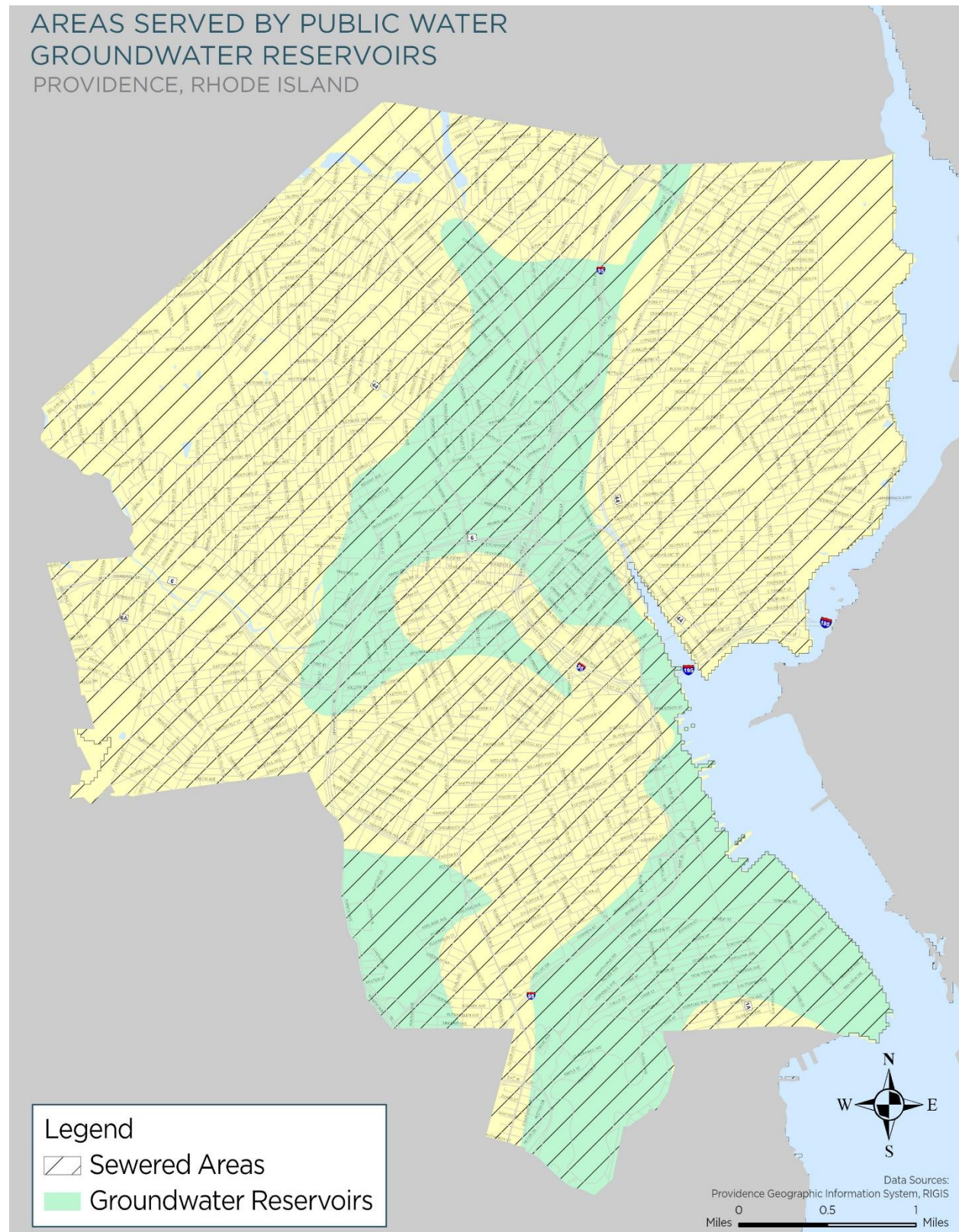
Appendix B

Appendix B. Maps

This Appendix fulfills the mapping requirements established in the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards.

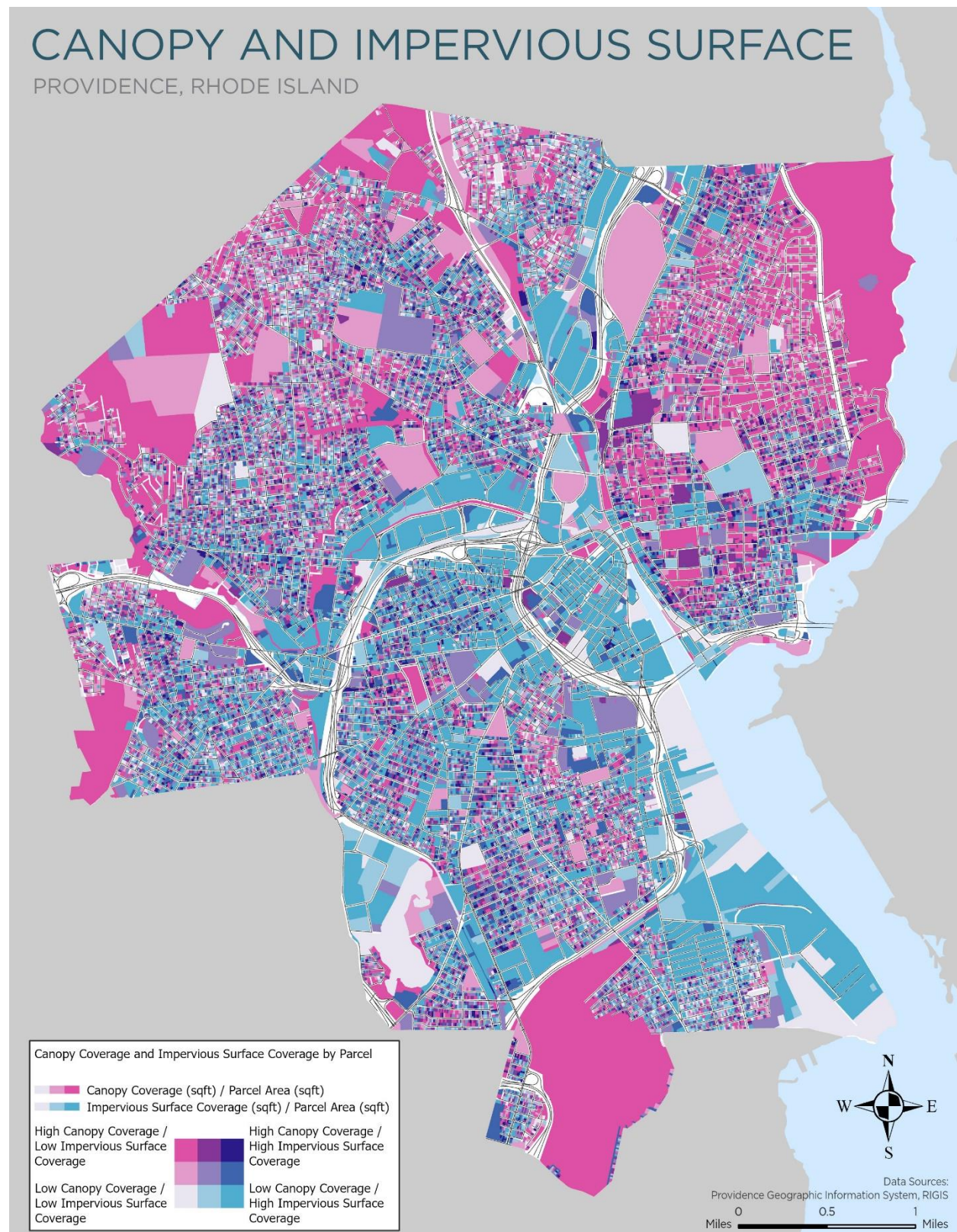
Appendix B

Map B.1 Areas Served by Public Water & Groundwater Reservoirs



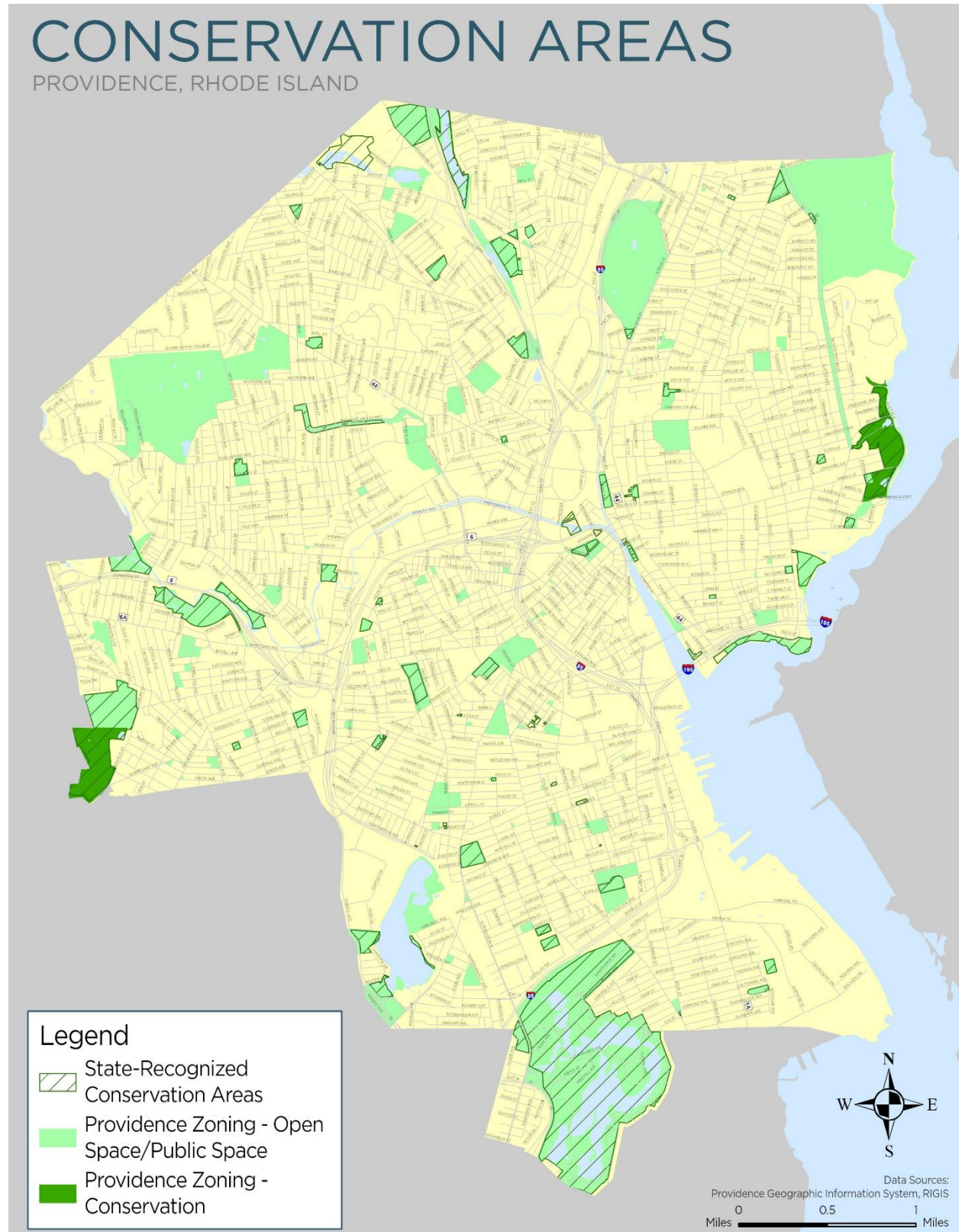
Appendix B

Map B.2 Canopy and Impervious Surface Coverage



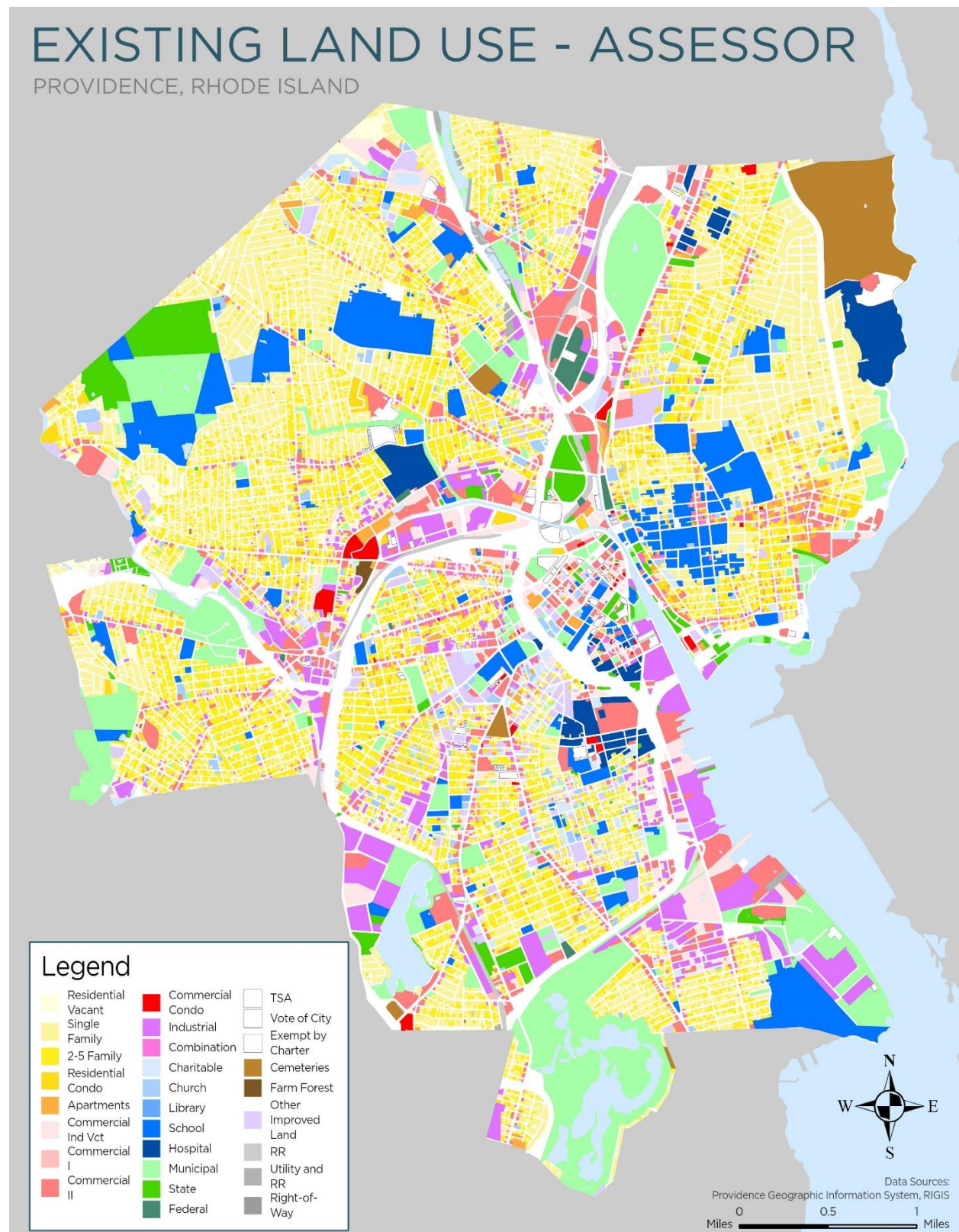
Appendix B

Map B.3 Conservation Areas



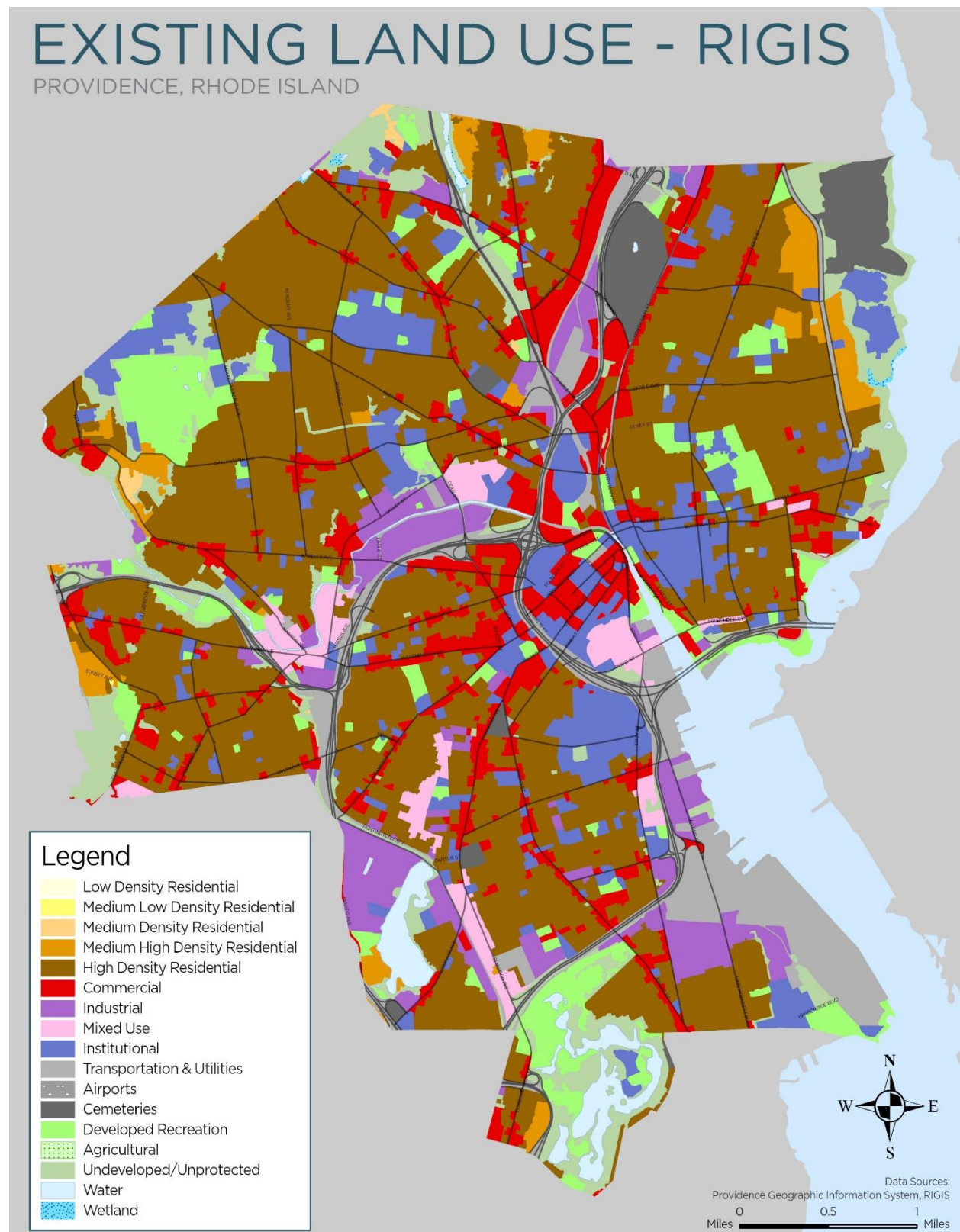
Appendix B

Map B.4 Existing Land Use - Assessor



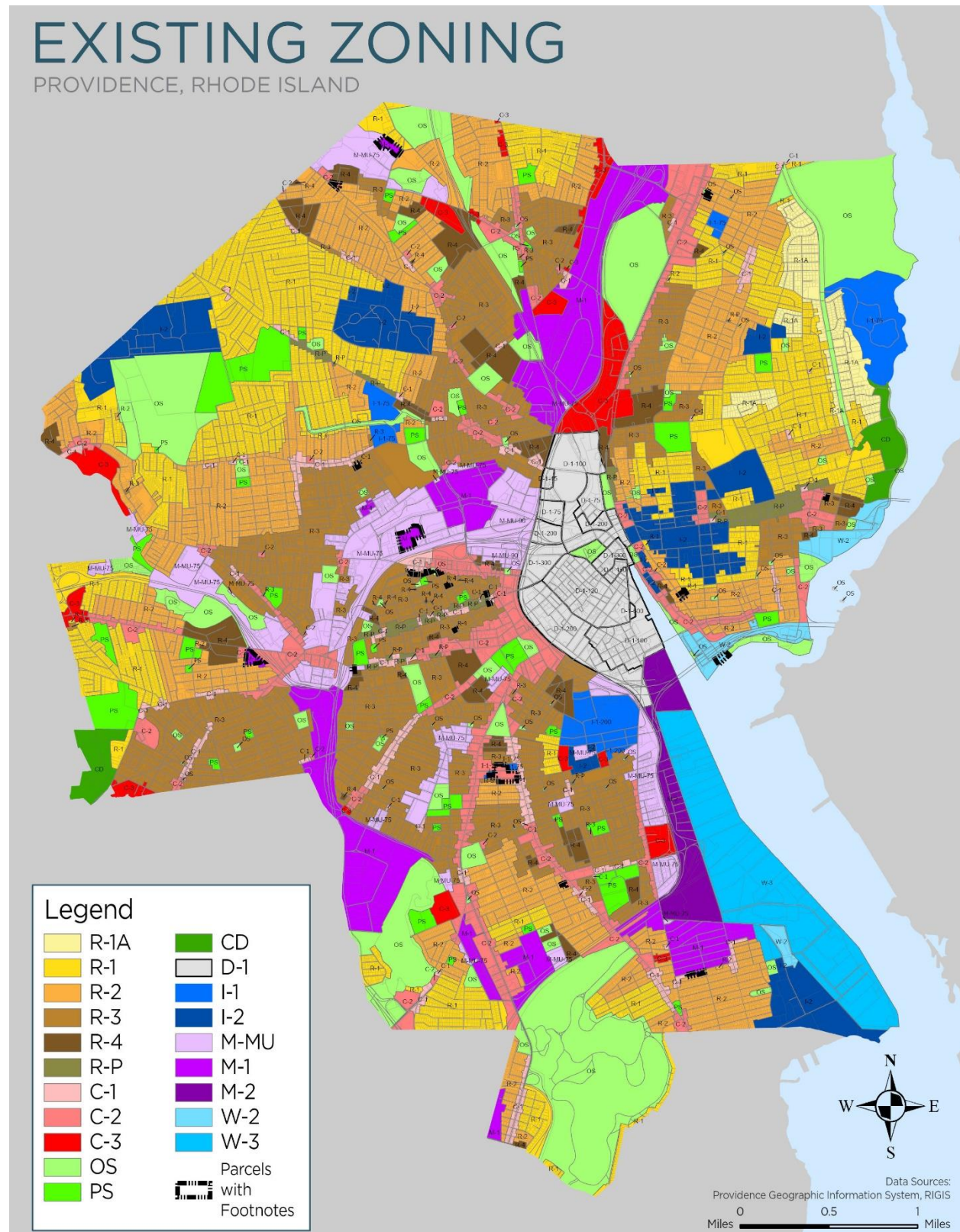
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Map B.5 Existing Land Use - RIGIS



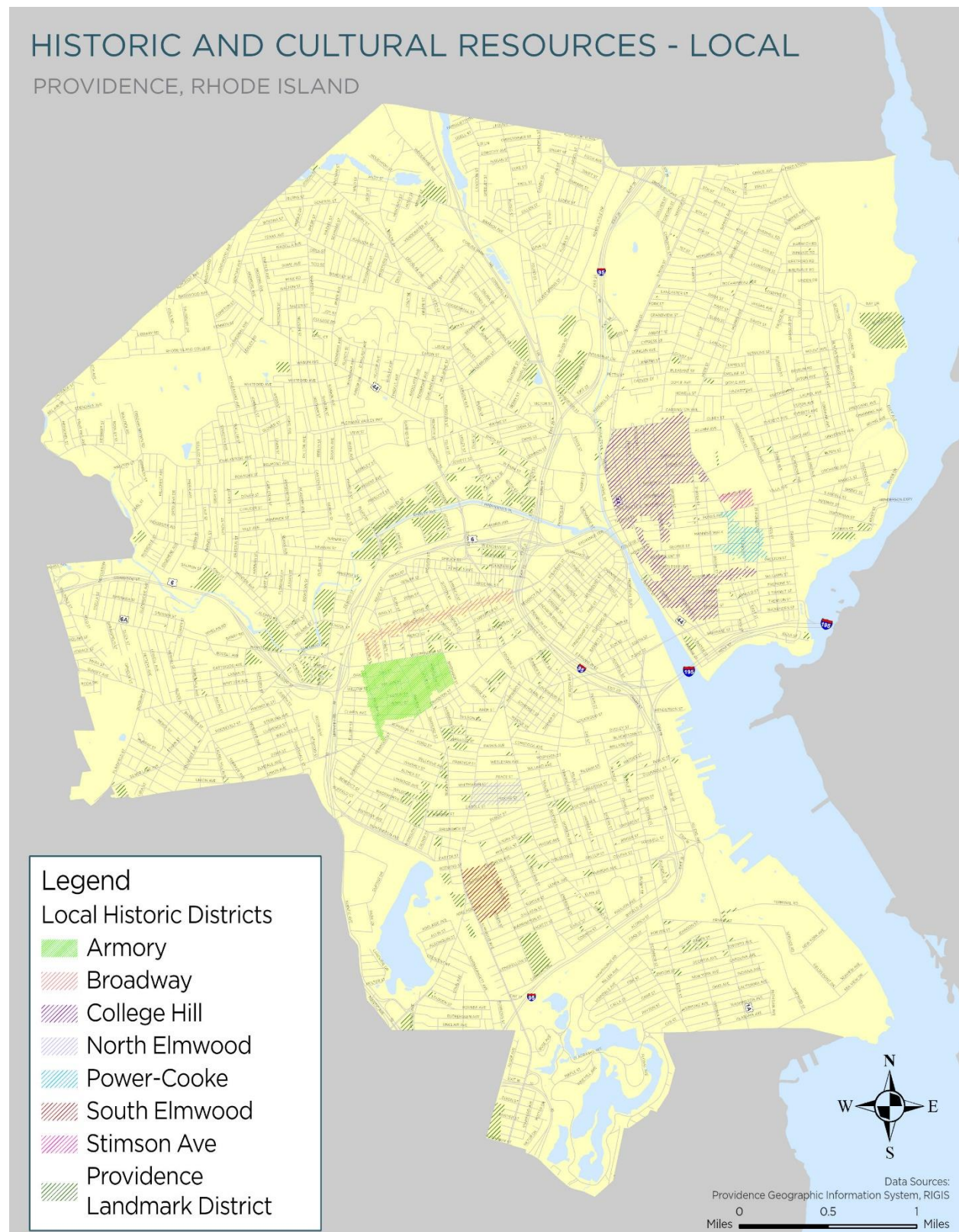
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Map B.6 Existing Zoning



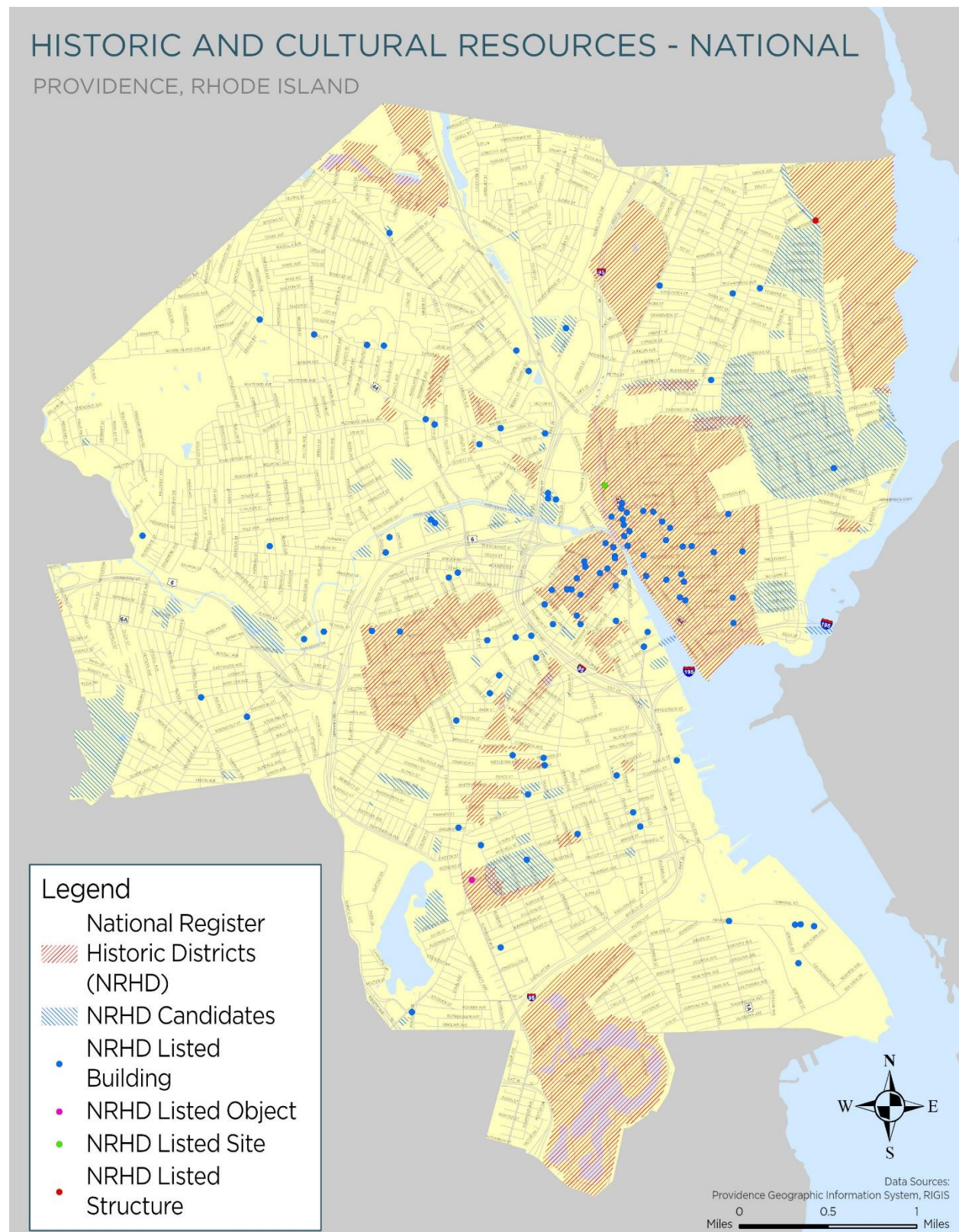
Appendix B

Map B.7 Historic and Cultural Resources - Local



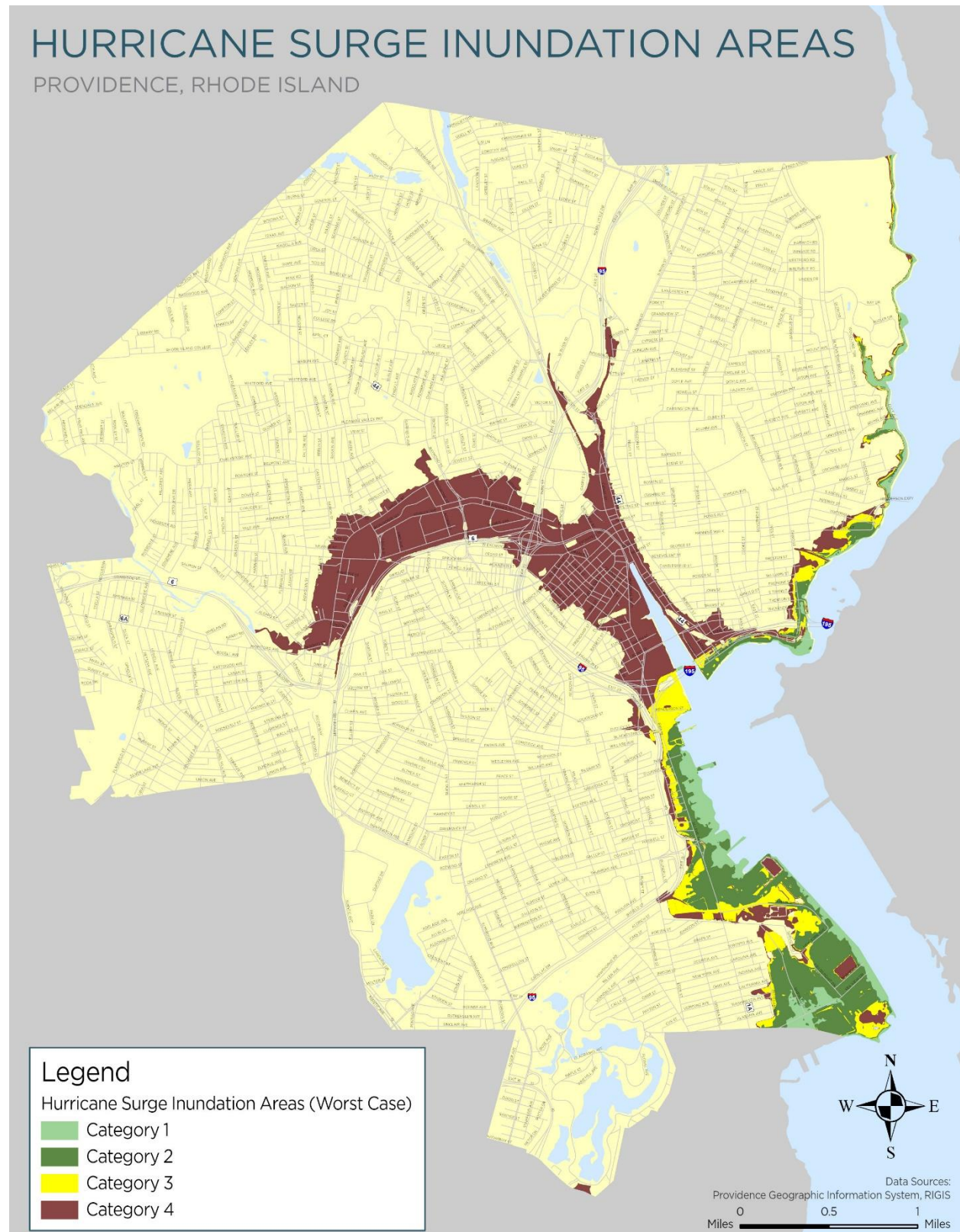
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Map B.8 Historic and Cultural Resources - National



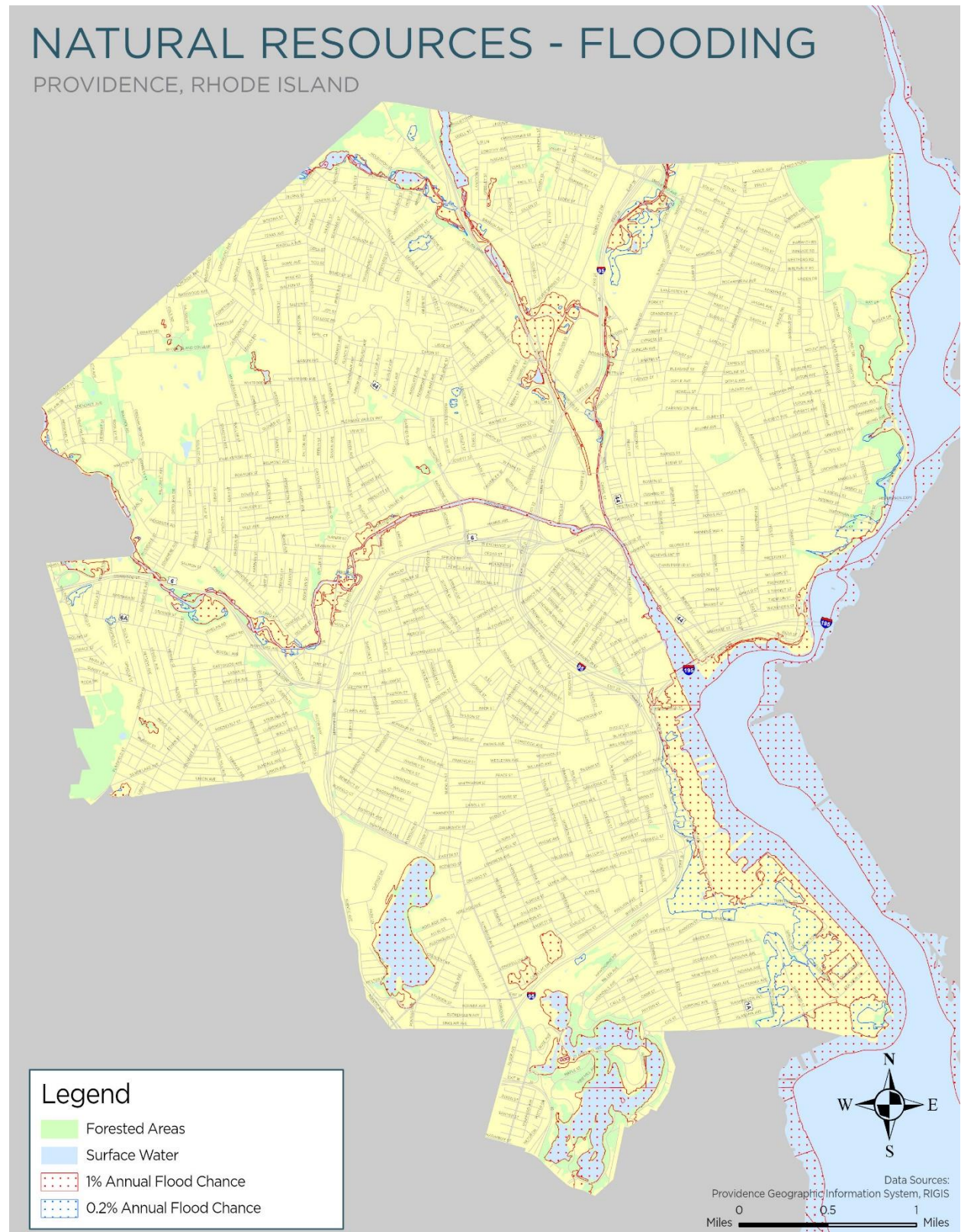
Appendix B

Map B.9 Hurricane Surge Inundation Areas



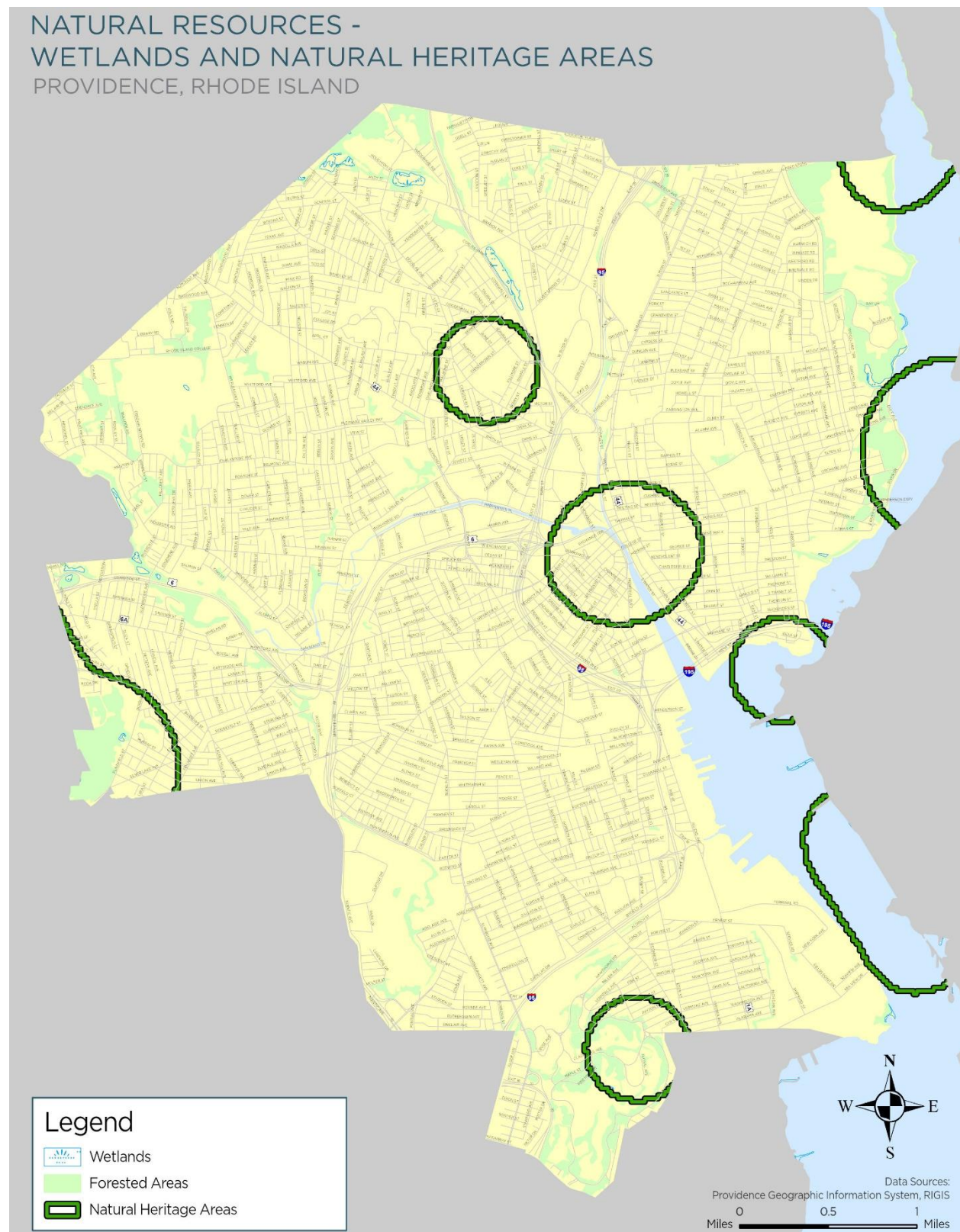
Appendix B

Map B.10 Natural Resources - Flooding



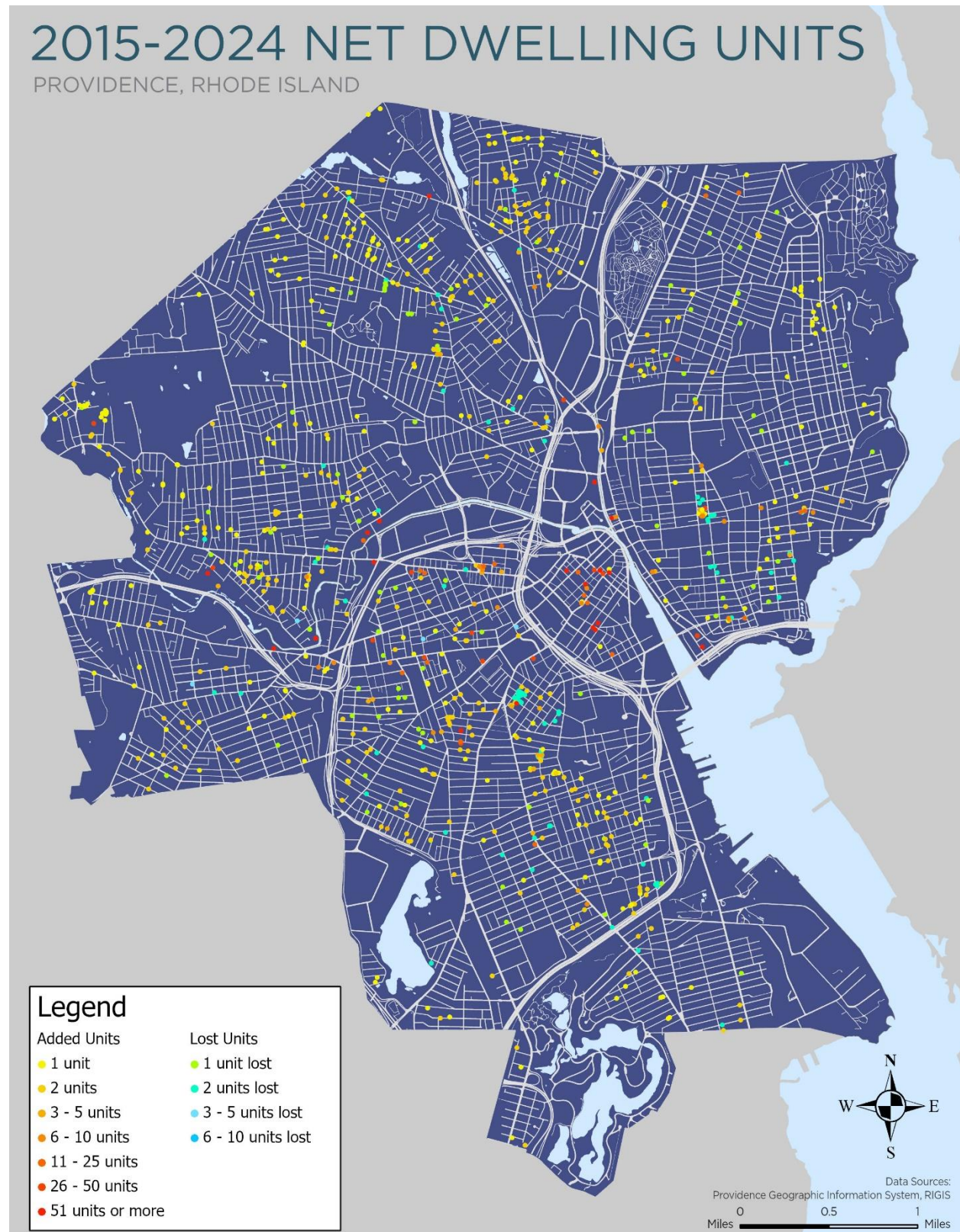
Appendix B

Map B.11 Natural Resources – Wetlands and Natural Heritage Areas



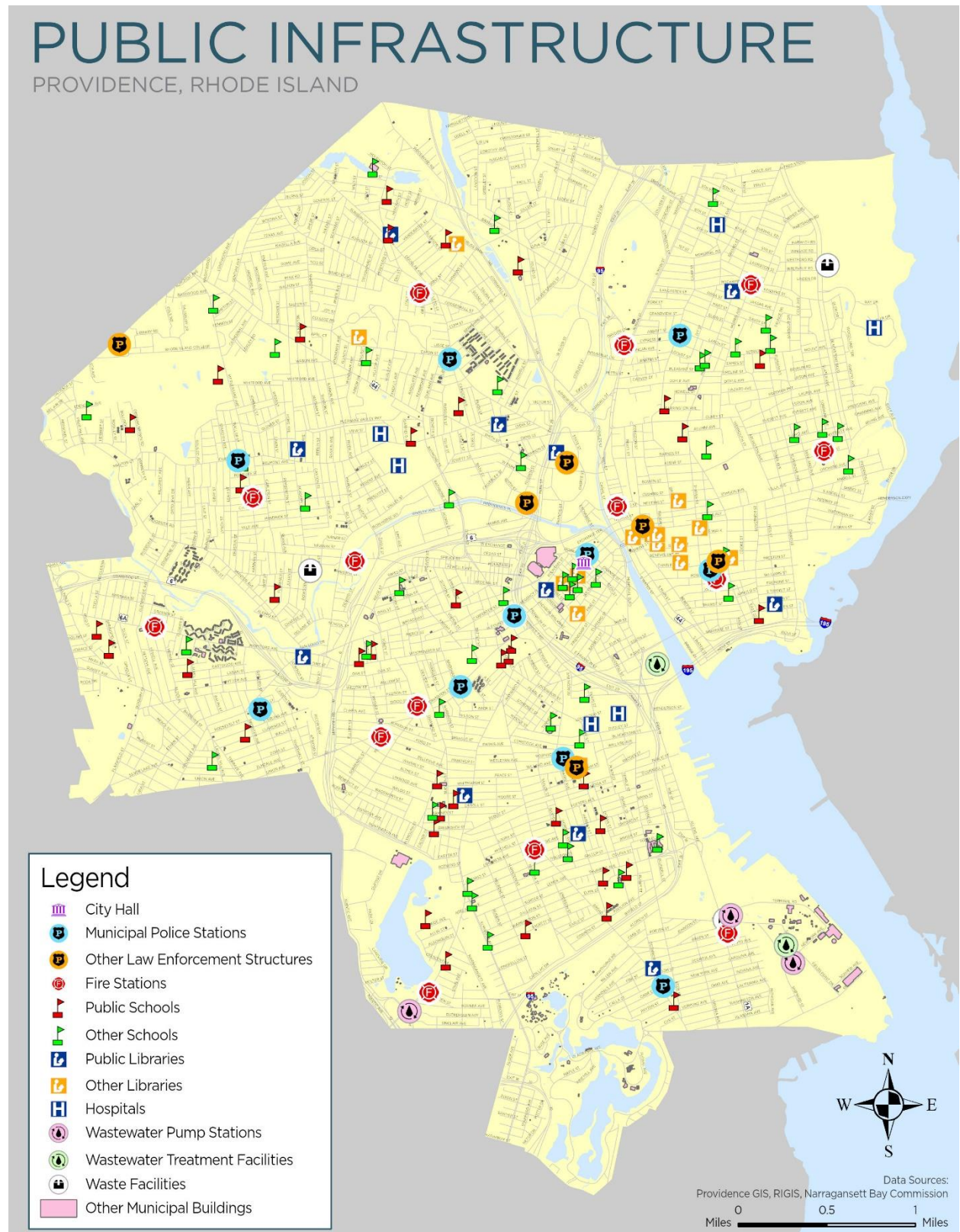
Appendix B

Map B.12 Net Dwelling Units Added 2015-2024



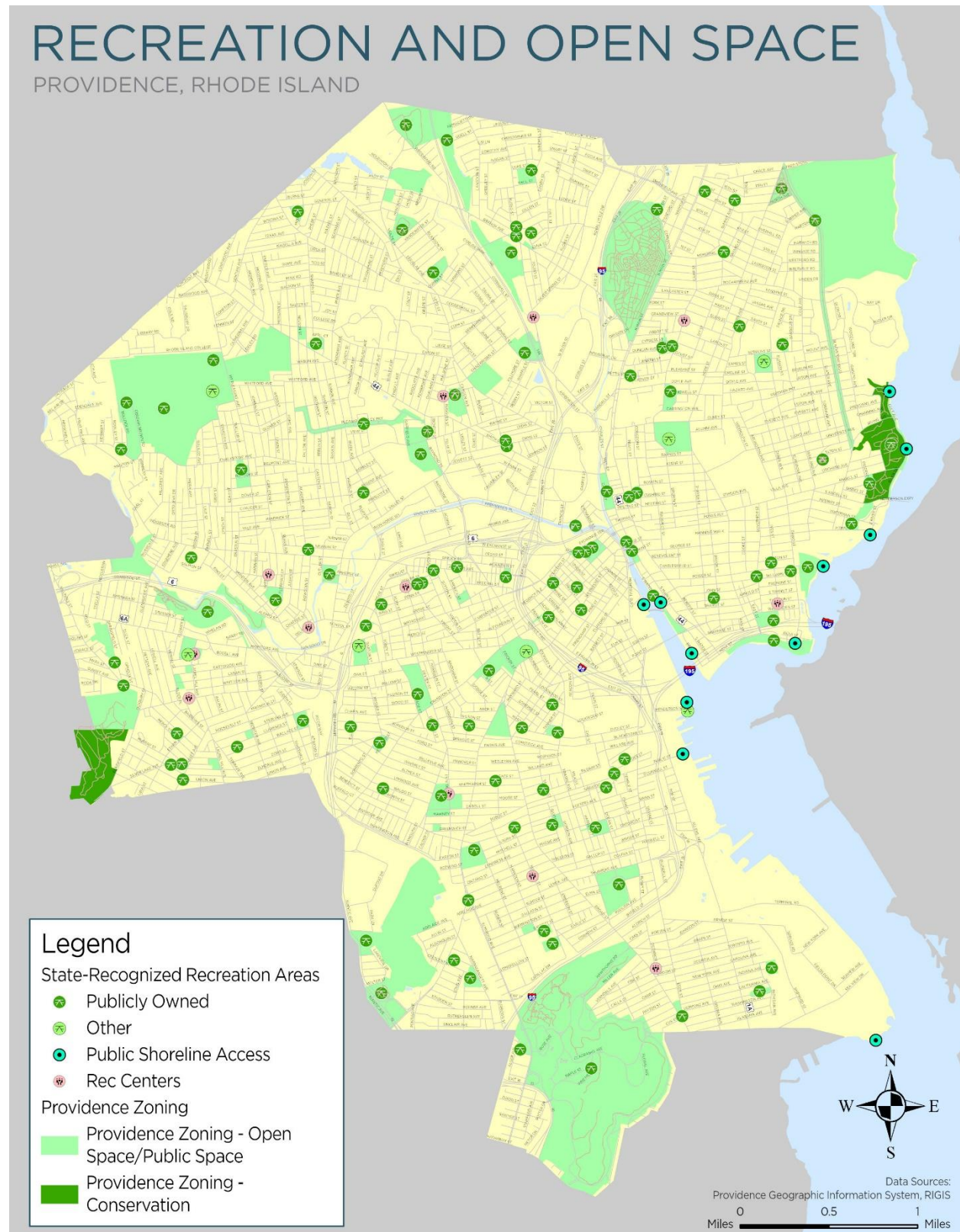
Appendix B

Map B.13 Public Infrastructure



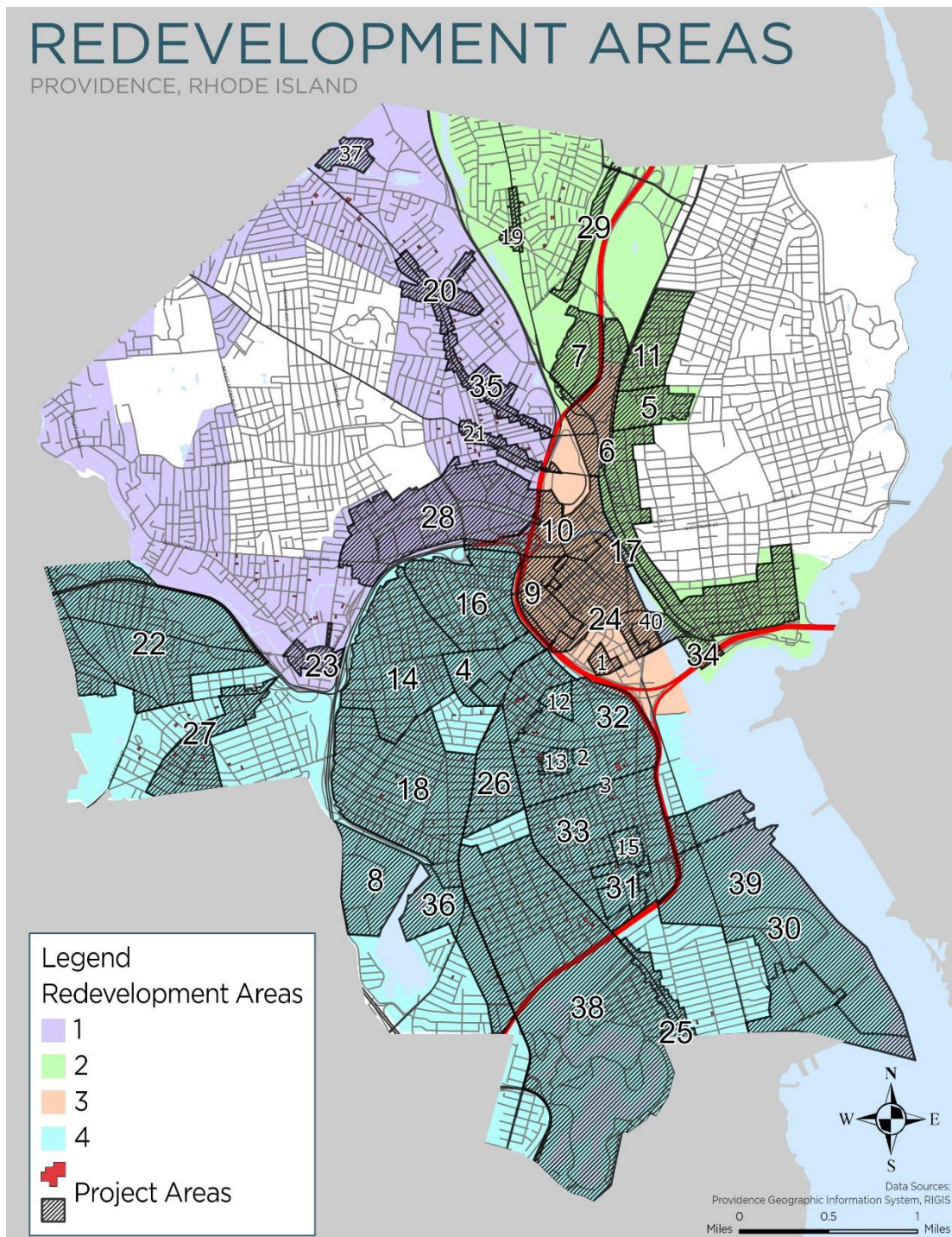
Appendix B

Map B.14 Recreation and Open Space



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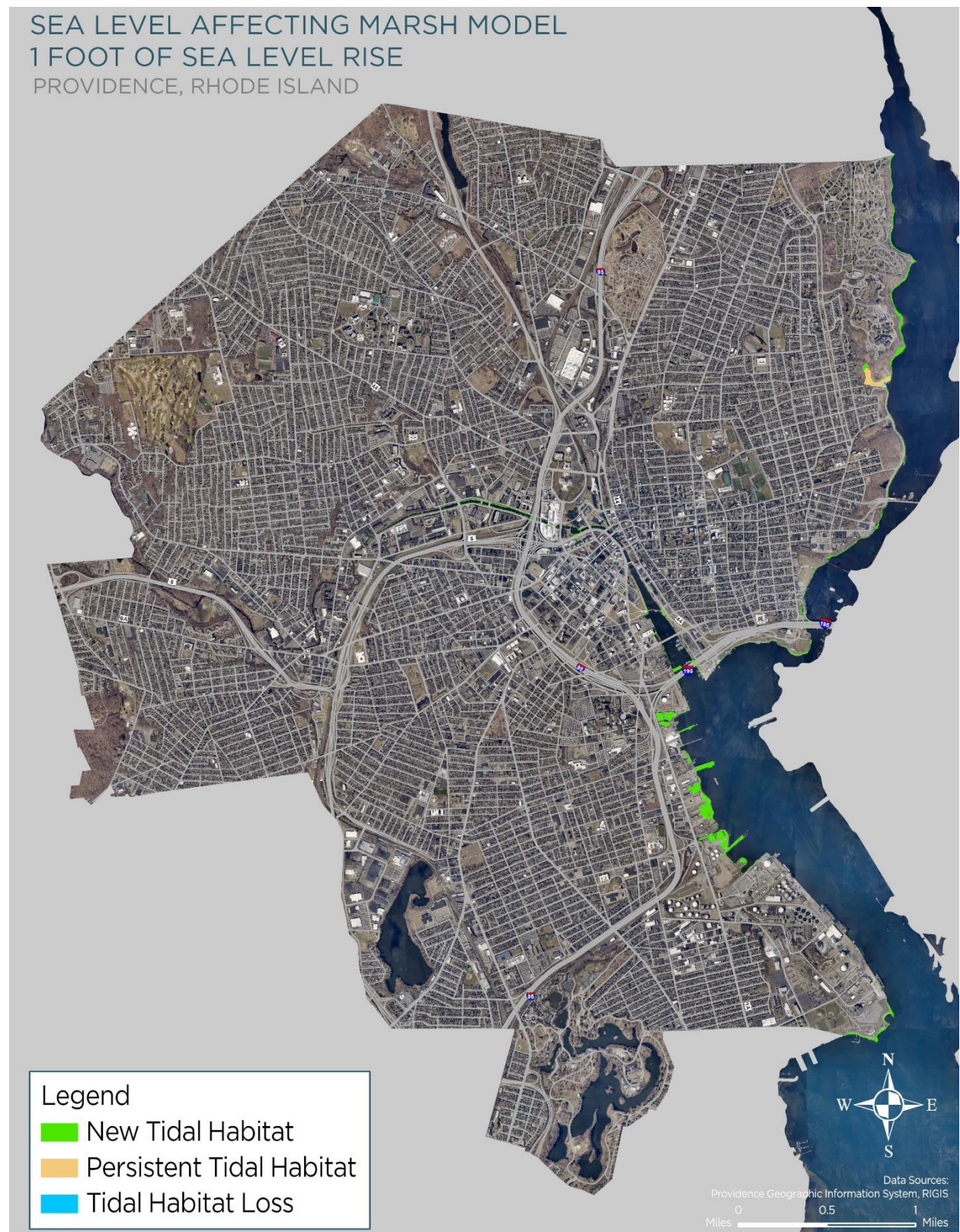
Map B.15 Redevelopment Areas



Four redevelopment areas were designated by the Providence City Council by Ordinance No. 246, Chapter 1996-24, dated May 23, 1996, and reconfirmed by City Council Resolution No. 143, approved March 25, 2008. These four redevelopment areas represent a consolidation of numerous redevelopment areas that were previously individually designated. The City Council has further designated Redevelopment Project Areas for individual Redevelopment Plans.

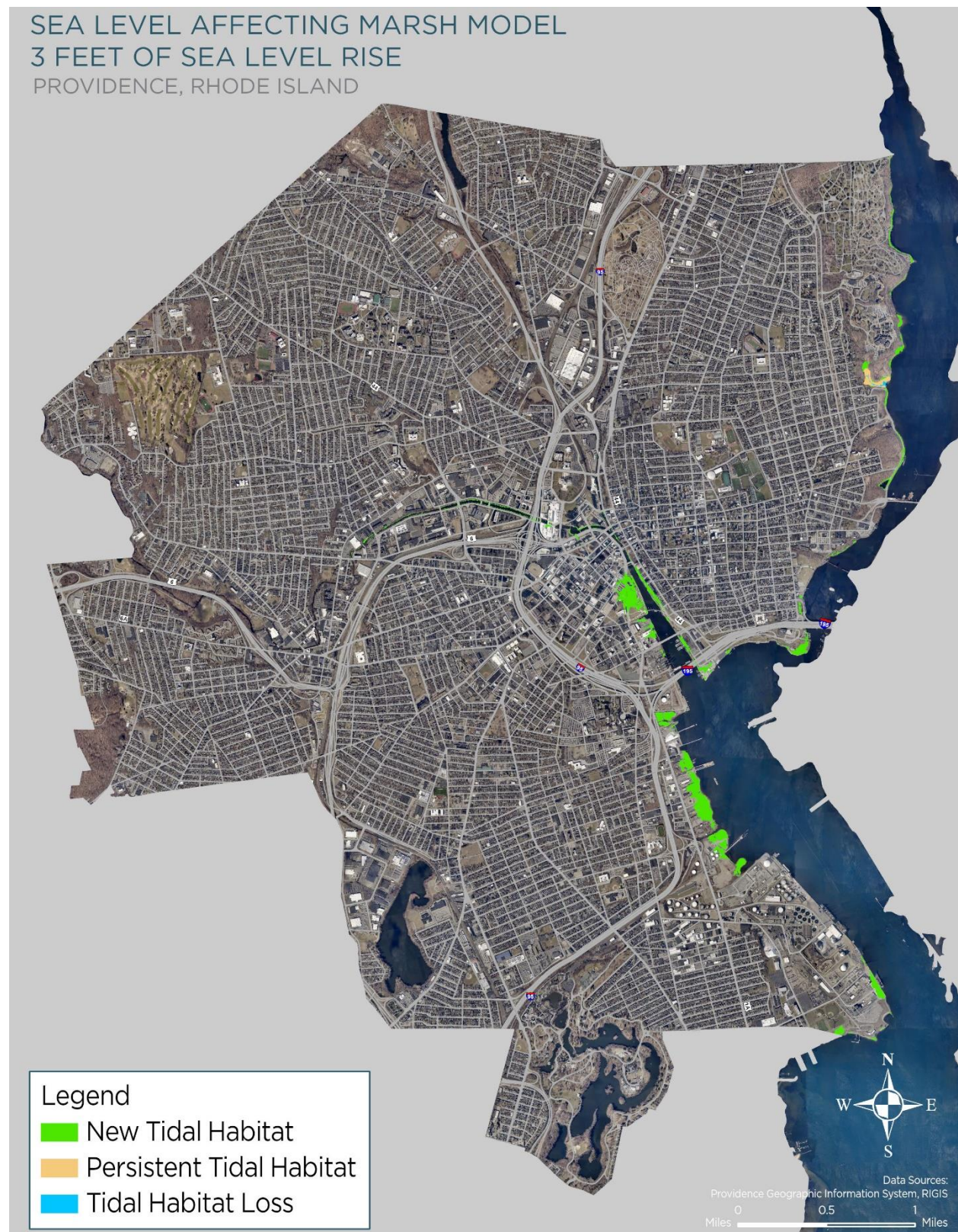
Appendix B

Map B.16 Sea Level Affecting Marsh Model Rise – 1 Foot of Sea Level Rise



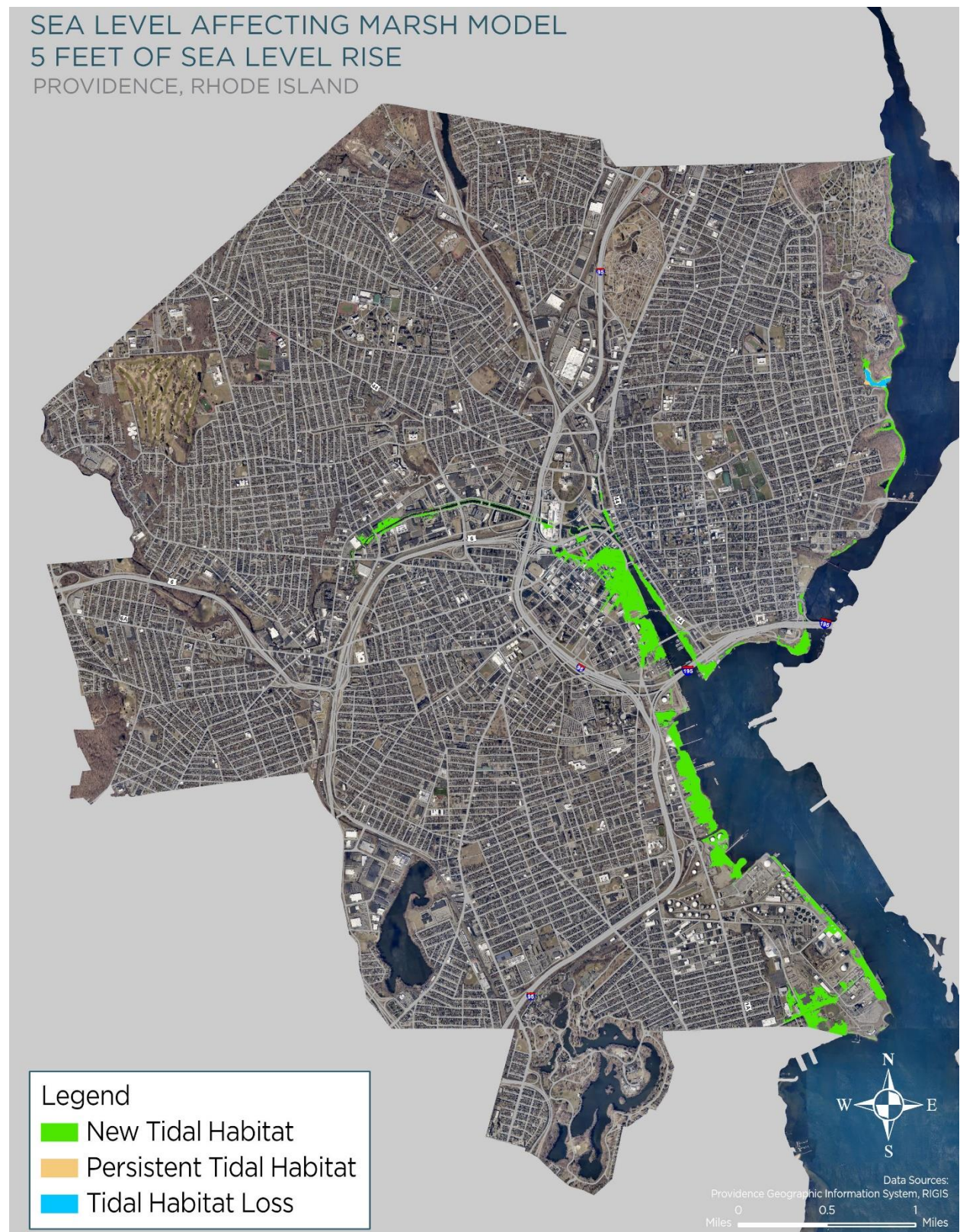
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Map B.17 Sea Level Affecting Marsh Model Rise – 3 Feet of Sea Level Rise



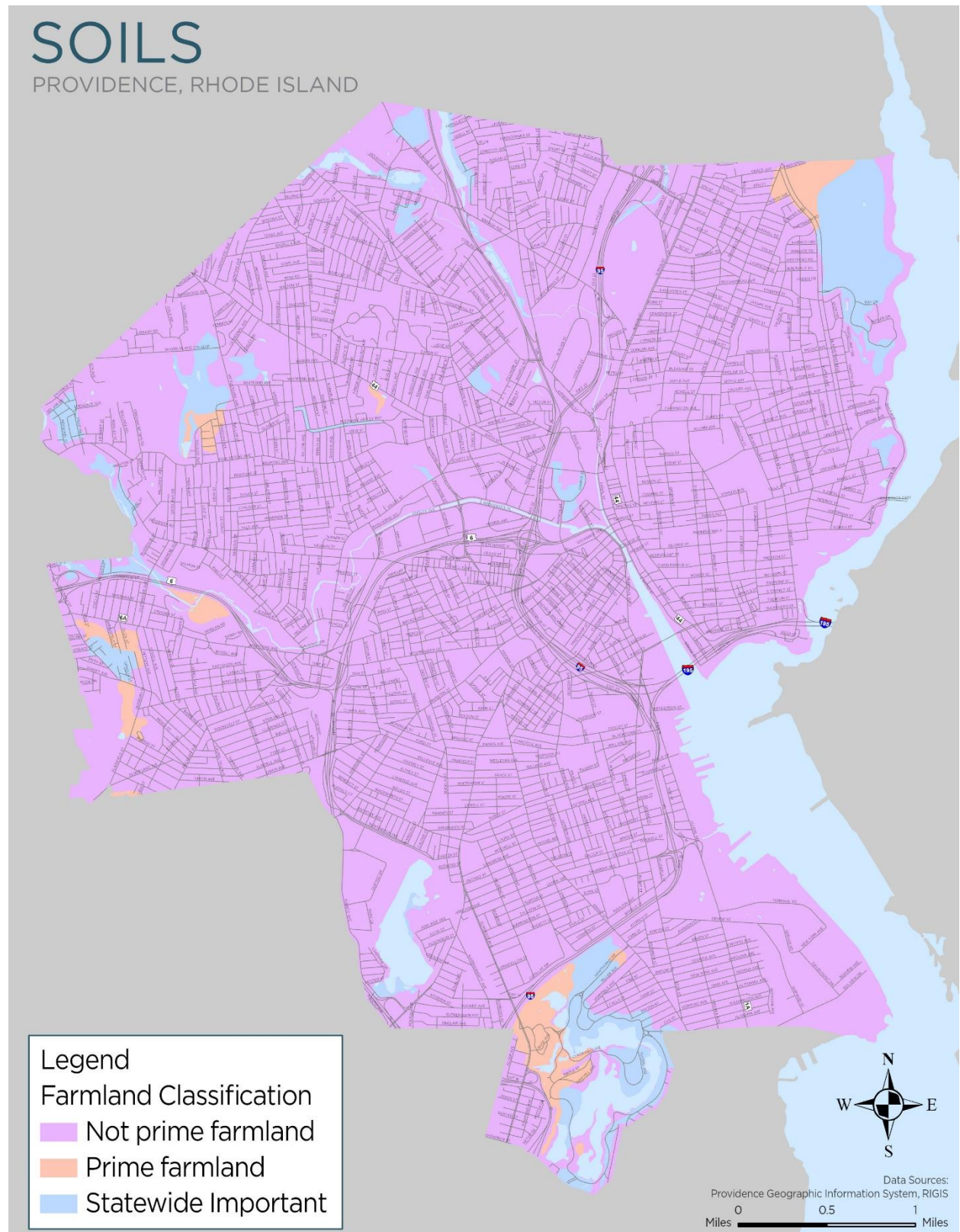
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Map B.18 Sea Level Affecting Marsh Model Rise – 5 Feet of Sea Level Rise



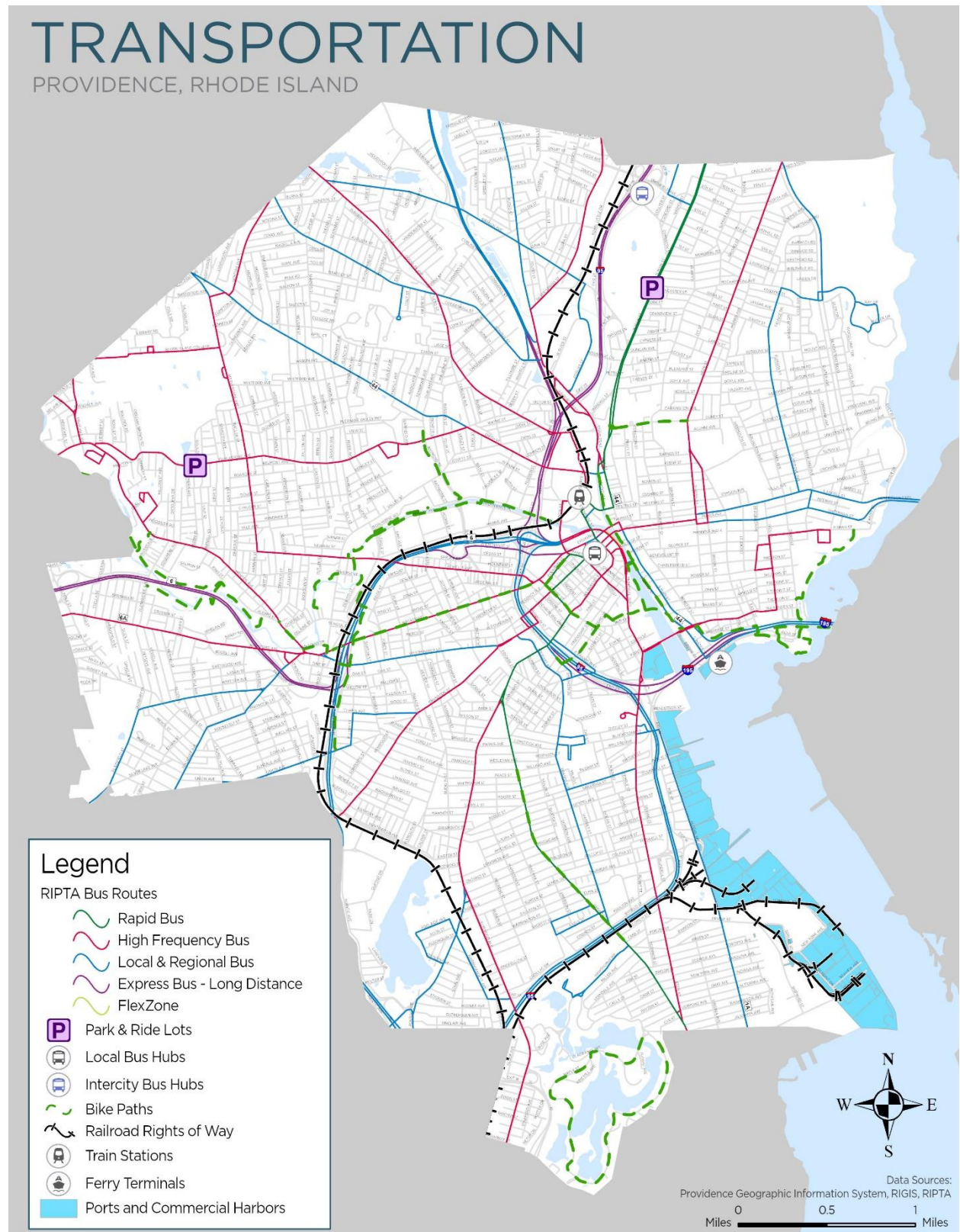
Appendix B

Map B.19 Soils



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Map B.20 Transportation



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Map B.21 Transportation - Roads

