

Comprehensive Plan 101

As required by the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, at least once every ten years, municipalities must update and re-adopt a Comprehensive Plan. This “Comp Plan” (for short) is an urban planning policy document that guides Providence's long-term growth and development. It is developed with community members, articulates a broad shared vision for Providence’s future, and outlines a roadmap of policies and proposals across a range of topics to achieve the vision. This roadmap is intended to ensure that as the city grows, we maintain a high quality of life and vibrant urban environment. Topics addressed in the plan include:

- Sustainability, Resilience, and the Environment
- Built Environment
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Mobility
- Arts and Cultural Resources
- People and Public Spaces
- Community Services and Facilities
- Land Use

The Providence Department of Planning and Development drafts the Comprehensive Plan on behalf of the City with robust community participation and an extensive public review and approval process led by the Providence City Plan Commission, City Council, and the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning.

The Comprehensive Plan is unique for both its wide-ranging content and impact. Instead of addressing a single topic area or a single neighborhood or corridor, the Comprehensive Plan looks at growth and change over decades, holistically across topics at a city-wide scale.

The centerpiece of the plan, the land use chapter, is also legally binding on Providence’s zoning ordinance, which regulates what types of new development are allowed where. The land use chapter aims to answer the question of “*Where and how Providence should grow?*” Land use, combined with the vision and strategies of the other chapters inform how Providence will look and feel in the future.

Each chapter includes an overarching goal, an introductory narrative, and a set of objectives with supporting strategies. At the end of the plan are appendices that include a compilation of data and maps outlining how Providence has changed in recent decades, as well an implementation matrix, which defines time frames and lead actors for achieving the strategies in every chapter.

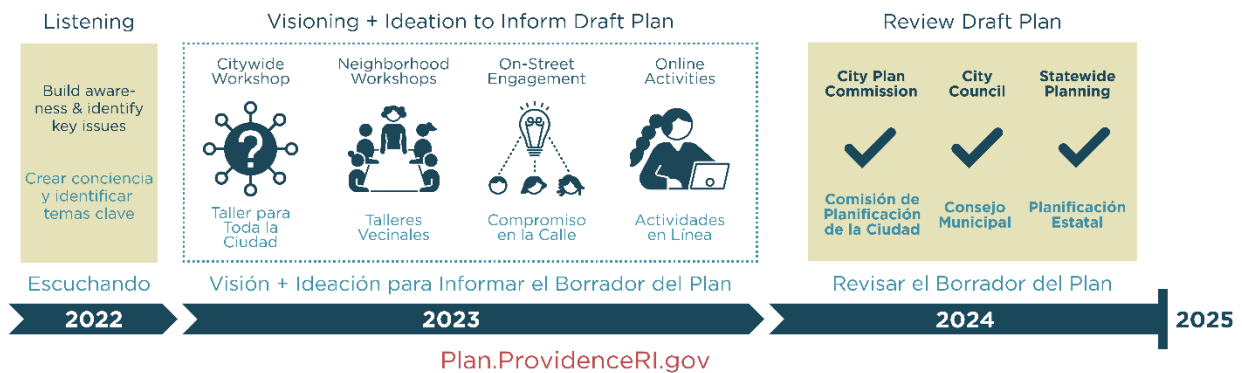
Community Participation Process

To inform the direction of the Comprehensive Plan update, the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) led a two-year community participation process that included over 80 community events with engagement opportunities in every neighborhood in Providence. The process was designed to be accessible, iterative, and collaborative.

In 2022, a period of “listen and learn” engagement kicked off the process with goals of raising public awareness about the Comprehensive Plan, learning about how community members see and experience the City changing, and identifying the issues of highest importance.

In 2023, expanding on the findings from the 2022 engagement, the process entered a "visioning and ideation" phase. During this phase, surveys, workshops, and outreach events were conducted in collaboration with community organizations and elected officials to brainstorm solutions to critical issues such as housing, transportation, and climate change. Methods of participation varied from interactive polling and small group discussions at workshops, to online surveys and tabling at neighborhood block parties. DPD's analysis of the engagement results informed the internal drafting process.

Finally, in 2024, DPD published draft elements of the plan and solicited feedback. Methods included public comment at City Plan Commission meetings, online comment through the project website, and a tour of public feedback events at neighborhood libraries. The draft chapters were revised based on this feedback to best represent the community's vision for Providence's future growth and development.



Key Policies

The PVD Comprehensive Plan outlines a vision for sustainable and inclusive growth across nine chapters. The following is a list of key policy changes in each chapter:

Land Use: Reforms land use strategies to make it easier to build new housing and mixed-use development in every neighborhood, while preserving the scale of buildings and quality of life. Building types to be allowed in different sections of the city include accessory dwelling units (ADUs), “missing middle” housing types (from two-family houses to small apartment buildings), and larger-scale mixed-used transit-oriented development, where appropriate. Changes to industrial land use encourage more clean, sustainable, and resilient industries, and transition away from carbon-intensive sectors.

Sustainability, Resilience & the Environment: Incorporates best practices and strategies from recent adopted plans aimed at reducing fossil fuel emissions, improving resilience to climate change through green infrastructure and other methods, improving environmental quality and conservation in targeted areas, and emphasizing equity and environmental justice.

Built Environment: Commits to improving design standards and review of new development, encourages adaptive reuse of existing structures, encourages green building practices, and expands historic preservation efforts.

Economic Development: Aims to grow and adapt Providence’s economy through investments in key sectors like the blue economy, life sciences, and arts and culture, while supporting workforce and small business development and improved city infrastructure and services.

Housing: Responds to the national housing crisis at the local level by encouraging increased production of new housing at all price points through various methods, with particular attention to expanding deed-restricted affordable housing, housing for populations with special needs, housing near public transit, and energy efficient and accessible housing design.

Mobility: Outlines policies to transition to a safer, better-connected transportation system for all Providence residents and visitors, including strategies that aim to increase trips made via public transportation, walking, and biking in alignment with local and state plans and federal guidelines.

Arts & Cultural Resources: Codifies goals and actions created by Providence’s creative community that center the wellbeing of artists and culture-bearers to foster a vibrant and equitable artistic and creative culture that benefits Providence’s civic life, neighborhoods, public realm, and much more.

People & Public Spaces: Plans for the continued investment in and expansion of Providence’s parks system with responsive programming, investments in climate resilience, improved green space access and linkages, and expanded community involvement opportunities.

Community Services & Facilities: Establishes a diverse set of goals and strategies across topics ranging from utilities to schools and recreation centers that aim to improve the quality and coordination of city services and public facilities.