



TOWN OF BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

PLANNING BOARD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE MEETING

Agenda

Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 5:30 PM

Reynolds School Conference Room, 235 High Street, Bristol, RI 02809

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Agenda Items

B1. Review Revised Draft Economic Development Element (*continued from January 22nd meeting*)

B2. Review Draft Transportation Element (*continued from January 22nd meeting*)

C. Adjournment

Date Posted: March 18, 2026

Posted By: mbw

Economic Development – 2026 Bristol Comprehensive Plan

Economic Development

Introduction

The overarching goal of economic development in the Town of Bristol is to sustain a vibrant, resilient, and welcoming community for residents, businesses, and visitors. Bristol's strategy builds on its core strengths—its nationally recognized waterfront, rich historic and cultural resources, active downtown, respected academic institutions, high-quality public spaces, and strong maritime and manufacturing roots.

Bristol's commercial districts, small businesses, marine trades, educational partnerships, and emerging innovation sectors provide a strong foundation for long-term growth. At the same time, the Town's coastal setting and historic character require that economic activity support environmental stewardship, resilience, and compatible land use.

This Element outlines the policies that guide economic development in Bristol and identifies strategies to strengthen the local economy, support small businesses, expand workforce opportunities, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, and enhance the Town's role as a regional destination. The implementation actions that follow provide a roadmap for achieving these goals.

Goal 1. Strengthen Bristol's overall economic climate by promoting a stable, resilient, and business-friendly environment that supports the community's quality of life and long-term prosperity.

Policies

1. Make economic development a priority by fostering a predictable, business-friendly environment across Town departments and providing permitting processes that are efficient while still meeting design, safety, and environmental standards.
2. Collaborate with local, regional, and institutional partners to align economic initiatives and leverage shared resources.
3. Promote coordinated destination branding and marketing efforts that highlight Bristol's cultural, historic, and waterfront assets. Encourage reinvestment in existing commercial and industrial sites to strengthen the local tax base.

Goal 2. Support and grow Bristol's business base by prioritizing small businesses, key industries, the blue economy, entrepreneurship, and reinvestment in commercial and industrial properties.

Policies

1. Support the retention and growth of Bristol's key industries, including marine trades, advanced manufacturing, higher education, tourism, and creative economy.
2. Foster entrepreneurship and small business growth through partnerships and support business incubators and shared workspaces.
3. Encourage the use of vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial properties suitable for redevelopment or adaptive reuse.

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4. Encourage property and facility upgrades that improve accessibility, energy efficiency, and site appearance.
5. Prepare for climate impacts by implementing resilience strategies to protect businesses .

Goal 3. Invest in infrastructure, regulatory updates, and place-based improvements that enable business growth while preserving Bristol's distinctive character and environmental quality.

Policies

1. Align infrastructure and capital improvement investments with economic development priorities and areas suitable for reinvestment or redevelopment.
2. Incorporate flood resilience, sustainability, and green infrastructure features into public and private redevelopment projects.
3. Coordinate with regional and state agencies to fund and implement infrastructure projects that support economic growth and climate adaptation.
4. Balance commercial visibility, signage, and access needs with the Town's scenic, historic, and neighborhood character.

Goal 4. Promote a thriving downtown and active commercial areas that serve as vibrant centers of commerce, culture, and community life.

Policies

1. Preserve and enhance the historic fabric and human scale of Downtown Bristol while encouraging compatible adaptive reuse and upper-story occupancy.
2. Maintain Bristol's Formula Business Ordinance to preserve the unique character, scale, and local business environment of the Downtown Historic District.
3. Maintain and strengthen civic uses downtown to support year-round activity, reinforce the area's role as Bristol's civic and cultural hub, and complement surrounding businesses and historic character.
4. Improve walkability and accessibility through coordinated streetscape design, parking management, and wayfinding.
5. Coordinate visitor information, marketing, and signage to connect downtown, the waterfront, and other destinations.
6. Encourage year-round downtown activity through cultural events, heritage tourism, and partnerships that support local businesses.
7. Promote public art, cultural programming, and the creative economy as integral components of Bristol's economic vitality.

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Goal 5. Support education, workforce development, and partnerships with local academic institutions and industries to build a strong and adaptable local workforce.

Policies

1. Partner with Roger Williams University, the Bristol-Warren Regional School District, and workforce organizations to support training and career pathway programs.
2. Facilitate connections between students, residents, and local employers in the trades, blue economy, manufacturing, and tourism sectors.
3. Encourage local hiring, internships, and apprenticeships through municipal, institutional, and private partnerships.
4. Promote lifelong learning and career readiness as community values that strengthen workforce adaptability.

Goal 6. Maintain and expand Bristol's agricultural economy by preserving farmland, supporting farm operations, and encouraging value-added and aquaculture enterprises.

Policies

1. Preserve remaining farmland and high-quality agricultural soils through voluntary conservation tools and purchase of development rights, while ensuring zoning and land use policies support agricultural uses.
2. Encourage the active use of idle or underutilized agricultural land for farming, horticulture, or community agriculture.
3. Support aquaculture and shellfish enterprises in coordination with state agencies and local maritime stakeholders.
4. Promote awareness of Bristol's farming heritage and encourage residents and institutions to purchase locally grown or locally produced foods.

2016 Comprehensive Plan Implementation Progress

Since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Bristol has advanced key economic development initiatives across zoning, infrastructure, tourism, workforce development, and interdepartmental coordination. This section highlights the actions from the 2016 Plan that have been implemented and demonstrates how the Town has made measurable progress toward its economic development goals.

1. Modernizing Regulations and Improving Town Processes

Bristol has completed several zoning updates to support business growth, adaptive reuse, and flexible industrial spaces. Recent State reforms have further streamlined administrative and development

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review procedures. The Town has strengthened coordination among departments, improved communication with applicants and created a more efficient permitting process.

Unity Park Redevelopment

The transformation of the former manufacturing area into Unity Park represents one of Bristol's most significant economic development accomplishments since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan. The Town proactively supported this redevelopment by ensuring that existing manufacturing uses could continue while also creating the Rehab Land Development Project (LDP) zoning district to enable adaptive reuse and broaden the range of allowable uses with minimal restrictions. This zoning framework provided the flexibility necessary to attract reinvestment, modernize aging industrial buildings, and support a mix of commercial, industrial and space for civic events.

2. Strengthening Tourism, Merchants, and Destination Branding

Tourism, marketing, and downtown vitality have been major areas of progress since 2016. Bristol has supported numerous initiatives through partnerships with: Explore Bristol, Bristol Merchants Association (BMA), Discover Newport, and Bristol Historical & Preservation Society

Key accomplishments include:

- Installation of tourism kiosks with maps and brochures.
- Ongoing digital and print campaigns including the “Small Town, Big Charm” brand.
- Explore Bristol’s expanded role in event coordination, marketing, newsletters, and merchant support.
- Continued progress on Discover Newport’s regional strategic planning, including Bristol representation on working groups.
- Continued support for downtown redevelopment.
- Sustained maintenance of a vibrant downtown with active storefronts, community events, and cultural programming.

Although the Town no longer operates a formal welcome center, the Maritime Center serves as a visitor gateway for the boating community. The Bristol Maritime Center is an important addition to Bristol Harbor and a major asset for the boating community. The facility provides upgraded restrooms, boater services, storage, and improved access to the harbor. Its completion has enhanced Bristol's appeal as a recreational boating destination and strengthened the connection between the waterfront and downtown businesses.

3. Advancing Education, Workforce Development, and RWU Partnerships

Workforce readiness remains an ongoing priority. Bristol has made noticeable progress in expanding partnerships with Roger Williams University (RWU), the School District, and local businesses. Recent initiatives include:

- Active partnerships between RWU, local businesses, and educational institutions to support internships, mentorship, project collaboration, and workforce skill development.

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- Grant funded upgrades at the Rogers Free Library, including improved work/study rooms and the new public maker space, along with expanded programming focused on work readiness, education, and health.

4. Expanded Civic and Physical Infrastructure to Support Economic Development

Bristol has completed numerous infrastructure actions identified in the 2016 Plan. Highlights include:

- Major progress on Unity Park, including amenities, signage, benches, and civic improvements.
- Completion of the boat ramp at Independence Park, a state-owned facility leased by the Town, was funded through the Town's Capital Budget. Associated parking lot improvements and water quality enhancements were supported through a grant from the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank. ARPA-funded expansion of the OSHEAN broadband network, advancing connectivity for municipal facilities.
- Ongoing coordination with RIDOT on the sidewalk and path extension from Constitution Street to RWU, with continued advocacy to extend sidewalks up to traffic light at Old Ferry Road.
- Harbor management improvements by the Harbormaster, including updated harbor infrastructure and continued implementation of the Marine Trades Route Plan.
- Completion of several actions relating to signage and wayfinding.

5. Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Local Food Systems

The Town established an agricultural zoning district and partnered with NRCS and local organizations to preserve several farm properties through conservation easements, helping protect Bristol's remaining farmland. The Town also adopted agritourism zoning to support farm viability by allowing appropriate accessory commercial uses on agricultural properties. Ongoing efforts continue to support agricultural and aquaculture enterprises through zoning and tax strategies, such as the Farm, Forest and Open Space program, collaboration with partners, and promotion of local food initiatives such as farmers' markets and "farm-to-table" and "boat-to-table" programming.

6. Downtown Residential Development and Revitalization

Supporting residential development in and near downtown was a key recommendation of the 2016 Plan, and the Town has made significant progress. Along with 6,400 square feet of commercial use, the redevelopment of the former Robin Rug mill will add 127 new residential units, bringing new residents to the downtown area, supporting local shops and restaurants, and strengthening walkability and year-round activity. Opportunities for revitalization and adaptive reuse of additional key properties downtown remain a priority.

BRISTOL ECONOMIC STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

Strategic Regional Location

Bristol is situated within southern New England's broader travel and economic corridors, providing

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access to multiple labor markets, higher education institutions, and industry clusters. While travel times can vary due to limited access routes, Bristol remains within a reasonable commuting distance of Providence, Newport County, and southeastern Massachusetts. Its proximity to these markets combined with strong quality of life amenities, a competitive commercial tax rate, and a federally designated Opportunity Zone helps position Bristol as an attractive location for small businesses, marine trades, research partnerships, and innovation-oriented enterprises.

Distinctive Community Character

Bristol's walkable historic downtown, nationally recognized waterfront, preserved architecture, scenic neighborhoods, and parks and public spaces contribute to a strong sense of place. This character supports tourism, small-scale retail, and local entrepreneurship, and plays a central role in attracting new residents, businesses, and investment.

Presence of Roger Williams University

The town's largest employer, Roger Williams University is a significant driver of Bristol's economy. The university brings students, employees, and visitors into town and provides opportunities for research partnerships, entrepreneurship, workforce development, cultural programming, and marine and engineering innovation.

Redevelopment and Reuse Opportunities

Bristol includes several properties well suited for reinvestment, adaptive reuse, and mixed-use development. Its federally designated Opportunity Zone provides additional financial tools to support redevelopment of key sites, including historic buildings, mill complexes, and waterfront properties.

Infrastructure and Mobility Assets

Bristol's public water and sewer systems, along with ongoing infrastructure upgrades, create a reliable foundation for business operations and future investment. Mobility assets, including RIPTA transit, the East Bay Bike Path, and a walkable downtown, strengthen access to commercial areas, support local businesses, and enhance the town's economic competitiveness.

Creative, Cultural, and Civic Assets

Bristol's arts community, cultural institutions, historic venues, and year-round community events contribute to a vibrant local economy. These assets and events generate visitor activity, support downtown businesses, and help sustain economic activity beyond the peak summer season, reinforcing Bristol's identity as a lively and creative coastal community.

Natural Resources and Maritime Economy

Bristol's extensive shoreline and harbor shape a strong maritime economy supported by marine trades, boating, recreation, and emerging blue economy sectors. These resources offer ongoing opportunities for sustainable growth while reinforcing the community's coastal heritage.

Economic Development Challenges

Coastal Resilience Risks

Businesses and infrastructure in flood-prone areas of Bristol including Downtown face increasing risks from flooding and sea-level rise, creating short and long-term challenges. The Town was selected for the Ready, Set, Rhoody initiative, a statewide program supporting climate and infrastructure resilience in vulnerable commercial districts. Through this effort, Bristol's Thames Street district received a state-

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funded vulnerability assessment to identify flooding, storm surge, and infrastructure risks that could affect businesses. Participation in this program positions the Town to pursue targeted improvements that protect local businesses from climate-related disruptions and improve resiliency of the local economy.

High Cost of Real Estate

High housing and real estate costs limit Bristol's ability to attract and retain a stable workforce and constrain small business growth. Rising housing prices and a lack of rental, workforce, and employee-oriented housing force many workers to commute from outside the community, increasing costs for employees and employers alike. At the same time, high commercial rents and limited space availability make it difficult for small businesses and start-ups to secure affordable locations. Addressing housing affordability and workforce housing options is closely tied to Bristol's long-term economic vitality and business retention.

State Land-Use Mandates

Recent state land-use reforms have reduced local control, including new "by-right" adaptive reuse provisions that allow commercial buildings to be converted to residential use even within commercial zoning districts. This creates concern about the long-term loss of commercial space, potential land-use conflicts, and impacts on economic vitality. The Town should regularly engage State delegation and advocate for state-level adjustments to ensure adaptive reuse or other policies do not unintentionally erode Bristol's commercial tax base or business districts.

Parking and Downtown Access

Parking in Downtown Bristol during peak periods, in particular special events is a challenge. Any parking or access management strategies must balance the need to support businesses and visitors while preserving the walkable scale and historic character that define Downtown Bristol.

Transportation Constraints

Bristol's peninsular geography and limited access routes can create congestion and longer travel times for workers, visitors, and deliveries. For some businesses, particularly those serving a regional customer base, the geography limits their market radius and can influence business location decisions.

Distance from interstate highways also affects customer reach and employee commuting patterns, with travel to Providence and other hubs often taking longer than comparable distances elsewhere in the state. These geographic factors underscore the importance of strengthening transit, enhancing digital infrastructure, and supporting industries that are less dependent on regional physical catchment areas.

Seasonal Demand Fluctuations

Tourism-dependent businesses experience seasonal peaks and slower winter months, affecting staffing and year-round financial stability, particularly for small retailers and restaurants.

Skilled Workforce Gaps

Marine trades, manufacturing, and blue-economy firms face challenges recruiting workers with specialized skills. Strengthening connections between local employers, universities, and regional workforce programs remains an ongoing opportunity.

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ECONOMIC DATA & INDICATORS

Data Sources and Methodology

Economic indicators presented in this section are drawn primarily from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates for 2013 and 2023, supplemented by additional sources where appropriate. The ACS provides statistically reliable data for small geographies such as Bristol by aggregating multiple years of survey responses. Employment trends are also informed by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (RIDLT) Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) series, which provides the standard annual average unemployment estimates for Bristol residents. Housing market indicators, including recent changes in home values, rents, and income needed to afford housing, are drawn from the 2025 HousingWorks RI Factbook. Together, these sources provide baseline context for understanding local economic conditions, including labor force participation, household assistance needs, income levels, and housing affordability. All values are estimates and should be interpreted with consideration of margins of error and methodological differences between sources.

Population and Household Context

According to ACS 5-Year estimates, Bristol had approximately 8,300 households in 2013 and 8,480 households in 2023, indicating relatively stable household counts over the past decade. Average household size remained consistent, suggesting that changes in economic indicators are not solely attributable to population growth, but may reflect shifts in income, employment conditions, housing costs, or household composition.

Household Assistance and Poverty

Between 2013 and 2023, the share of Bristol households receiving SNAP benefits declined from 9.1 percent (approximately 755 households) to 5.6 percent (approximately 475 households). Over the same period, the share of residents living below the federal poverty level declined from 7.7 percent (approximately 1,720 residents) to 6.4 percent (approximately 1,410 residents). These trends suggest modest improvement in several household economic indicators, though a meaningful number of households and residents continue to experience economic vulnerability.

Employment and Labor Force Participation

RIDLT's LAUS data show that Bristol's annual average unemployment rate generally declined through the late 2010s (5.6% in 2015 to 3.3% in 2019), spiked during the pandemic (8.0% in 2020), then improved again (2.7% in 2023) before rising to 3.8% in 2024. These figures reflect Bristol residents' labor force status (not where jobs are located) and are the standard "official" unemployment series used by RIDLT/BLS for sub-state areas.

Educational Attainment

The labor force in Bristol is comparatively well educated. Over 90% of residents age 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, and nearly 46% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. High educational attainment supports the town's professional services, research, and technical sectors.

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Educational Attainment (Age 25+) Percent Estimated Count

High school graduate or higher 91.9% ~14,110
 Bachelor’s degree or higher 45.9% ~7,053

Commuting Patterns

Bristol residents have an average commute of about **26 minutes**, demonstrating strong connectivity to employment centers throughout the region. This aligns with Bristol’s strategic location relative to Providence, southeastern Massachusetts, and Newport County.

Residential Mobility

With approximately 12.8% of the population moving in the past year, Bristol exhibits a moderate level of residential turnover. Mobility patterns can reflect both housing market conditions and broader demographic trends.

Household Income Distribution

Detailed ACS 5-Year Estimates for Bristol reveal a diverse income distribution across households. Nearly half of households earn above \$75,000 annually, and the median household income is approximately \$96,005, which is higher than statewide and national medians, reflecting relative economic affluence. Income distribution shows variation across income brackets, which has implications for housing affordability and economic inclusion.

Household Income Bracket	Estimated Households	% of Total Households
Less than \$25,000	~1,035	~12%
\$25,000–\$49,999	~1,270	~15%
\$50,000–\$74,999	~1,700	~20%
\$75,000–\$99,999	~1,360	~16%
\$100,000–\$149,999	~1,530	~18%
\$150,000 and over	~1,585	~19%
Total Households	8,480	100%

Income and Housing Cost Pressures

Bristol’s median household income has increased over the past decade and, based on the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, is higher than the statewide median. At the same time, housing costs have risen rapidly and continue to outpace income growth. According to the 2025 HousingWorks RI Factbook, the median single-family home price in Bristol reached approximately \$575,000, representing a 69 percent increase between 2019 and 2024. Average rents have also increased, with a typical two-bedroom apartment renting for about \$2,002 per month, a 21 percent increase over the same period, requiring an annual income of roughly \$80,000 to avoid being cost-burdened. As a result, approximately 39 percent of renter households in Bristol spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, compared to 27 percent of owner households. The income needed to purchase a median-priced home is estimated at over \$191,000, which significantly exceeds Bristol’s current median household income of \$96,005. Together, these trends indicate growing

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housing affordability pressures that may influence household stability, workforce retention, and who is able to remain in or move to Bristol.

Improvements in economic indicators, such as increased household income and reduced reliance on public assistance, may reflect increased earnings among existing residents, broader labor market recovery, or a combination of factors. These trends can also coincide with demographic change, including the in-migration of higher-income households and affordability pressures that may contribute to displacement of lower-income residents.

From an economic development perspective, these indicators underscore the importance of supporting stable, year-round employment, workforce retention, and housing options affordable to a range of income levels.

Local Employment Structure

Major employers in Bristol include Roger Williams University, the Bristol-Warren Regional School District, State Veteran's home, and a range of marine trades and manufacturing firms in the Business Park and Unity Park, and the Bristol Medical Center and other medical/nursing home facilities.

Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data from the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training provides a snapshot of jobs physically located in Bristol, regardless of where employees live. The dataset captures employment associated with worksites in town and does not reflect remote work performed from home or the residential employment patterns of Bristol residents. It includes both private-sector employers and government entities, including public schools and municipal operations. QCEW does not publish establishment-level breakouts for individual employers, and employment counts are aggregated by industry and ownership category.

Based on the most recent complete data available, the industries with the largest numbers of jobs located in Bristol include:

- Educational Services (1,356 jobs) – the largest employment sector in town, reflecting Roger Williams University, private educational institutions, and related employers.
- Government (1,141 jobs) – including local and state government worksites located in Bristol, such as municipal operations, public schools, police and fire services, and state facilities.
- Accommodation and Food Services (952 jobs) – representing restaurants, hospitality, and tourism-related businesses serving residents, students, and visitors.
- Manufacturing (912 jobs) – including marine trades, precision manufacturing, and specialty production, which provide relatively higher-wage employment opportunities.
- Health Care and Social Assistance (728 jobs) – including medical offices, clinics, and care providers serving the local and regional population.
- Retail Trade (609 jobs) – including downtown shops, grocery stores, and other consumer-oriented businesses.

Several of these sectors also make substantial contributions to total wages generated within Bristol. The highest overall wage-paying sectors include Educational Services (\$78.7 million), Government (\$69.6 million), Manufacturing (\$59.9 million), Health Care and Social Assistance (\$38.5 million),

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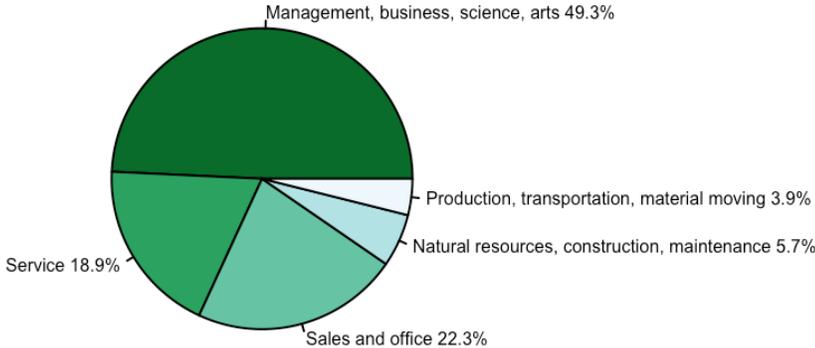
Accommodation and Food Services (\$27.2 million), and Professional and Technical Services (\$27.6 million).

Occupation Profile of Bristol Residents

Occupation data are drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) and reflect standard U.S. Census occupational categories. These data describe the occupations of Bristol residents rather than the location of employment. ACS estimates indicate that nearly half of Bristol’s employed residents work in management, business, science, and arts occupations, with an additional 22 percent employed in sales and office roles. This occupational profile reflects a highly skilled, largely white-collar workforce that is closely tied to regional employment centers and professional industries.

While the accompanying chart presents a snapshot of occupational distribution in 2023, comparative ACS data show that between 2013 and 2023 Bristol experienced a gradual shift toward higher-skill professional and managerial occupations among residents, consistent with broader regional and national labor market trends.

Occupation of Bristol Workers in 2023



Industry Profiles

Bristol’s economy includes a mix of long-standing industries and emerging sectors shaped by the Town’s coastal location, institutional presence, and quality of life. Employment is distributed across multiple sectors, each contributing to year-round economic activity and community stability.

Marine trades and advanced manufacturing are a foundational part of Bristol’s economic base. Local firms produce composites, specialty equipment, and provide naval architecture and marine

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engineering services. These businesses benefit from access to Bristol Harbor, proximity to a working waterfront, and connections to Roger Williams University's marine science and engineering programs. Together, these assets support skilled employment and link Bristol to Rhode Island's growing blue-economy sector.

Tourism, hospitality, and cultural industries play a significant role in Bristol's local economy. The historic downtown, waterfront amenities, museums, and cultural venues attract visitors throughout the year. Festivals, concerts, and heritage events help extend the tourism season and support local shops, restaurants, and service businesses.

Higher education, health care, and social assistance represent major employment sectors in Bristol. Roger Williams University is the Town's largest employer, providing a substantial number of jobs directly through academic, research, administrative, and facilities positions. Health care and institutional employers, including Bristol Medical Center and the State Veterans Home, also provide stable, year-round employment and serve local and regional populations.

Professional and technical services continue to grow in Bristol. Small firms in engineering, architecture, information technology, consulting, and design are supported by the Town's quality of life and accessibility to regional markets.

The Blue Economy

The blue economy, defined by the State as the sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources to support economic activity and employment, is an established and growing sector in Bristol. As a coastal community with an active working waterfront, marine trades, research capacity, and advanced manufacturing space, Bristol is well positioned to support this sector as part of Rhode Island's broader blue-economy strategy.

Bristol's blue economy includes both traditional maritime industries and emerging ocean-technology activities. Marine trades and boatyards at Bristol Harbor support year-round economic activity and maintain essential working-waterfront functions. Roger Williams University contributes to the sector through marine science and engineering programs, applied research, and partnerships related to aquaculture, coastal resilience, and marine technology, while also serving as a major employer in these fields.

Recent state investment has reinforced Bristol's role in the blue economy, particularly at Unity Park, which has emerged as a center for ocean-technology manufacturing and research. State incentives totaling approximately \$2.68 million have supported redevelopment at Unity Park, and a \$4 million Innovation Campus grant has been awarded for the Blue Robotics Lab. The Herreshoff Marine Museum has also received state funding to expand facilities supporting marine-industry testing, education, and innovation.

Bristol's blue economy is characterized by a diverse mix of marine trades, naval architecture and engineering, marine fabrication, clean-energy and climate-resilience firms, and ocean-technology manufacturers. The concentration of these activities supports collaboration across research, testing, manufacturing, and commercialization and reinforces Bristol's role as a regional hub within the State's blue-economy network.

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Public Input on Economic Development

Public input from workshops emphasized the importance of supporting economic growth while preserving Bristol's historic character and coastal identity. Participants expressed strong support for reinvestment in local businesses and underutilized properties, paired with a desire to maintain the Town's walkable downtown, working waterfront, and cultural assets.

Residents highlighted the need to diversify the business base and continue supporting small, locally owned establishments, noting that Bristol's waterfront and historic resources provide opportunities to strengthen the economy if growth remains compatible with neighborhood character. Overall, community feedback reflected optimism about Bristol's economic future and a shared interest in balanced growth that expands opportunities while reinforcing the Town's sense of place.

Economic Development Programs and Partners

Bristol's economic development efforts are supported through a combination of local incentive programs, partnerships with business and tourism organizations, regional collaboration, and state and federal resources. Together, these programs and partners help support business investment, strengthen the visitor economy, and enhance the Town's long-term economic resilience.

Tax Stabilization

The Town offers a Commercial Tax Stabilization Program to support new construction and rehabilitation investment by allowing a phased property tax arrangement for qualifying projects. This incentive is intended to improve Bristol's competitiveness for business location and reinvestment, particularly for projects exceeding capital investment thresholds. This program is established under Town Ordinance Chapter 27, Section 27.5

Community Facilities Grant / Rogers Free Library

Rogers Free Library is undergoing a series of capital improvements supported by a \$1.75 million Community Facilities Grant awarded to the Town of Bristol through the United States Treasury and administered by the Rhode Island Pandemic Recovery Office. The grant program is intended to support community facilities that enable work, education, and health monitoring. Bristol's project includes both building system upgrades and new public-facing amenities, such as updated equipment, flexible work and study areas, private rooms with technology access, and a publicly accessible maker space. These improvements expand the Library's capacity to provide technology access, space for remote work and learning, skills development resources, and community programs, serving residents town-wide and supporting a range of educational and workforce-related activities.

Learn365RI

Bristol participates in Learn365RI, a statewide initiative administered by the Rhode Island Department of Education that supports expanded out-of-school learning opportunities. The Town signed the Learn365RI Municipal Compact in 2023 and partners with local organizations to provide programming

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that builds academic skills, digital literacy, and readiness for future employment. In Bristol, Learn365-supported activities have included tutoring and enrichment programs

Explore Bristol

Explore Bristol serves as the Town's primary partner for tourism promotion and visitor information. The organization markets local businesses, cultural assets, and community events through coordinated outreach and branding. Its work supports Bristol's small-business community by helping direct visitors to downtown shops, restaurants, and attractions. Continued collaboration with Explore Bristol can assist the Town in maintaining a steady visitor economy and reinforcing the visibility of local destinations.

Bristol Merchants Association

The Bristol Merchants Association (BMA) is a volunteer organization that supports local businesses through communication, networking, and coordinated promotional efforts. The group helps share information among merchants, collaborates on seasonal activities and special events, and provides a forum for discussing issues affecting the downtown and broader business community. The BMA's efforts complement the Town's economic development goals by fostering connections among local businesses and contributing to a cohesive commercial environment.

East Bay Chamber of Commerce

The East Bay Chamber of Commerce serves as a regional resource for businesses in Bristol, Warren, and Barrington. The Chamber provides networking opportunities, business education, advocacy, and promotional support for local enterprises. It also assists with small-business development, workforce connections, and regional marketing initiatives. The Chamber's programs complement the Town's economic development efforts by offering services that help strengthen local businesses and support a coordinated economic identity for the East Bay region.

Bristol Fourth of July Committee

Bristol's Fourth of July Committee, a local Town committee, plays a significant role in the local economy by organizing the month-long celebration that draws tens of thousands of visitors each year. The Committee's activities—including parades, concerts, fireworks, and community events—generate the busiest economic period of the year for many local businesses. Coordination among the Town, the Committee, and economic development partners is essential to ensure that public safety, parking, transportation, signage, and visitor services effectively support both residents and businesses during peak periods. Strategic planning with the Committee can help maximize the economic benefits of this signature event while maintaining the traditions and character that define Bristol's identity.

East Bay Chamber of Commerce

The East Bay Chamber of Commerce serves as a regional resource for businesses in Bristol, Warren, and Barrington. The Chamber provides networking opportunities, business education, advocacy, and promotional support, and assists with small-business development, workforce connections, and regional marketing initiatives. Its programs complement Bristol's economic development efforts by

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supporting local businesses and reinforcing a coordinated economic identity across the East Bay region.

State and Federal Resources

Bristol businesses also have access to a range of state and federal programs that support business development, financing, technical assistance, and workforce growth. Key resources include Commerce Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Small Business Development Center, and the U.S. Small Business Administration, which offer loan programs, counseling services, and technical assistance to support start-up, expansion, and resilience planning for local businesses.

Economic Development Implementation Actions (1/16/2026 DRAFT)				
ID	Action Type	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe
ED-1	Regulatory	Develop and consider adoption of an accessory commercial use ordinance that allows small, low-impact commercial activities accessory to a residential use in appropriate zoning districts. The ordinance should expand opportunities beyond traditional home occupations while maintaining neighborhood character through clear performance standards.	Dept. of Community Development; Planning Board; Town Council	Short
ED-2	Regulatory	Reevaluate the Limited Business (LB) zoning district to better distinguish neighborhood-scale uses from higher-intensity commercial activity. The Town should consider creating two LB districts, one appropriate for areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods and another suited to corridor locations such as Metacom Avenue, with appropriate buffering and land-use transitions.	Dept. of Community Development; Planning Board; Town Council	Short–Medium
ED-3	Intergovernmental / Legislative	Monitor the impacts of <u>state land-use mandates</u> , including the by-right adaptive reuse law, and <u>regularly engage Bristol’s state delegation</u> to advocate for amendments that support appropriate redevelopment while protecting commercial districts and the Town’s economic base.	Town Council; Town Administrator; Dept. of Community Development	Short–Medium (monitoring and advocacy ongoing)
ED-4	Program / Grants	Encourage appropriate reinvestment in aging commercial and industrial buildings, including <u>identifying and pursuing</u> grant programs and façade or rehabilitation assistance to support code compliance, energy efficiency, and occupancy.	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council	Medium
ED-5	Study	Evaluate strategies to address high commercial rents and limited affordable space for small and locally owned businesses, including shared or flexible commercial space models and public–private partnerships.	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council; Business Community	Medium
ED-6	Land Use / Regulatory	<u>Inventory vacant and underutilize commercial properties</u> ; create incentives and/or disincentives to encourage occupancy and reuse of vacant storefronts and underutilized commercial buildings, <u>while supporting active commercial ground-floor uses in business districts.</u>	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council	Short–Medium
ED-7	Program	<u>Establish a municipal single point of contact or business assistance function to support new business start-ups and existing business expansions by providing guidance on local regulations, permitting and approvals, zoning and tax requirements, and by coordinating interdepartmental review to improve efficiency and service.</u>	Town Council; Town Administrator	Short–Medium
ED-8	Program / Partnership	<u>Establish an outreach program (annual/biannual) to meet with key employers and businesses, document barriers (permitting, regulations, utilities, workforce), and identify potential municipal actions to support.</u>	Town Council; Town Administrator	Short–Ongoing

ED-9	Program / Partnership	Consider participation in the Grow Smart “Main Street” program or similar technical-assistance initiatives to support downtown revitalization and small business development.	Dept. of Community Development; Town Administrator	Medium
ED-10	Land Use / Regulatory	Continue to support downtown housing development <u>on upper stories above commercial ground-floor uses</u> as a strategy to enhance year-round economic activity and support local shops and restaurants.	Dept. of Community Development; Planning Board; Town Council	Ongoing
ED-11	Study / Plan	Study long-term parking management options for downtown that protect walkability and historic character while addressing peak-season pressures, and <u>identify implementation options consistent with downtown planning goals.</u>	Dept. of Community Development; Police Department; DPW	Medium
ED-12	Program / Partnership	Maintain and strengthen Explore Bristol as the Town’s primary tourism and visitor economy partner; <u>expand long-term capacity.</u>	Town Administrator / Partners: Explore Bristol; Economic Development Partners	Ongoing
ED-13	Capital / Infrastructure	Improve tourism-related infrastructure, wayfinding signage, and visitor amenities, in collaboration with Explore Bristol and downtown organizations to expand the local visitor economy.	DPW; Dept. of Community Development	Medium
ED-14	Program / Partnership	<u>Partner with arts/cultural organizations to expand year-round programming and creative economy initiatives.</u>	Dept. of Community Development; Town Administrator	Ongoing
ED-15	Program / Partnership	Support networking and coordination among blue-economy firms, research institutions, and marine trades to <u>strengthen industry clustering, shared infrastructure use, workforce development, and collaboration.</u>	Town Administrator; Town Council	Ongoing
ED-16	Capital / Infrastructure	Identify and pursue municipal actions that support Bristol’s commercial fishing sector and working waterfront, including infrastructure improvements.	Harbor Commission; Public Works; Town Council	Medium
ED-17	Land Use / Zoning Update	Strengthen water-dependent uses through waterfront zoning updates, infrastructure maintenance, and partnerships with marine-service providers.	Harbor Commission; Dept. of Community Development; Town Council	Ongoing
ED-18	Transportation	Maintain appropriate designated boat-transport corridors for moving vessels between boatyards and the waterfront to reduce conflicts, improve safety, and support Bristol’s marine industries and working waterfront.	DPW; Police; Town Council	Ongoing
ED-19	Study / Plan	<u>Review the</u> Ready, Set, Rhody vulnerability assessment for the Thames Street business district and <u>incorporate the program’s recommended resilience and infrastructure improvements into capital planning.</u>	Dept. of Community Development	Short
ED-20	Program / Partnership	Partner with RWU to expand workforce pathways in marine trades, engineering, blue-tech, and hospitality, including apprenticeships and local job pipelines.	Town Administrator; Dept. of Community Development; BWRSD	Ongoing

ED-21	Land Use / Zoning Update	Rezone preserved farmland and properties with agricultural conservation easements into the Agricultural zoning district.	Planning Board; Town Council	Short
ED-22	Program / Partnership	Promote and support enrollment in the Farm, Forest and Open Space (FFOS) program to maintain farmland and open space.	Assessor; Dept. of Community Development	Ongoing
ED-23	Program / Partnership	Facilitate leasing of publicly owned or conserved land for small-scale or community farming.	Town Council	Ongoing
ED-24	Program / Partnership	<u>Coordinate with state agencies and local stakeholders to support aquaculture/shellfish enterprises, including permitting coordination and waterfront infrastructure needs.</u>	Harbor Commission; Dept. of Community Development	Ongoing
ED-25	Land Use / Regulatory	<u>Review and update commercial signage standards to balance visibility with historic and scenic resources and neighborhood character.</u>	Dept. of Community Development; Planning Board; Town Council	Medium

Transportation

Introduction

Bristol's transportation system is central to the Town's economic vitality, public safety, environmental sustainability, and quality of life. As a historic coastal community located on a peninsula, Bristol depends on a limited number of regional corridors, including Routes 114 and 136 and the Mount Hope Bridge, to connect residents, businesses, and visitors to neighboring communities and the highway network. These geographic constraints, together with a compact historic street pattern and scenic roadway designations, require a transportation approach that supports safety and mobility while preserving community character.

Transportation infrastructure in Bristol is increasingly affected by coastal hazards and climate change. Flooding, sea level rise, and extreme weather events pose risks to low-lying roadways and regional connections. While vulnerability assessments and adaptation strategies for transportation assets are addressed more fully in the Natural Hazards and Climate Change Element, this Transportation Element recognizes the need to coordinate mobility planning with long-term resilience efforts to maintain reliable access for residents, businesses, emergency services, and regional travel.

This Transportation Element builds upon prior corridor planning efforts, the Town's Safety Action Plan, and townwide Bicycle Network Plan and incorporates public input gathered during the Comprehensive Plan update. It establishes coordinated goals, policies, and implementation actions to advance a safe, connected, and resilient multimodal transportation system that improves access, strengthens regional connectivity, and enhances neighborhood livability.

2016 Comprehensive Plan Implementation Progress

- **Metacom Avenue Corridor Improvements:** Implemented key recommendations from the 2007 Metacom Corridor Management Plan, including a speed study, left-turn lanes, and a continuous center turn lane, resulting in improved traffic safety and operations along Metacom Avenue.
- **Bristol Bicycle Network Planning:** Completed the Bristol Bicycle Network planning effort, funded through the RIDEM Bikeways Program, to improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity townwide. The effort included alternatives analysis, public engagement, and concept designs for enhanced bicycle facilities and shared-street treatments.
- **Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program:** Implemented a resident request-based traffic calming program to reduce vehicle speeds and enhance neighborhood safety.
- **Safety Action Plan Prepared and Adopted:** Completed and locally adopted a municipal Safety Action Plan under the federal Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program, identifying high-risk intersections and priority safety countermeasures for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists through a data-driven and community-engaged process.
- **Town-Wide Wayfinding System:** Implemented a coordinated wayfinding program featuring a consistent red, white, and blue design theme that improves navigation and reinforces Bristol's civic identity, drawing inspiration from the community's annual Fourth of July Celebration.

- **Gooding Avenue Pedestrian Improvements:** Completed sidewalk and ADA accessibility upgrades along Gooding Avenue, including reconstruction of access serving adjacent commercial parking areas, improving walkability and safety along the corridor.
- **Ferry Road Sidewalk Extension:** Extended sidewalks from the Constitution and Wood Streets area to Metacom Avenue, improving pedestrian connectivity to Roger Williams University and surrounding neighborhoods. *(Anticipated completion date?)*
- **Downtown Bus Pull-Off Areas:** Installed designated bus pull-off areas (“bus boxes”) in downtown Bristol to allow buses to safely exit the travel lane for passenger boarding, and improving traffic flow and safety along state routes.

Goal 1: Provide a safe, accessible, and connected multimodal transportation system for all users.

A. Implement a Complete Streets approach that accommodates pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, motorists, and people of all ages and abilities.

B. Incorporate green infrastructure and stormwater management practices into roadway and streetscape projects where feasible to improve resilience and environmental performance.

C. Support complete streets principles by promoting bicycle and pedestrian facilities that improve access and safety throughout Bristol’s downtown and neighborhood corridors, reinforcing connections to the East Bay Bike Path, waterfront destinations, and major community nodes.

D. Expand and improve pedestrian and bicycle networks connecting neighborhoods, schools, parks, downtown, waterfront areas, and regional paths, including the East Bay Bike Path and Colt State Park.

E. Promote the safe and predictable use of shared-use paths and bicycle facilities through design, maintenance, signage, education, and coordination with enforcement, with specific attention to speed differentials and emerging mobility technologies such as electric bicycles, consistent with state regulations and best practices.

F. Close critical sidewalk, crossing, and accessibility gaps, with priority on Hope Street, Ferry Road, Metacom Avenue, and other key corridors.

G. Require and encourage physical connections between neighborhoods and key destinations, including schools, commercial areas, employment centers, and recreational facilities, through a connected network of public roads, sidewalks, off-street paths, and bicycle facilities.

H. Support neighborhood street connections that improve emergency access, local service delivery, and resident mobility, while preventing cut-through traffic and preserving neighborhood character.

Goal 2: Reduce congestion and transportation-related environmental impacts while improving local and regional connectivity.

- A. Promote land use and development patterns that reduce reliance on the automobile by supporting walking, bicycling, and other alternative modes of transportation.
- B. Encourage alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle travel, including public transit, ridesharing and vanpools, walking, and bicycling.
- C. Coordinate with RIPTA to improve bus stop safety, accessibility, visibility, and amenities, including shelters where appropriate.
- D. Identify opportunities for park-and-ride facilities and supporting multimodal connections to reduce congestion on regional corridors.
- E. Implement adopted transportation and corridor study recommendations, including the Metacom Avenue Corridor Management Plan, through development review and capital planning.
- F. Manage access along major roadways by limiting curb cuts, consolidating driveways, and improving intersection operations.
- G. Coordinate with RIDOT and neighboring communities to pursue regional transportation strategies that reduce cut-through traffic and congestion.
- H. Reduce air and water pollution by supporting low-emission and non-motorized transportation options and incorporating green infrastructure where feasible.

Goal 3: Maintain safe, efficient, and well-managed transportation access for downtown, neighborhood, and waterfront areas, including the movement of people, goods, and services.

- A. Maintain safe and efficient circulation in downtown, waterfront, and commercial areas to support businesses, institutions, and tourism.
- B. Promote “park-once” behavior through coordinated parking management, pedestrian connections, and wayfinding that encourage walking between destinations.
- C. Expand bicycle parking and visitor-supportive facilities at downtown, waterfront, park, and cultural destinations.
- D. Explore seasonal or local mobility options, such as shuttles or trolley-style service and institutional partnerships, that reduce parking pressure and enhance visitor access.
- E. Implement coordinated gateway and streetscape improvements that reinforce community identity and improve navigation.
- F. Support efficient goods movement and deliveries through curb management and design strategies that minimize conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists.
- G. Maintain the Town’s prohibition on the creation of new private roads to promote a connected public street network, ensure long-term public access, and avoid fragmented roadway ownership and maintenance.

H. Maintain the Town's policy of allowing on-street parking on all non-arterial roadways to support neighborhood access, local activity, and shared use of the public right-of-way.

Transportation Context

Bristol's location on a peninsula strongly shapes local and regional circulation patterns. Vehicular access into and out of Town is limited to Routes 114 and 136, including the Mount Hope Bridge connection to Aquidneck Island. Approximately 120 miles of roadway are maintained by the Town of Bristol. Key corridors, including Metacom Avenue (Route 136), Hope Street and Ferry Road (Route 114), and select downtown streets, are under state jurisdiction.

Bristol's historic development pattern has resulted in a compact street network with narrow rights-of-way and limited opportunities for roadway expansion. Transportation improvements must therefore balance safety, mobility, and accessibility with preservation of the Town's historic character. Route 114 (Hope Street and Ferry Road) and High Street are designated Scenic Roadways under the State Scenic Roadway Program. This designation requires review of roadway changes to protect scenic and historic character and influences transportation design, maintenance, and streetscape decisions.

Map TR-1 illustrates Federal Highway Administration roadway classifications within Bristol, demonstrating the concentration of regional traffic along Routes 114 and 136 and the extensive network of local and collector streets that support neighborhood access.

Neighborhood Circulation and Connectivity

Several Bristol neighborhoods, particularly those located along Metacom Avenue and Hope Street, lack internal street connections and rely on a limited number of access points to major corridors. This pattern can concentrate traffic at a small number of intersections, increase reliance on Metacom Avenue for short local trips, and create challenges for emergency response and municipal services.

Bristol's approach to neighborhood circulation emphasizes improving internal connectivity while maintaining appropriate access management along Metacom Avenue. Where appropriate, neighborhood circulation should direct traffic to existing signalized intersections rather than creating new direct access points along the corridor. Evaluation of new or improved neighborhood connections should incorporate neighborhood input and preserve safety and character.

Metacom Avenue (Route 136)

Long-term circulation strategies identified in the Metacom Avenue Corridor Management Plan (2007) remain relevant, including recommendations related to roadway safety, access management, pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, transit operations, landscaping, signage, and site design. The Town will continue to refer to this plan when evaluating development proposals and coordinating incremental improvements along the corridor.

These strategies include improving internal connections between commercial areas and adjacent neighborhoods to reduce reliance on Metacom Avenue and the parallel local street network (including Hope Street) for short local trips. Incremental implementation of shared access connections and service road segments has demonstrated benefits and should continue where feasible in order to improve safety and circulation while minimizing additional curb cuts and turning conflicts along the corridor.

Transportation Safety

Safe Streets and Roads for All Safety Action Plan

Bristol prepared and adopted a municipal Safety Action Plan as part of the statewide Safe Streets and Roads for All initiative funded through a 2022 United States Department of Transportation grant. The plan applies a Safe Systems approach to improve safety for all roadway users and reflects a data-driven and community-informed process that included crash analysis, identification of the High Injury Network, and public engagement.

The Safety Action Plan establishes priority safety needs and recommended improvements for both Town-maintained and State-maintained roadways. It positions Bristol to pursue future implementation funding and provides a framework for advancing targeted safety projects that align with local, regional, and state transportation planning efforts.

Priority Improvement Locations

The Safety Action Plan identifies priority locations based on crash data, roadway characteristics, and community input.

On Town-controlled streets, recommended improvements include the following:

- Bay View Avenue. This corridor presents opportunities for traffic calming, lane adjustments, enhanced pedestrian infrastructure, and bicycle accommodations consistent with Complete Streets principles.
- Sherry Avenue and Perry Street. These streets function as neighborhood cut-through routes and serve as important walking paths for students traveling to and from the high school. Recommended actions include intersection safety treatments, improved signage, sidewalk and crossing enhancements, and continued evaluation of alternative routes such as the Wood Street Connector.
- Naomi Street. This street experiences cut-through traffic and pedestrian safety concerns, including sidewalk gaps and constrained intersections. The Plan recommends improving pedestrian continuity, filling sidewalk gaps, and implementing targeted traffic calming and signage improvements.
- Poppasquash Road. This corridor presents safety challenges related to speeding, limited sight distances on curves, and interactions with the East Bay Bike Path. Recommended improvements include speed management, visibility enhancements, improved crossings, pedestrian facility upgrades, and coordination with longer-term coastal resilience planning.

On State-owned roadways, implementation will require coordination with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation. Priority corridors include:

- Metacom Avenue (Route 136). Recommended improvements include enhanced pedestrian crossings, sidewalk continuity, bicycle accommodations, intersection safety improvements, and speed management.
- Hope Street and Ferry Road (Route 114). Recommended measures include improved crosswalks, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, traffic calming treatments, and intersection upgrades while maintaining regional mobility.

The Town will use the Safety Action Plan to guide capital improvements, pursue state and federal funding, and coordinate with RIDOT and other partners.

Traffic Calming and Speed Management

The Town of Bristol maintains an established Traffic Calming Policy to address neighborhood concerns about vehicle speeds and roadway safety on Town-maintained residential streets. The policy provides a formal process through which residents may initiate traffic calming requests by submitting a petition demonstrating at least sixty percent support within the defined area of influence.

Requests are evaluated through traffic studies and reviewed by Town staff, including Police and Public Works, with recommendations presented to the Town Council for final action and funding. Potential measures include speed humps, roadway narrowing, electronic speed feedback signs, and other design-based strategies intended to reduce vehicle speeds and enhance safety. Requests for removal of installed measures also require Town Council approval.

Public engagement conducted during the Comprehensive Plan update revealed strong and consistent concern regarding speeding, unsafe driving behaviors, and difficult pedestrian crossings, particularly along Metacom Avenue, Hope Street, Ferry Road, and downtown streets. Residents expressed strong support for traffic calming measures, improved crosswalks, clearer markings, and enhanced pedestrian visibility.

Public Transit (RIPTA) Service

Public bus service in Bristol is provided by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority and is an important component of the Town's transportation system. Route 60 primarily serves Hope Street and downtown Bristol and is a high-ridership corridor that provides frequent and reliable service. This route supports access to employment, education, healthcare, and commercial destinations and plays a central role in supporting downtown vitality. Route 60X primarily serves Metacom Avenue and provides more limited service.

Enhanced frequency, reliability, and stop amenities along Metacom Avenue could improve transit access to neighborhoods and employment areas and support transit-supportive development patterns. The Town supports exploring opportunities to enhance service along Metacom Avenue without reducing service levels along Route 60 or negatively affecting existing ridership.

The Town will continue coordinating with RIPTA to improve the safety and accessibility of bus stops, including ADA-compliant access, pedestrian and bicycle connections and shelters where appropriate. The Town has prepared a list of priority bus stops where amenities should be considered.

Public engagement indicated interest in improved service frequency, clearer bus route information, additional shelters and benches, potential local or seasonal shuttle services, and coordination with Roger Williams University to reduce automobile dependence.

Map TR-2 illustrates RIPTA bus routes and stops, the East Bay Bike Path, and highlights the concentration of transit service along Hope Street (Route 114) and Metacom Avenue (Route 136).

Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure

East Bay Bike Path

Bristol's bicycle network is anchored by the East Bay Bike Path, a regionally significant shared-use path connecting Bristol to Warren, Barrington, East Providence, and Providence. The path serves both recreational and transportation functions and is an important component of the Town's active transportation network.

High user volumes, speed differentials, roadway crossings, and constrained segments present ongoing safety and connectivity challenges, particularly during peak tourism seasons and special events.

The Town will continue to coordinate with state and regional partners to improve safety, strengthen connections to key destinations, and integrate bicycle facilities with pedestrian networks, transit service, and land use planning.

Bristol Bicycle Network Plan

The Town of Bristol completed the Bristol Bicycle Network and Connector planning effort to improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity throughout the community. While the study was initially intended to explore improved connections between Roger Williams University and downtown Bristol, the scope expanded to evaluate broader townwide connectivity between the East Bay Bike Path, downtown, waterfront destinations, civic sites, and surrounding neighborhoods.

As part of the planning process, consultants developed conceptual design approaches for several corridors, including a shared-street concept for Thames Street. The concept emphasizes traffic calming, raised crosswalks, improved intersection design at State Street, and shared-street elements intended to slow vehicle speeds and enhance pedestrian and bicycle comfort. Public engagement indicated support for the Thames Street concept as a way to strengthen connections to Independence Park, State Street Dock, Rockwell Park, Fireman's Memorial Park, and the Prudence Island Ferry, while allowing portions of the street to function as pedestrian-oriented space during community events.

The Wood Street Connector was also identified as an important component of the active transportation network. This concept would provide a safer and more direct bicycle and pedestrian connection between residential neighborhoods and downtown Bristol, while improving overall access to the East Bay Bike Path and reducing cut-through traffic on nearby neighborhood streets.

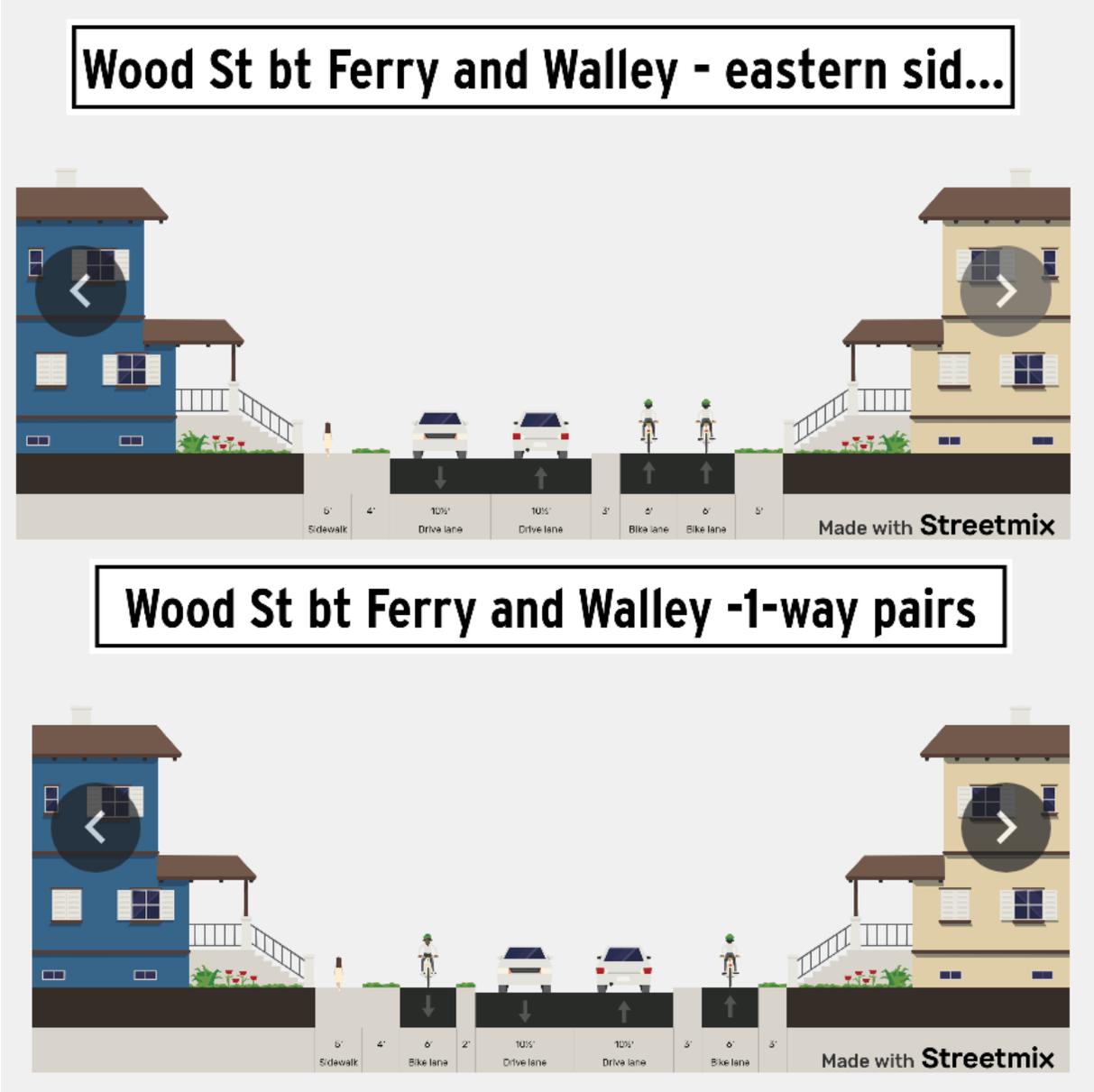


Figure 2 Wood Street Bicycle Lanes: Conceptual illustrations prepared as part of the Bristol Bicycle Network Plan. Final design subject to engineering, funding availability, and further public review.

Sidewalk and Pedestrian Connectivity

Public engagement emphasized the need for additional sidewalks and improved pedestrian connections linking residential neighborhoods with downtown, schools, parks, and the waterfront. Gaps in the sidewalk network and challenging roadway crossings were identified as barriers to walking, particularly for older residents and families with children.

The Town will continue to prioritize incremental sidewalk construction, ADA accessibility improvements, crossing enhancements, and pedestrian infrastructure that strengthens connectivity throughout Bristol.

Rhode Island Energy Utility Easement Trail

In coordination with the Town of Warren, Bristol completed a feasibility study evaluating a shared-use path within the Rhode Island Energy electric transmission easement. The study identified the potential for an off-road, north-south multi-use trail connecting the two communities and strengthening regional active transportation connections.

Ferry Service

Bristol serves as the mainland access point for year-round ferry service to Prudence Island, which is located within the Town of Portsmouth. This ferry service is privately operated, with access occurring through Bristol's Thames Street waterfront.

The Town recognizes that mainland parking demand associated with Prudence Island residents presents ongoing challenges. Bristol may work with property owners and residents to identify and support appropriate parking and access solutions that reduce impacts on residential streets while maintaining safe and reliable access to ferry service.

Seasonal passenger ferry service connecting Providence, Bristol, and Newport includes a limited stop in Bristol that was introduced in recent years and currently operates primarily on weekends during the peak visitor season. In addition to supporting tourism and visitor access to downtown Bristol, this service provides Bristol residents with a seasonal non-automobile travel option to regional destinations. The Town supports the continued operation of seasonal service to Bristol and encourages the exploration of expanded service, where feasible, and may coordinate, as appropriate, with service providers and partners to support pedestrian and bicycle access, traveler information, and wayfinding within the public right-of-way.

Mount Hope Bridge and Regional Connectivity

The Mount Hope Bridge is a critical regional connection linking Bristol to Aquidneck Island and supporting commuting, tourism, goods movement, and emergency access. The Town will continue to coordinate with the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority on construction impacts, asset management, and public communication.

Parking and Downtown Access

Parking management is an important component of Bristol's transportation system, particularly within the historic downtown and waterfront areas where street widths are constrained and seasonal visitation increases demand. Public engagement identified parking availability, turnover, and time limits as recurring concerns, especially during peak summer months and special events.

Downtown Bristol relies heavily on on-street parking supplemented by municipal and privately owned surface lots. While this pattern supports walkability and a compact development form, high-demand periods can result in circulation inefficiencies and competition between short-term

visitor parking, employee parking, and ferry-related parking demand. Parking associated with Prudence Island ferry users also contributes to pressure on nearby streets and waterfront areas.

A comprehensive parking and curb management approach will be important to improving turnover, supporting local businesses, and reducing unnecessary vehicle circulation. This may include:

- Evaluation of utilization patterns
- Time limits
- Loading zones
- Seasonal demand
- Enforcement practices
- Review and update of the Town's parking ordinance and associated signage to ensure consistency, clarity and enforceability
- Evaluation and identification of satellite public parking locations outside of Downtown
- Implementation of a shuttle service to key destinations (coordinated with satellite parking)
- Strategic siting of public EV charging infrastructure

These strategies support downtown vitality, improve circulation efficiency, and reinforce Bristol's commitment to maintaining a walkable and accessible historic Downtown.

Reference Documents

Consistency with the Rhode Island State Guide Plan

This Transportation Element is consistent with the Rhode Island State Guide Plan, specifically Moving Forward RI 2050: The Long-Range Transportation Plan (State Guide Plan Element 640). Bristol's emphasis on Complete Streets, bicycle and pedestrian connectivity, and implementation of the Bicycle Network Plan advances the State's goals to connect people and places and promote travel choices across a multimodal system. Coordination with RIDOT on safety improvements and access management along state corridors, including Route 114 and Route 136, supports a safer and more reliable regional transportation network. Policies incorporating green infrastructure and stormwater considerations into transportation projects further advance environmental sustainability and long-term system resilience, consistent with statewide transportation priorities.

Supporting Plans

Town of Bristol, Rhode Island. *Bristol Safety Action Plan*. August 2025.
Adopted September 10, 2025. Prepared by VHB (with Cambridge Systematics and SmithGroup).

Town of Bristol, Rhode Island. Bristol Bicycle Network Project. Established 2020.
Prepared by Fuss & O'Neill (with Toole Design) under the RIDEM Bikeways Program Grant.

Town of Warren and Town of Bristol, Rhode Island. *National Grid (RI Energy) Easement Trail Feasibility Study*. June 2016. Prepared by Horsley Witten Group, Inc., and Bradford Associates LLC.

Transportation Implementation Actions (2/11/2026 Draft)

Corridor Planning & State Coordination

ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
T-1	Planning / Study	Update the Scenic Corridor Management Study in coordination with RIDOT for Hope Street (Route 114), Ferry Road, and High Street to advance context-sensitive roadway design, safety, and streetscape improvements consistent with scenic and historic corridor goals.	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development
T-2	Planning / Study	In coordination with RIDOT, identify priority intersections on Metacom Avenue / Hope Street / Ferry Road for phased improvements (turn-lane needs, signal timing/coordination, crossing safety, and access management- coordinate Metacom Ave cross streets).	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development
T-3	Planning / Study	Evaluate roundabout feasibility where appropriate, including the Route 114/Route 136 area and other priority intersections identified in existing plans and through safety and operational analysis.	Long-term	Department of Community Development
T-4	Infrastructure / Capital Improvement	Advance roadway resurfacing, sidewalk rehabilitation, ADA curb ramp installation, and safety improvements along Hope Street and Ferry Road.	Mid-term	Public Works; Department of Community Development
T-5	Planning / Study	Identify and prioritize sidewalk extension projects and submit eligible projects for inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to advance implementation of the Town’s sidewalk and pedestrian network.	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development
T-6	Coordination / Partnerships	Coordinate with RIDOT to advance and fund priority safety improvements identified in the Bristol Safety Action Plan on state-controlled corridors, including Metacom Avenue (Route 136) and Hope Street / Ferry Road (Route 114), through inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and other funding programs.	Short-Mid-term	Department of Community Development

Safety & Neighborhood Circulation

ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
T-7	Programs & Services	Implement targeted safety improvements on local Town streets identified in the Safety Action Plan, such as Bay View Avenue, Sherry Avenue, Naomi Street, and Poppasquash Road, incorporating visibility improvements, traffic calming, and pedestrian infrastructure where crash history and risk are elevated.	Short–Mid-term	Public Works; Department of Community Development; Police Department
T-8	Planning / Study	Prepare neighborhood circulation studies, particularly in neighborhoods along Metacom Avenue and Hope Street, to evaluate local street connections that improve emergency access, support local service vehicles, and provide access to signalized intersections.	Mid-term	Department of Community Development; Public Works; Fire & Police

Bicycle & Pedestrian Network				
ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
T-9	Coordination / Partnerships	Coordinate with RIDOT, Statewide Planning, neighboring communities, and local partners to evaluate safety and connectivity along the East Bay Bike Path and related bicycle routes in Bristol. Actions may include identifying priority roadway crossings, improving signage and pavement markings (3D crosswalk markings), enhancing wayfinding to key destinations, supporting public education related to shared-use path etiquette and e-bike use, and strengthening connections between the Bike Path, neighborhoods, downtown, parks, schools, and transit stops.	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development
T-10	Infrastructure / Capital Improvement	Advance implementation of priority bicycle and pedestrian improvements identified in the Bristol Bicycle Network Project, with an initial focus on Thames Street enhancements, including raised crosswalks, shared-street design elements, and improved intersection treatments at State Street to support safer, slower vehicle speeds and better connectivity between the East Bay Bike Path, downtown destinations, and waterfront attractions.	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development; Public Works
T-11	Infrastructure / Capital Improvement	Evaluate opportunities for wider shoulders for bicycles, clearer bicycle lane markings, and consistent striping to improve bicycle safety and network continuity.	Short-term	Public Works; Department of Community Development
T-12	Infrastructure / Capital Improvement	Install additional bicycle racks at key destinations, including downtown, parks, the waterfront, and public facilities, and install bicycle repair stations.	Short-term	Department of Community Development; Parks & Recreation
T-13	Environmental & Resilience	Expand Safe Routes to School initiatives by supporting walking school bus programs, improving pedestrian and bicycle connections to schools, offering bicycle safety education for children including a bicycle safety training course.	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development; School Department; Police Department
T-14	Coordination / Partnerships	Work with partners to establish a multi-use trail on the electric easement of the Rhode Island Energy property to provide an off-road alternative to Metacom Avenue in coordination with the Town of Warren.	Long-term	Department of Community Development
T-15	Planning / Study	Identify existing paper streets and assess their potential as roads, pedestrian walkways, and/or bicycle paths.	Long-term	Department of Community Development
T-16	Planning / Study	Develop a phased implementation strategy for the Bristol Bicycle Network Project identifying priority segments, cost estimates, funding sources, and coordination requirements for both Town and state-controlled roadways.	Short-term	Department of Community Development
T-17	Planning / Study	Examine options to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular access to Unity Park via Franklin Street, with a focus on safety, accessibility, and neighborhood compatibility.	Mid-term	Department of Community Development; Parks & Recreation

Parking & Downtown Access Management				
ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
T-18	Planning / Study	Undertake a municipal parking survey and utilization study and develop a comprehensive parking and curb management strategy, including short-term parking, loading zones, time limits, event management, enforcement mechanisms, and pricing or permit considerations where appropriate.	Short-term	Department of Community Development; Town Administrator; Police
T-19	Planning / Study	Review and update the Town’s parking ordinance to ensure consistency with adopted parking management strategies, clarify time limits and loading provisions, and install or replace signage to accurately reflect ordinance requirements and improve enforceability.	Short-Mid-term	Department of Community Development; Town Administrator; Police Department; Public Works
T-20	Programs & Services	Pursue a local or seasonal shuttle service that serves residents and visitors, connects to destinations, shopping, and public parking areas, and helps manage downtown parking demand and congestion, including evaluation of vehicle acquisition, driver staffing or contracted operations, and identification of potential partnerships and sustainable funding sources.	Mid-term	Town Administrator; Department of Community Development
T-21	Planning / Study	Develop a siting strategy for public EV charging (downtown/municipal lots/parks) aligned with parking management and visitor access.	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development; Town Administrator
T-22	Planning / Study	Evaluate the feasibility of small-scale parking structures to address areas with limited accessible parking; identify vacant or surface parking lots in the downtown area that may be suitable for future parking decks through a range of ownership or partnership approaches.	Long-term	Department of Community Development; Town Administrator
T-23	Planning / Study	Identify and evaluate potential satellite public parking locations outside the downtown core to reduce pressure on on-street parking, support seasonal demand, and provide dedicated parking opportunities for Prudence Island ferry users and residents	Mid-term	Department of Community Development; Town Administrator
T-24	Infrastructure / Capital Improvement	Design and implement approved satellite parking facilities, including wayfinding, lighting, ADA access, and integration with shuttle service or ferry access as appropriate.	Long-term	Public Works; Department of Community Development
Transit				
ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
T-25	Coordination / Partnerships	Coordinate with RIPTA on bus shelters, benches and route info/signage, prioritizing stops with safety issues and high ridership potential.	Short–Mid-term	Department of Community Development
Environmental & Resilience				
ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
T-26	Environmental & Resilience	Coordinate with RIDOT, RIDEM, and other relevant state agencies to address recurring flooding and long-term vulnerability along Poppasquash Road, including evaluation of long-term adaptation strategies that account for projected sea level rise, such as inland rerouting, elevation, or relocation.	Long-term	Department of Community Development; Public Works
T-27	Environmental & Resilience	Incorporate permeable paving and other stormwater management practices into applicable Town transportation projects and redevelopment projects.	Ongoing	Public Works; Department of Community Development

T-28	Environmental & Resilience	Implement end-of-road stormwater retrofit projects to reduce runoff, erosion, and pollutant loading to coastal waters, prioritizing locations where local streets discharge directly to water bodies or drainage systems.	Mid–Long-term	Public Works
Ongoing Operations & Maintenance				
ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
T-29	Operations & Maintenance	Maintain and apply the Town’s adopted wayfinding program by ensuring that new or replacement signage is consistent with established wayfinding design standards and themes.	Ongoing	Department of Community Development; Public Works
T-30	Operations & Maintenance	Preserve and maintain the landscaped tree island at the intersection of Routes 114 and 136 as part of any roadway improvement projects, consistent with highway safety requirements.	Ongoing	Public Works
T-31	Operations & Maintenance	Continue to accommodate marine transport routes through ongoing roadway maintenance and design practices, including adjustable signage, utility clearance considerations, and intersection geometry that allow the safe movement of boats and oversized marine trailers to and from the waterfront.	Ongoing	Public Works; Harbor Commission

MAP TR-1
Transportation:
Road Classifications
TOWN OF
BRISTOL
RHODE ISLAND
 Comprehensive Plan, 2026



Legend

Federal Highway Administration Road Classifications

- Principal Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Major Collector
- Minor Collector
- Local Roads

N

Location Inset

0 0.25 0.5 1

Miles

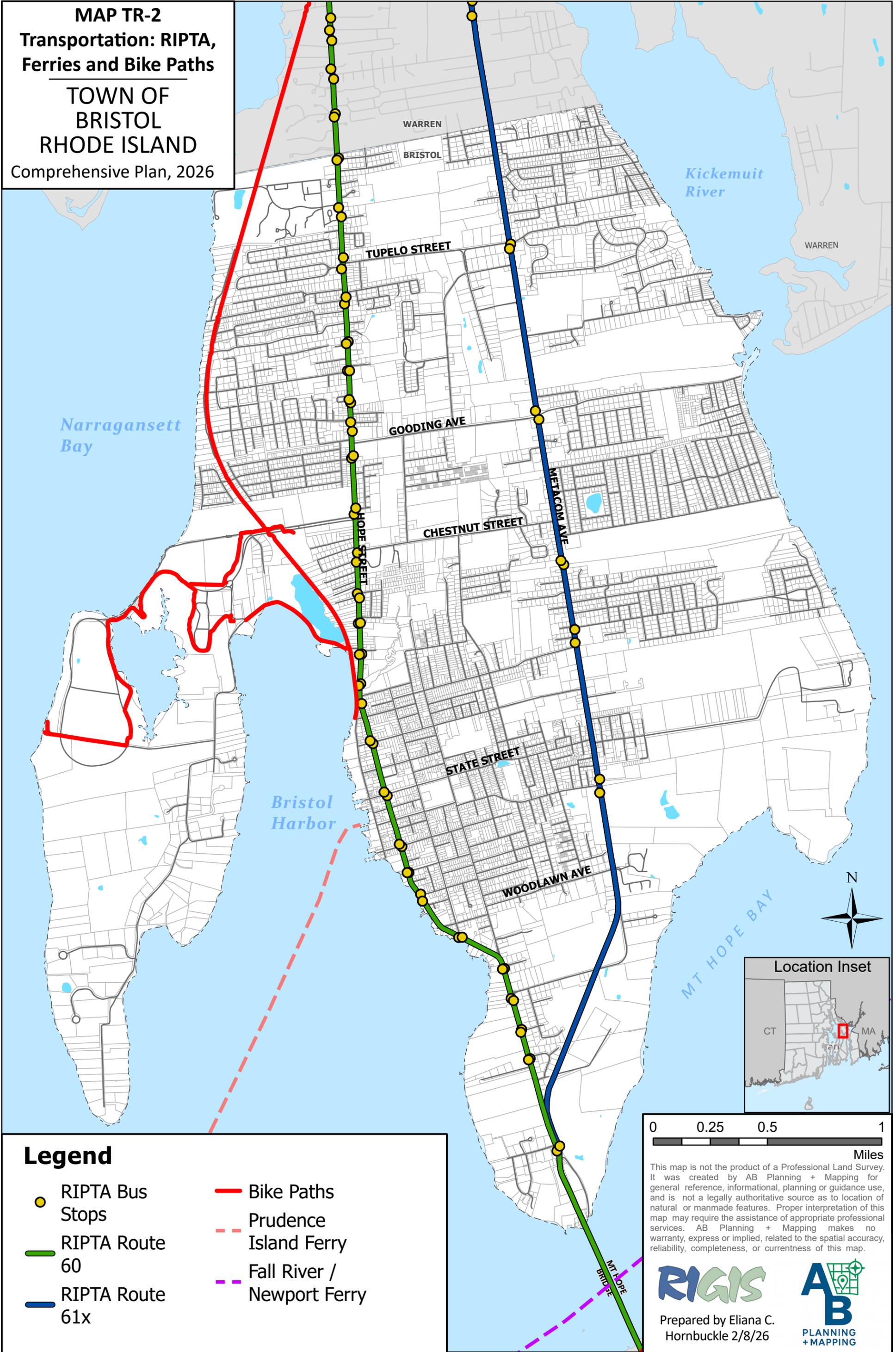
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Prepared by Eliana C. Hornbuckle 2/8/26

AB
 PLANNING + MAPPING

MAP TR-2
Transportation: RIPTA,
Ferries and Bike Paths
TOWN OF
BRISTOL
RHODE ISLAND
 Comprehensive Plan, 2026



Legend

- RIPTA Bus Stops
- RIPTA Route 60
- RIPTA Route 61x
- Bike Paths
- Prudence Island Ferry
- Fall River / Newport Ferry



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