



TOWN OF BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Agenda

Thursday, July 9th, 2026 at 7:00 PM
Bristol Town Hall, 10 Court Street, Bristol, RI 02809

- A. Pledge of Allegiance**
- B. Agenda Items**
 - B1. Review and make recommendations to the Town Council** on proposed zoning ordinance amendment to regulate Short Term Rentals.
 - B2. Comprehensive Plan Update** – Review draft Outdoor Recreation and Open Space chapter of the Update.
- C. Adjournment**

Date Posted: July 2, 2026

Posted By: mbw



Town of Bristol, Rhode Island

Department of Community Development

10 Court Street
Bristol, RI 02809
www.bristolri.gov
401-253-7000

July 1, 2026

Bristol Planning Board
10 Court Street
Bristol, RI 02809

RE: Short Term Rental Ordinance

Honorable Members:

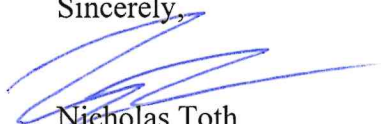
The Bristol Department of Community Development is proposing a set of regulations to govern the issuance of special use permits for Short Term Rentals. Attached is our draft for your review and comment, along with the following supplemental information:

- The goal of this ordinance is to ensure the stability and availability of long-term housing units in Bristol for rent and to own and to provide the town with the means of overseeing the current and future short term rentals within its jurisdiction.
- Other municipalities of comparable or smaller population to Bristol have seen the number of short term rentals explode to several hundred.
 - o Middletown has over 400 Short Term Rental Units for a population of just over 17,000, or nearly 5% of all housing units in the municipality
 - o Narragansett has over 1,000 for a population of roughly 14,000.
- Adoption of this ordinance at this time would ensure Bristol maintains control over its housing stock while the number of short-term rentals in Bristol remains relatively small.
- There are, as of 6/25/2026, 88 Short Term Rental units currently active with RIDBR in the town of Bristol (0.944% of total housing Units)
 - o This has fluctuated. 123 active registrations were found in June 2023 (1.32% of total housing units), and 164 Active Registrations in April 2026 (1.76% of total housing units)
- This ordinance is not being considered in a vacuum. A number of other communities in Rhode Island currently regulate short term rentals in some fashion, including:
 - o Providence
 - o Newport
 - o Narragansett
 - o Middletown
 - o Portsmouth
 - o Warwick
 - o Warren
 - o Westerly

- South Kingstown
 - New Shoreham
 - Barrington
-
- The Draft presented is based on the best practices of a number of other communities, especially Middletown, New Shoreham, and Westerly.
 - Regulation of Short Term Rentals has been identified as an item of concern for many residents though the Town's comprehensive planning process, and has been a goal of the town for several years.

We hope this helps to guide this Board's review process and starts the Town on the path to adoption.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Toth
Planner/HDC Coordinator
Department of Community Development
Town of Bristol

2024-21

ORDINANCE OF THE
TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN, RHODE ISLAND

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE TOWN CODE OF THE
TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN

TITLE XV: LAND USAGE
Chapter 152, Zoning Code

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED AS FOLLOWS:

FIRST: That Town Code Title XV, Chapter 152, Entitled "Zoning Code" , Article 4 – Definitions, Section 400, Article 6, § 602. Schedule of District Regulations – Uses and Districts and Article 27C. Short Term Rentals, § 27C01. Short-Term Rental. Application of District Regulations is amended as follows (language to be deleted is ~~struck~~ out within brackets; language to be added is underlined):

§ 400. Definitions

~~Rooming House~~Short-Term Rental. A building in which one or more dwelling units or rooms for sleeping are rented for lodging accommodations for periods of thirty-one (31) consecutive days or less with or without the furnishing of meals and with the owner who is in charge and manages such rentals residing ~~*in said building on said property~~ at all times during the period of such rental. No more than six short-term renters, regardless of age, shall be allowed during any rental period irrespective of the number of dwelling units or rooms for sleeping that are contained in the building. Only one building on a lot or parcel of land shall be allowed a Short-Term Rental use. All Short-Term Rentals must be registered in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 98 of the Town Code of Ordinances, titled Short-Term Rental Leases, and must fully comply with the restrictions stated therein. A single family dwelling in which the principal resident rents not more than two rooms, without kitchen facilities and with or without provision of meals, to not more than two persons per room.

Article 6. Application of District Regulations

§ 602. Schedule of District Regulations – Uses and Districts

	R60	R40	R30	R20	R10	RM	GB	LB	OB	LI	L2	OP	OS	P	MT	ABD
Residential – Conventional Development																
Rooming houses Short-Term Rental	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>S*</u>	<u>S*</u>

*Any special use permit granted for a Short-Term Rental shall be subject to the conditions set forth in Article 27C of this ordinance.

Article 27C. Short Term Rentals

§ 27C01. Short-Term Rental.

Short-Term Rental shall only be permitted by special use permit in all residential zoning districts, and must fully comply with the restrictions set forth for said use in the definition of “Short-Term Rental” as stated in Article 4 of this Zoning Ordinance, or else the use is prohibited. In addition to any other requirements set forth in this zoning code for granting of a special use permit, a special use permit may only be granted for a Short-Term Rental if the following standards are also met:

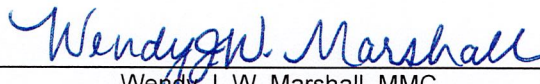
- (1) The use of the property must fully comply with Chapter 98 of the Middletown Code of Ordinances, as currently drafted and as may hereafter be amended, titled Short-Term Rental Leases.
- (2) The property owner must submit an affidavit to the Zoning Enforcement Officer attesting that the use fully complies with the restrictions stated in Article 4 of this Zoning Ordinance in the definition of “Short-Term Rental.”
- (3) The grant of any special use permit set forth may be granted upon any condition allowed under § 904 of this zoning code.

SECOND: This ordinance shall take effect upon adoption and its provisions shall supersede any inconsistent or contrary provision in any other ordinance.

- Amended by Council October 21, 2024

OCTOBER 21, 2024

READ AND ADOPTED IN COUNCIL, AS AMENDED



Wendy J. W. Marshall, MMC
Town Clerk



Holiday Hours

The State of Rhode Island will be observing *Independence Day* on Monday, July 6, 2026 and our office will be closed. Normal business hours will resume on Tuesday, July 7th at 8:30 AM.

[Home](#) » [Real Estate and Commercial Licensing](#) » [Short-Term Rentals](#) »

[Short-Term Rentals Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Short-Term Rentals Frequently Asked Questions

Registration Requirements

— When is registration required?

Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws **§ 42-63.1-14(b)**, registration is required if you offer your property for rent 30 nights or less **and** you're listing on a third-party hosting site (e.g., Air BnB, Vrbo, Real Estate Brokers, et cetera).

— What is a short-term rental?

R.I. General Law § 42-63.1-14(b) defines short-term rental as “a person, firm, or corporation's utilization, for transient lodging accommodations, not to exceed thirty (30) nights at a time.”

— What is a third-party hosting platform?

R.I. General Law § 42-63.1-2(5) defines a hosting platform as “any electronic or operating system in which a person or entity provides a means through which an owner may offer a residential unit for “tourist or transient” use. This service is usually, though not necessarily, provided through an online or web-based system which generally allows an owner to advertise the residential unit through a hosted website and provides a means for a person or entity to arrange tourist or transient use in exchange for payment, whether the person or entity pays rent directly to the owner or to the hosting platform.” This includes websites like AirBnB and Vrbo as well as real estate brokerage websites.

If a website operated by a property manager, real estate licensee or rental agent falls within this definition and the firm is listing properties that it does not own on the website, then the properties must be registered with the Department by the property owner or lessee.

— Why is registration required?

R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14, enacted by the Legislature, required the Department to implement a statewide registration for short term rentals.

— Do I need to register with the municipality and the state?

R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14, enacted by the Legislature, required the Department to implement a statewide registration for short term rentals. This statute does not address whether the municipalities will continue to have their own registration systems. If the municipality in which the short-term rental is located has its own registration requirement, then you must register both with the state and the municipality.

— What are the fire code requirements for short-term rentals?

These questions are to be directed to the local fire department of the municipality in which the rental property is located.

— Does my Timeshare need to be registered a Short-Term Rental?

If you advertise your timeshare for rent for 30 nights or less on a third-party hosting site, then you must register your timeshare as a short-term rental with the Department.

— Does my Houseboat need to be registered a Short-Term Rental?

If you advertise your houseboat for rent for 30 nights or less on a third-party hosting site, then you must register your houseboat as a short-term rental with the Department.

— Can I use my ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) as a Short-Term Rental?

Effective June 25, 2024, R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-24-73 was amended, including the addition of paragraph (b)(8), which states: “ADUs shall not be offered or rented for tourist or transient use or through a hosting platform, as such terms are defined in § 42-63.1-2.” You can view the full public law [here](#) .

(**Note:** Any statutory changes made during the 2024 legislative session will not appear in the General Laws on the General Assembly’s website until the end of 2024.)

— How much does the registration cost?

The cost to register your short-term rental with the Department of Business Regulation is \$25.

— How long will the registration last?

The registration will be good for one (1) calendar years upon issuance or renewal.

For example, a registration issued on Jan. 1, 2023, will expire on Dec. 31, 2024.

— How many registrations do I need?

- Owner-occupied short-term rentals of rooms or shared spaces within the same owner-occupied unit only require one registration per unit.
 - Example – owner occupied single-family house renting individual rooms on separate listings – one registration is required.
- Rentals of entire spaces require one registration per unit.
 - Three-family house with three apartments being advertised and entire spaces for short-term rental – each apartment in the building advertised for short-term rental needs its own registration.

— What if I list on a third-party site and don't register as a short-term rental? Are there penalties for failing to register?

Pursuant to R.I. General Law § 42-63.1-14(i), you will be subject to civil penalties in the following amounts:

1. Two hundred fifty dollars (\$250) for the first thirty (30) days of non-compliance;
2. Five hundred dollars (\$500) for between thirty-one (31) and sixty (60) days of non-compliance; and
3. One thousand dollars (\$1,000) for more than sixty (60) days of non-compliance.

— Can a registration be transferred to another owner or property?

No. Registrations are per property based upon the address and the person registering the property with the Department as a short-term rental. Any change in registrant and/or property location would require the termination of the first registration and the application for a new registration for the new registrant/location.

— What information will the application require?

The application will require the information listed in the statute at R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14(d). Statutory provisions are not repeated in the regulation. Here is a quotation of those statutory requirements for the registration.

1. *The principal place of business of the owner, or if outside the state, the agent for service of process or property manager for the owner;*
2. *The phone number of the owner of the property and/or property manager;*
3. *The email address of the property owner and/or property manager;*
4. *The address of the rental property;*
5. *The number of rooms for rent at the property;*
6. *Whether the registrant rents or owns; and*
7. *Intended use (entire space, private room or shared space).*

— Will commercial entities be required to show proof of liability insurance or other insurance as part of the registration process?

No. Neither R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14 nor the regulation contain any insurance requirement.

— Except for an incomplete application, are there any instances where an applicant would be denied?

No. Applicants who fill out all required fields and pay the fee will be issued a registration.

— I am having family use my house while I am away, do I need to register my property as a short-term rental?

Only properties that are both rented for 30 nights or less **and** advertised on websites like Airbnb, Vrbo, Expedia, etc. and/or real estate brokerage websites need to register as a short-term rental.

— Can a long-term tenant/lessee rent out their property as a short-term rental?

R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14 requires all short-term rentals to be registered. The long-term tenant/lessee or the property owner advertising the property is required to register the property with the Department. Whether or not a property owner allows its long-term tenant/lessee to sublet a property as a short-term rental is a private matter between the property owner and the lessee.

— In the case of traditional real estate brokerages, who is considered the registrant, broker/office or the homeowner?

The property owner or lessee is responsible for the registration.

— Are there any exceptions to the registration requirements for owner-occupied properties or for seasonal/summer-only rentals?

No. R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14 does not provide for any exceptions or exemptions to the registration requirement. Any property falling under the definition of short-term rental (any period up to and including 30 nights) advertised on a 3rd party hosting platform must register with the Department. Should the legislature hereafter adopt exceptions those exceptions will be implemented by the Department.

— Is the property manager, rental agent or another third party responsible for registering a short-term rental with the Department?

“Registrant” is defined as the Owner registering a property with the Department as required by R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14. The Act defines “owner” as property owner or lessee. Therefore, the property manager, rental agent or third party is not required to register the property. However, third-party hosting platforms and real estate licensees should notify their clients about the state’s short-term rental registration requirements.

Problems with a Short-Term Rental

— Whom do I contact if I have an issue with the rental?

Please refer to your reservation completed with the third-party hosting platform/real estate brokerage to inquire as to how to lodge a complaint or resolve a problem.

— I have a noise complaint; whom do I contact?

Contact the local police department’s non-emergency line to lodge a noise complaint.

For a list of cities and towns, including their websites, please visit this website:

<https://www.ri.gov/towns/>

Information about a Particular Property

— Will the Short-Term Rentals Registration Database be accessible to the public?

Yes. In accordance with the statutory requirement in R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14(h), the Department will provide access to the registration database on its website. Only the property address and registration status will be available in the public database.

— How do I find the property owner of a Short-Term Rental?

Please visit the tax assessor's website of the municipality in which the rental is located.

For a list of cities and towns, including their websites, please visit this website:

<https://www.ri.gov/towns/>

Municipal Regulation and Registration Requirements

— Will short-term rental hosts need to be registered first with their municipality?

The state registration requirement is independent of any municipal short-term rental registration requirements. State registration is required irrespective of whether a municipality requires short-term rental registration or fees.

— Do I still need to register my short-term rental with the municipality now that I have registered with the Department?

Yes, if the municipality in which the short-term rental is located has its own registration requirement.

— Who can I contact at the state level if our town is not following their own ordinances and/or state law regarding short-term rentals?

The Department does not have jurisdiction over this. If you have questions or concerns regarding a municipality's enforcement or application of its short-term rental ordinances or state laws you should reach out to your municipal officials, including but not limited to the City/Town Solicitor, the Clerk's Office, or the Office of the Mayor or Town Manager.

— Will the State's registration have built into its code each municipality's zoning ordinances? Or does this supersede municipalities?

The state registration requirement is independent of any municipal short-term rental registration requirements. Municipalities may still require registration and impose short-term rental requirements as may be permitted by law.

— Do the municipalities receive the registration fees?

No. The registration fees will be deposited into the state general fund.

— Will this legislation legitimize short-term rentals and require all municipalities to allow them by default?

This registration requirement does not affect whether short-term rentals are allowed or disallowed in any municipality, rather it simply requires them to be registered with the state.

— Will municipalities be notified of entities that are in violation of this regulation? Will violations be posted to the public for each locality?

The Department will handle potential violations in accordance with § 4.6 of the regulation and the Administrative Procedures Act.

— How will this registration information be shared with municipalities?

Municipalities can access the Department's database on its website at any time.

Taxation of Short-Term Rentals

— Do I need to pay sales and hotel taxes on short-term residential rentals?

Please refer to the Division of Taxation's FAQs, available [here](#) .

Definition

Short Term Rental shall be defined as a building in which one or more dwelling units or rooms for sleeping are rented for lodging accommodations for periods of 31 consecutive days or less with or without the furnishing of meals and with the owner who is in charge and manages such rentals residing on said property at all times during the period of such rental. No more than six short-term renters, regardless of age, shall be allowed during any rental period irrespective of the number of dwelling units or rooms for sleeping that are contained in the building. Only one building on a lot or parcel of land shall be allowed a short-term rental use. All short-term rentals must be registered in accordance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-63.1-14, as amended.

Applicability

Short Term Rentals validly registered with the State of Rhode Island at the time of adoption of these standards shall be presumed to be legally non-conforming pre-existing uses and thus exempt from a special use permit and resident-occupancy requirements unless registration is not renewed with the Department of Business Regulation and allowed to lapse for a period greater than 365 consecutive days. After 365 consecutive days, the use shall be presumed to be abandoned, at which point a special use permit must be obtained restart operation. Abandonment may also be established by any other overt act or failure to act indicating an intent to abandon under applicable law.

Standards

1. A special use permit shall be required for any property, lot or parcel hosting or advertising short term rentals for more than seven (7) total nights in a calendar year. A special use permit may be granted by the Bristol Zoning Board of Review if all standards are met. Special Use Permits for Short Term Rentals shall be valid for three (3) years. The owner who is responsible for managing a short term rental must reside on the same property, lot, or parcel during the entire duration of any short term rental.
2. The following requirements are conditions of any approved Special Use Permit and must be submitted to validate the approval:
 - a. A valid Short Term Rental Registration with the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation shall be a condition subsequent for a special use permit.
 - b. Valid home or commercial insurance policy covering short term rentals with coverage no less than \$1 Million shall be a condition subsequent to a special use permit.
3. No more than 5 Bedrooms shall be rented in total for short term rentals per property, lot, or parcel.
4. One off street parking spot per bedroom shall be required in addition to the minimum parking spaces already required for the building.
5. Any unit that is not a legal residential unit shall not be eligible for short-term rental.

6. The DBR registration number of the rental, property address and contact information for owner or resident manager must be posted conspicuously where it can be seen from a public street during rental periods in a manner prescribed by the Zoning Officer.
7. Properties, lots, or parcels hosting Short Term Rentals shall not be used or advertised in whole or in part as venues for events, parties, or functions. Short Term Rentals shall be used only for transient lodging accommodations as defined in these standards.

Proposed Allowable Zones

	R-80	R-40	R-20	R-15	R-10	R-6	LB	GB	D	W†	M	OS	EI	HPC	MMU	PI
					R-10SW											
					R-8											
Short Term Rentals	S*	S*	S*	S*	S*	S*	S*	N	S*	S*	N	N	N	N	N	N

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Outdoor Recreation and Open Space

Introduction

Open space and outdoor recreation are essential to Bristol's character, environmental and public health, and quality of life. The Town's parks, conservation lands, waterfront, trails, and recreational facilities provide opportunities for active and passive recreation while protecting natural resources, preserving scenic landscapes, supporting the local economy, and strengthening community resilience.

Bristol's location on a peninsula bordered by Narragansett Bay, Mount Hope Bay, the Kickemuit River, and Bristol Harbor provides exceptional access to the shoreline and distinguishes its recreation system from most Rhode Island communities. Residents enjoy a diverse network of neighborhood parks, athletic facilities, playgrounds, public beaches, conservation areas, trails, public shoreline access points, and waterfront destinations. State-owned resources, including Colt State Park and the East Bay Bike Path, are complemented by Mount Hope Farm, Blithewold Manor, Gardens and Arboretum, Audubon properties, and Bristol Land Conservation Trust preserves. Together, these public and private lands provide year-round recreational opportunities while protecting wildlife habitat, improving water quality, reducing flooding, preserving scenic views, and increasing resilience to climate change.

Since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the Town has continued to invest in parks, waterfront facilities, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, recreational programming, and environmental stewardship. At the same time, changing recreational preferences, an aging population, continued demand for youth sports, and the impacts of climate change highlight the need for continued investment and long-term stewardship.

This element builds on the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the Open Space Plan, Harbor Management Plan, Tree Canopy Plan, Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, and other planning efforts. It establishes goals, policies, and actions to protect open space, expand recreational opportunities, improve public access, and guide future investments.

Goals and Policies

Goal 1. Protect Bristol's open space, natural resources, and scenic landscapes.

Policies

- A. Protect significant open space, wetlands, forests, agricultural lands, coastal resources, and other environmentally sensitive areas.
- B. Expand and connect protected open space where it supports conservation, recreation, and climate resilience.

C. Support the preservation of working farms, coastal landscapes, and other undeveloped lands that contribute to Bristol's character.

D. Encourage redevelopment and reuse of previously developed or underutilized properties to reduce development pressure on open space and environmentally sensitive lands.

E. Work with land trusts, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners to protect and manage open space.

Goal 2. Maintain a high-quality system of parks and recreational facilities that serves residents of all ages and abilities.

Policies

A. Maintain and improve existing parks, athletic fields, playgrounds, trails, waterfront facilities, and other recreational amenities.

B. Provide a balance of active and passive recreational opportunities throughout the community.

C. Improve accessibility through ADA upgrades and universal design where practical.

D. Support recreational programs that promote healthy, year-round participation.

Goal 3. Preserve and improve public access to Bristol's shoreline, parks, and open spaces.

Policies

A. Maintain and improve public access to Bristol Harbor, Narragansett Bay, Mount Hope Bay, and the Kickemuit River.

B. Protect and enhance public shoreline rights-of-way and waterfront access points.

C. Improve connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks, downtown, and waterfront destinations through sidewalks, bicycle facilities, greenways, and trails.

D. Improve signage, wayfinding, bicycle parking, and other amenities that make recreational resources easier to find and use.

Goal 4. Steward Bristol's parks and open space system through planning, investment, partnerships, and responsible management to meet the community's current and future needs.

Policies

A. Coordinate open space and recreation planning with land use, natural resource protection, climate resilience, harbor management, and capital improvement planning.

B. Pursue grants, partnerships, conservation easements, and strategic land acquisition to protect open space, improve recreational facilities, and expand public access.

C. Prioritize maintenance, rehabilitation, and long-term management of existing parks and recreational facilities.

D. Periodically evaluate community recreation needs, facility conditions, and recreational trends to guide future investments and improvements.

Accomplishments Since 2016 Comprehensive Plan

Since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, Bristol has completed or advanced numerous projects that have expanded recreational opportunities, improved recreational facilities, and strengthened stewardship of the Town's open space and waterfront resources.

- Replacement of aging playground equipment and improvements to neighborhood parks throughout the community.
- Conversion of the Town Common tennis courts to dedicated pickleball courts, reflecting changing recreational interests and increasing demand for pickleball.
- Completion of the Independence Park boat ramp replacement project, including a new ADA-accessible boat ramp, parking improvements, stormwater management, and related waterfront enhancements.
- Completion of the Bristol Tree Canopy Plan, establishing a long-term strategy for expanding tree canopy, improving shade in parks and public spaces, and strengthening climate resilience.
- Improvements to public shoreline access, waterfront facilities, and harbor infrastructure through implementation of the Harbor Management Plan.
- Expansion of bicycle and pedestrian improvements, including implementation of recommendations from the Bicycle Connectivity Study and improvements that strengthen connections between neighborhoods, parks, downtown, and the waterfront.
- Implementation of green infrastructure and watershed restoration projects, particularly within the Silver Creek watershed, improving water quality while enhancing recreational and environmental resources.
- Expansion of recreational programming offered by the Parks and Recreation Department for residents of all ages.

Parks and Recreation Department

The Bristol Parks and Recreation Department maintains the Town's parks, athletic fields, playgrounds, recreational facilities, waterfront amenities, and public beaches while providing year-round recreational programming for residents of all ages. Programs include youth sports, summer camp, fitness and wellness classes, seasonal activities, special events, and senior programming. The Department also coordinates facility reservations, athletic field scheduling, and community use of Town recreational facilities.

Open Space and Recreation Inventory

Bristol's recreation system includes Town-owned parks, athletic fields, playgrounds, conservation lands, beaches, trails, shoreline access points, and recreational facilities, as well as significant state-owned and privately owned open space. Maps NR5 and R1 and the accompanying inventory tables identify the location, ownership, and primary use of these resources.

The Town owns and maintains many of the community's parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, and recreational facilities. State-owned resources, including Colt State Park and the East Bay Bike Path, provide regionally significant recreational opportunities and attract residents and visitors from throughout Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts.

Privately owned properties also play an important role in Bristol's open space system. Mount Hope Farm, Blithewold Manor, Gardens and Arboretum, Audubon properties, and lands protected by the Bristol Land Conservation Trust provide opportunities for walking, nature observation, environmental education, agricultural programming, and public events.

Major recreational resources include:

- Community and neighborhood parks
- Athletic fields and courts
- Playgrounds
- School recreational facilities
- Walking trails and the East Bay Bike Path
- Waterfront parks and public beaches
- Public boat ramps, kayak launches, and fishing access
- Conservation lands and nature preserves
- Public shoreline rights-of-way and water access sites

Parks and Recreation Department

The Bristol Parks and Recreation Department maintains the Town's parks, athletic fields, playgrounds, recreational facilities, waterfront amenities, and public beaches while providing recreational programming for residents of all ages. Programs include youth and adult recreation, fitness and wellness classes, summer camps, seasonal activities, special events, and senior

programming offered throughout the year. The Department also coordinates facility reservations, athletic field scheduling, and community use of Town recreational facilities, helping ensure that Bristol's parks and open spaces remain active community assets year-round.

Geographic Distribution of Recreation

Overall, Bristol has a well-distributed system of parks and recreational resources. Larger community facilities, including Colt State Park, the East Bay Bike Path, Bristol Town Beach and Sports Complex, and waterfront parks serve residents throughout the community, while neighborhood parks provide recreational opportunities within residential areas.

Bristol's compact development pattern and extensive shoreline provide residents with convenient access to parks, recreational facilities, conservation lands, and the waterfront. Overall, Bristol's parks and recreational resources are well distributed throughout the community. Future investments should focus on improving accessibility, strengthening connections between existing resources, enhancing waterfront access, and modernizing aging recreational facilities.

Public Input

Public input emphasized the importance of preserving Bristol's open space, waterfront, and recreational resources while expanding opportunities for recreation and environmental stewardship. Protection of wetlands, water quality, and wildlife habitat emerged as recurring priorities, particularly in the Silver Creek watershed and other flood-prone areas. Residents also supported continued protection of open space through acquisition, conservation, and redevelopment of previously developed properties to reduce development pressure on undeveloped land.

Improving public access to the shoreline was another consistent theme. Residents supported maintaining and improving public shoreline rights-of-way, preparing a comprehensive inventory and map of shoreline access points, improving wayfinding and signage, and expanding waterfront access while protecting sensitive coastal resources. Additional waterfront recommendations included enhanced docks and boating facilities, improved public seating and gathering areas, additional kayak and boating opportunities, and continued monitoring of Bristol Harbor water quality.

Participants also identified opportunities to improve Bristol's parks and recreation system through continued investment in athletic fields, playgrounds, trails, and recreational facilities. Frequently mentioned priorities included additional youth recreation opportunities, expanded indoor recreation, modernization of play equipment, improved bicycle and pedestrian connections, more benches and seating areas, increased tree planting, pollinator habitat, and improved maintenance of parks, public spaces, and shoreline access sites. Residents also

supported expanding environmental education through partnerships with local organizations and educational institutions to promote tree stewardship, native landscaping, fertilizer reduction, and water conservation.

The goals, policies, and implementation actions in this element respond to these priorities by emphasizing open space protection, shoreline access, environmental stewardship, park and trail improvements, climate resilience, and continued investment in Bristol's parks and recreational resources.

Condition of Existing Facilities

Overall, Bristol's parks and recreational facilities are well maintained. Future capital improvements should focus on replacing aging infrastructure, improving accessibility, modernizing recreational amenities, and maintaining waterfront facilities, trails, boardwalks, and other recreational infrastructure.

Climate Resilience

Many of Bristol's most heavily used recreational resources are located along the shoreline. Waterfront parks, public shoreline rights-of-way, boat ramps, beaches, and coastal trails are increasingly vulnerable to coastal flooding, erosion, storm surge, and sea level rise.

As improvements are planned, the Town should incorporate resilient design strategies that reduce future damage while maintaining public access. Strategies may include elevating vulnerable infrastructure, improving drainage, restoring natural shoreline features, and using nature-based approaches to stabilize coastal areas where appropriate.

Future land acquisition should also consider climate resilience by prioritizing properties that protect coastal buffers, flood storage areas, wildlife habitat, and future public shoreline access.

Open Space and Recreation Maps and Inventory

The following maps and inventory tables provide an overview of Bristol's open space and recreational resources. Together, they identify the location, ownership, and primary use of protected open space, parks, recreational facilities, public shoreline access sites, and other recreational resources throughout the community.

Map NR5 illustrates Bristol's protected open space network, including municipal parks, conservation lands, state-owned recreation areas, institutional open space, cemeteries, and privately protected lands.

Map R1 identifies parks, recreational facilities, trails, public shoreline access sites, and other recreational resources that support active and passive recreation throughout the community.

Map R1. Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Public Access **(revising)**

No.	Facility	Owner	Primary Recreation Use
1	Hopeworth Playground	Town of Bristol	Playground
2	Mt. Hope High School Sports Fields	Bristol Warren Regional School District	Athletic Fields
3	Sherman Avenue Recreation Area	Town of Bristol	Neighborhood Park
4	Bristol Harbor Boardwalk	Town of Bristol / Private	Waterfront Walkway
5	State Street Boat Launch	Town of Bristol	Boat Launch
6	Fales Road Public Shoreline Access	Town of Bristol	Shoreline Access
7	Guiteras Field	Town of Bristol	Athletic Field
8	Veterans' Memorial Field	Town of Bristol	Athletic Fields
9	Annawanscutt Fishing and Boating Access	State of Rhode Island	Fishing and Boat Access
10	Cedar Crest Playground	Town of Bristol	Playground
11	Walley Park	Town of Bristol	Neighborhood Park / Waterfront Access
12	Sowams Playground	Town of Bristol	Playground
13	Loafers Corner	Town of Bristol	Passive Recreation
14	Leahy Pond	Town of Bristol	Passive Recreation / Nature Area
15	Waypoysset Preserve / Bristol Narrows	Bristol Land Conservation Trust	Conservation / Passive Recreation
16	Tanyard Brook Park	Town of Bristol	Neighborhood Park
17	Hopeworth Road Site	Town of Bristol	Open Space / Recreation Area

No.	Facility	Owner	Primary Recreation Use
18	Aaron Avenue Public Shoreline Access	Town of Bristol	Shoreline Access
19	Bristol Town Common	Town of Bristol	Community Park / Pickleball / Passive Recreation
20	Bristol Town Farm	Town of Bristol	Open Space / Agriculture
21	Rockwell School Recreation Area	Bristol Warren Regional School District	School Recreation
22	Rockwell Park	Town of Bristol	Neighborhood Park / Playground
23	Independence Park	Town of Bristol	Waterfront Park / Boat Ramp / Events
24	Thomas Park / Silver Creek	Town of Bristol	Neighborhood Park / Passive Recreation
25	Mount Hope Farm	Private	Agriculture, Open Space, Events
26	Gibson Road Public Shoreline Access	Town of Bristol	Shoreline Access
27	Coelho Park	Town of Bristol	Neighborhood Park / Playground
28	East Bay Bike Path	State of Rhode Island	Regional Shared-Use Path
29	Paull Park / Ramos Field	Town of Bristol	Athletic Fields
30	Mount Hope Community Forest	Town of Bristol	Conservation Area / Trails / Passive Recreation

Shoreline Access

Bristol's extensive shoreline provides numerous opportunities for public water access and is a defining feature of the Town's recreation system. Public access is available through parks, beaches, boat ramps, marinas, public shoreline rights-of-way, and other waterfront access sites located throughout the community.

The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) currently recognizes 34 designated public shoreline rights-of-way in Bristol, providing access to Narragansett Bay, Mount Hope Bay, the Kickemuit River, and Bristol Harbor. The Town's Harbor Management Plan identifies additional public shoreline access sites, reflecting Bristol's longstanding commitment to maintaining and expanding public access to the waterfront.

Public shoreline rights-of-way and other water access sites provide opportunities for walking, fishing, boating, kayaking, wildlife observation, and passive enjoyment of the shoreline. Continued maintenance, mapping, signage, and protection of these access points will help ensure long-term public access while preserving Bristol's coastal resources.

Planning Board Discussion Questions

- Does the inventory accurately reflect Bristol's parks, recreational facilities, and open space resources? Are there any significant resources or facilities that should be added?
- Overall, are Bristol's parks, recreational facilities and programs meeting the needs of the community? Are there facilities or programs that are currently lacking?
- Are there parks, athletic fields, waterfront facilities, or recreational amenities that should receive higher priority for future capital improvements?
- Do the goals, policies, and implementation actions reflect the community's priorities for parks, recreation, and open space over the next twenty years?

Outdoor Recreation and Open Space Implementation Actions (7/1/2026 DRAFT)			
ID	Action	Timeframe	Responsible Parties
OS-A1	Update the Bristol Open Space Plan to reflect completed projects, changing recreational needs, updated mapping, climate resilience priorities, and the recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan.	Short-Term	Department of Community Development
OS-A2	Prepare a Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Plan to prioritize investments in parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, courts, waterfront facilities, trails, accessibility improvements, and other recreational infrastructure.	Short-Term	Parks & Recreation Department
OS-A3	Develop and maintain a GIS-based inventory of parks, conservation lands, recreational facilities, trails, and public shoreline access sites to support planning, maintenance, and capital improvements.	Short-Term / Ongoing	Department of Community Development
OS-A4	Complete a comprehensive inventory and condition assessment of public shoreline rights-of-way and prepare a prioritized improvement program for signage, accessibility, parking, seating, erosion control, shoreline stabilization, and other public amenities.	Short-Term	Department of Community Development
OS-A5	Implement applicable recommendations of the Harbor Management Plan that improve public access to Bristol Harbor, Narragansett Bay, Mount Hope Bay, and the Kickemuit River, including improvements to boat launches, transient boating facilities, kayak launches, fishing access, docks, and shoreline amenities.	Ongoing	Harbor Commission
OS-A6	Complete improvements to the State Street boat ramp and public dock to improve public boating access, safety, accessibility, and long-term resiliency.	Short-Term	DPW
OS-A7	Expand connections between parks, neighborhoods, schools, conservation lands, downtown, and waterfront destinations by implementing priority bicycle, pedestrian, greenway, and trail improvements identified in adopted transportation and recreation plans.	Ongoing	Department of Community Development
OS-A8	Identify and pursue opportunities to expand Bristol's greenway and trail network through conservation easements, subdivision review, redevelopment projects, and partnerships with adjacent property owners and neighboring communities.	Medium-Term	Department of Community Development
OS-A9	Evaluate municipal parks, recreational facilities, waterfront infrastructure, and public open spaces for vulnerability to flooding, erosion, sea level rise, and extreme heat, and incorporate resilience measures into future capital improvement projects.	Short-Term / Ongoing	Department of Community Development/ DPW

OS-A10	Implement priority recommendations of the Bristol Tree Canopy Plan by expanding tree planting and increasing shade within parks, playgrounds, trails, school properties, parking areas, and other public open spaces.	Ongoing	DPW
OS-A11	Continue implementation of watershed restoration, stormwater management, and green infrastructure projects that improve water quality while enhancing recreational and ecological resources, particularly within the Silver Creek and Tanyard Brook watersheds.	Ongoing	DPW
OS-A12	Evaluate opportunities to expand passive and nature-based recreation opportunities throughout the community in response to changing recreational interests and community needs.	Medium-Term	Parks & Recreation Department
OS-A13	Pursue grants, partnerships, conservation easements, and strategic land acquisition opportunities to preserve significant open space, protect environmentally sensitive lands, improve recreational facilities, and expand public access to parks and the waterfront.	Ongoing	Department of Community Development
OS-A14	Partner with Roger Williams University, URI Cooperative Extension, the Bristol Land Conservation Trust, Audubon, and other organizations to expand environmental education, stewardship programs, and interpretive signage within parks, conservation lands, trails, and shoreline access sites.	Medium-Term	Parks & Recreation Department
OS-A15	Periodically evaluate recreational programming, facility conditions, and community needs to inform future capital improvements and updates to the Open Space Plan.	Ongoing	Parks & Recreation Department
OS-A16	Continue improving accessibility at parks, playgrounds, recreational facilities, public shoreline access points, trails, and waterfront amenities through implementation of ADA improvements and universal design principles as facilities are renovated or replaced.	Ongoing	DPW / Parks & Recreation Department
OS-A17	Evaluate the feasibility, potential partnerships, funding opportunities, and community demand for development of an indoor aquatics facility or other year-round aquatic recreation opportunities.	Long-Term	Town Administrator / Parks & Recreation Department
OS-A18	Periodically evaluate the capacity, condition, and utilization of athletic fields and recreational facilities to ensure they continue to meet community needs.	Ongoing	Town Administrator / Parks & Recreation Department

