



## **TOWN OF BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND**

### **PLANNING BOARD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE MEETING**

#### **Agenda**

**Thursday, December 18, 2025 at 5:30 PM  
Reynolds School Conference Room, 235 High Street  
Bristol, RI 02809**

**A. Pledge of Allegiance**

**B. Agenda Item**

**B1. Continued review of the draft Historic and Cultural Resource Element and draft map**

**B2. Continued Review of the draft Economic Development Element**

**C. Adjournment**

Date Posted: December 12, 2025

Posted By: mbw

Historic & Cultural Resources - Implementation Actions (DRAFT 12/10/2025)				
ID	Action Type	Action	Timeframe*	Responsible Parties
HCR-1	Planning & Survey / Documentation	Review and consider recommendations of the Historic Resources Re-Survey ( <a href="#">Final Report 2024</a> ) to guide future preservation priorities, including boundary updates for the Bristol Waterfront Historic District, evaluation of additional eligible areas (Northern Hope Street, Wood Street / "New Goree"), and preparation of nominations for at-risk properties (e.g., St. Michael's Bell Tower, St. Elizabeth's Church, Bay View Avenue residences, Linden Place outbuildings).	Short-Medium	Town Council; HDC; Dept. of Community Development
HCR-2	Planning & Survey / Documentation	Rezone the conserved Mt. Hope Area to Open Space.	Short	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council
HCR-3	Planning & Survey / Documentation	Pursue National Register nomination for the <a href="#">Mt. Hope Area</a> in partnership with the Pokanoket Tribe.	Short- Medium	Dept. of Community Development
HCR-4	Planning & Design / Interpretation	Prepare a vision plan for trails, access, and interpretation at the Waypoiset Preserve in partnership with the Waypoiset Preserve Trust and pursue the National Register nomination for the Waypoiset Area	Short	Dept. of Community Development
HCR-5	Partnerships & Capacity Building	Coordinate with RIDOT and the RI Scenic Roadways Board to review proposed changes and manage alterations, <a href="#">and reduce visual clutter</a> , along designated scenic corridors.	Ongoing	Dept. of Community Development; Planning Board
HCR-6	Regulatory & Policy Tools	Develop and adopt design standards to protect views, historic streetscapes, landscaping, <a href="#">street trees</a> , and stone walls along scenic routes.	Short	Planning Board; HDC; Town Council
HCR-7	Infrastructure & Design Coordination	Ensure roadway projects incorporate context-sensitive design (pedestrian/bike facilities, drainage, lighting) along scenic corridors.	Ongoing	DPW; Planning Board
HCR-8	Outreach & Interpretation / Partnerships	Collaborate on implementation of the Revolutionary Heritage Byway Corridor Plan ( <a href="#">cite</a> ), adding interpretive signage, heritage trail connections, and tourism promotion.	Short	Dept. of Community Development
HCR-9	Incentives & Funding	Pursue Scenic Byways grants and cultural tourism funding to support corridor preservation and enhancements.	Ongoing	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council
HCR-10	Outreach & Interpretation	Partner with Explore Bristol and Discover Newport to promote the Bristol-Newport Heritage Trail and Revolutionary Heritage Byway.	Medium	Dept. of Community Development
HCR-11	Facilities & Capital Improvements	Enhance public access to historic resource information through signage, wayfinding, walking tours, and digital mapping.	Medium	Dept. of Community Development

HCR-12	Regulatory & Policy Tools	Implement priority recommendations of the Historic District Vulnerability Assessment (2023) and <u>consider recommendations from any future Final FEMA/SHPO Building-Level Study to mitigate flood and sea-level-rise impacts on historic resources.</u>	Short	Dept. of Community Development; HDC
HCR-13	Incentives & Funding	Create a resilience funding and incentives toolkit (FEMA/RIEMA funds, CLG grants, tax credits, fee reductions).	Short	Dept. of Community Development; Finance Dept.
HCR-14	Education / Demonstration Projects	Select 2-3 demonstration projects in the BWHD to showcase resilience retrofits.	Short-Medium	Dept. of Community Development; HDC
HCR-15	Regulatory & Policy Tools	Adopt pre-approved emergency measures (temporary barriers, sandbag placement, stabilization protocols) for imminent flooding of historic structures.	Short	Emergency Management; HDC
HCR-16	Infrastructure & Capital Coordination	Coordinate public-realm adaptation projects (streets, sidewalks, drainage, utilities) in the BWHD to avoid impacts to historic resources.	Medium	DPW; RIDOT; HDC; CDD
HCR-17	Regulatory & Policy Tools	Amend local codes to remove barriers to preservation-compatible retrofits (e.g., height for elevated utilities, façade vent placement).	Short-Medium	Planning Board; Town Council; HDC; Building Official
HCR-18	Education / Training	Maintain annual training for HDC members for RIHPHC and land-use law requirements.	Ongoing	HDC
HCR-19	Incentives & Funding	<u>Explore and evaluate local preservation incentives, such as a local historic tax credit program or the waiving of permit and review fees to make historic rehabilitation more affordable for property owners.</u>	Short-Medium	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council; Planning Board
HCR-20	Regulatory & Policy Tools / Design Guidance	<u>Complete the grant-funded update of the HDC Design Review Guidebook to clarify standards, materials, and review criteria; include guidance for cost-effective modern materials and best practices. Incorporate photographs and renderings into the Guidebook to clearly illustrate preferred architectural treatments, materials and design approaches.</u>	Short	HDC; Dept. of Community Development; RIHPHC
HCR-21	Regulatory & Policy Tools / Design Guidance	<u>Develop enhanced HDC applicant guidance materials, including a short instructional video, example application packets, and recommended style books in the library for common architectural types within the district.</u>	Short	HDC; Dept. of Community Development
HCR-22	Regulatory & Policy Tools / Design Guidance	<u>Establish monthly open office hours with planning staff and/or HDC representatives to provide early technical guidance to applicants preparing for HDC review.</u>	Short; Ongoing	HDC; Dept. of Community Development

HCR-23	Regulatory & Policy Tools	Evaluate and implement an opt-in program allowing owners of historically significant properties outside the HDC boundary to voluntarily <u>(or with the encouragement of incentives)</u> join the overlay district for protection. Streamline zoning amendments and conduct owner outreach to encourage participation. Identify potential properties and provide outreach/marketing of the program.	Medium	Dept. of Community Development; Planning Board; HDC; Town Council
HCR-24	Education	<u>With partners, organize periodic tours of lesser-known historic sites, such as Wayposset, to broaden community awareness and appreciation of Bristol's cultural and architectural heritage.</u>	Long	
HCR-25	Regulatory & Policy Tools	Discourage demolition of historic buildings for parking; promote shared and structured parking integrated with pedestrian and bicycle access.	Ongoing	Planning Board; Zoning Board; Dept. of Community Development
HCR-26	Design Standards / Infrastructure Coordination	Adopt streetscape standards for the historic downtown (benches, lighting, signage, granite curbing) to guide RIDOT and local projects.	Short	DPW; Planning Board
HCR-27	Education	Expand heritage education programs in schools and through oral history projects.	Ongoing	School Dept.
HCR-28	Facilities & Capital Improvements	Establish a shared performing arts space through partnerships and adaptive reuse of underutilized historic or municipal buildings.	Medium	Town Council
HCR-29	Facilities & Capital Improvements	Re-purpose decommissioned historic school buildings (Guiteras, Reynolds, Byfield, Walley) for community or municipal uses <u>or private when applicable</u> and evaluate long-term lease or reuse opportunities.	<u>Short</u> - Medium	<u>Town Administrator</u> ; Town Council; Dept. of Community Development
HCR-30	Facilities & Capital Improvements	<u>Form a multi-stakeholder advisory committee (including HDC participation) to evaluate and recommend potential reuse strategies for decommissioned school buildings.</u>	<u>Short</u> - Medium	<u>Town Administrator</u> ; Town Council
	Planning & Design Guidance	Develop illustrated, preservation-sensitive design guidance for BWHD building types (elevation, utilities, materials) aligned with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.	Short	Dept. of Community Development; HDC
	Planning & Survey / Documentation	Maintain and update every 2-3 years a GIS inventory of at-risk historic and archaeological resources with condition, significance, and adaptation status.	Ongoing	Dept. of Community Development; HDC
	Regulatory & Policy Tools	Establish an HDC/Unified Development Review (UDR) streamlined review track for resilience retrofits with pre-application coaching and checklists.	Short	HDC; Planning Board; Building Official

	Partnerships & Capacity Building	Add archaeological review and salvage procedures in high-risk zones (e.g., Waypoint, downtown subsurface areas).	Short	Dept. of Community Development; RIHPHC
	Education / Outreach	Conduct annual workshops on resilience retrofits and publish a “BWHD Resilience Starter Pack.”	Ongoing	Dept. of Community Development; HDC
	Monitoring & Metrics / Documentation	Track metrics for resilience projects (retrofits, approvals, funding leveraged, flood claims reduced) and report annually.	Ongoing	Dept. of Community Development; HDC

## **HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Bristol's historic and cultural resources are central to the Town's identity, shaping the character of its neighborhoods, waterfront, civic institutions, and landscapes. From nationally recognized architecture and archaeological sites to long-standing cultural traditions, these resources help define Bristol's sense of place and contribute to its quality of life and economic vitality. Their continued protection requires thoughtful planning, consistent stewardship, and coordinated investments that support preservation, guide decision making, and ensure that these defining assets remain integral to the community's future.

### **2016 Comprehensive Plan Implementation Progress**

Since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Bristol has made significant progress in advancing the preservation and protection of its historic and cultural resources. Key accomplishments include:

- **Historic District Re-Survey:** Completed an updated survey and re-evaluation of the Bristol Waterfront National Register Historic District, clarifying boundaries, expanding the period of significance, and identifying previously omitted historic properties.
- **Historic Resource Vulnerability Assessment:** Completed a study identifying the most flood-vulnerable buildings within the Bristol Waterfront Historic District, informing local mitigation and adaptation strategies.
- **FEMA / SHPO Building-Level Resilience Study:** Partnered with the State Historic Preservation Office and FEMA on a study of nine commercial and public buildings in the downtown historic district. The draft report includes building-specific recommendations for flood and hazard mitigation.
- **Historic District Training:** Continued annual Historic District Commission (HDC) and staff training through the RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) Conference and the state-required land use training program.
- **Waterfront and Shoreline Access:** Advanced Secured public access along the harbor and boardwalk improvements along the waterfront through near completion of the Bristol Boardwalk, with only the segment adjacent to the Elks property remaining.
- **Town Common Zoning Amendments:** Updated zoning to reaffirm restrictions on residential uses and to support adaptive reuse of former school buildings for community and cultural purposes, consistent with the historic Town Common deed.

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- **Adaptive Reuse and Downtown Revitalization:** Supported major rehabilitation projects such as Robin Rug/Bristol Lofts and Unity Park, achieving long-standing goals for adaptive reuse and enhancement of the downtown historic and industrial fabric.
- **Mount Hope Area Preservation:** Advanced preservation of the Mount Hope area in partnership with the Pokanoket Tribe, Mt. Hope Farm, U.S. Forest Service and RIDEM and other stakeholders, strengthening cultural and historical stewardship of this significant landscape. Approximately 120 acres of open space have been protected for all as part of the Mount Hope Community Forest.
- **Designation of the Route 114 Revolutionary Scenic Byway.** Secured state and federal designation of Route 114 as the Revolutionary Heritage Scenic Byway (2021), highlighting the corridor's national historic and cultural significance, and awarded federal funding for upgrades.

### Goal HCR-1

Protect, preserve, and celebrate Bristol's historic and cultural resources as defining elements of the Town's identity, character, and future.

#### Policies

1. Maintain and expand documentation of historic and cultural resources through updated inventories and National Register listings.
2. Integrate historic resource protection into development review, zoning, and long-range planning processes.
3. Promote adaptive reuse of historic and underutilized buildings in ways that retain architectural integrity and contribute to neighborhood vitality.
4. Coordinate preservation efforts among Town boards, commissions, state agencies, and regional partners to ensure consistent policy and decision-making.
5. Safeguard archaeological and culturally sensitive sites consistent with state law and professional standards.
6. Promote expansion local, state, and federal tax incentives available for historic property rehabilitation and encourage their use among eligible Bristol property owners.

### Goal HCR-2

Foster public awareness, community participation, and cultural vitality that strengthen Bristol's shared heritage and sense of place.

#### Policies

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1. Support investment and programming that sustain Bristol's cultural institutions, traditions, and community events.
2. Expand interpretation of Bristol's history through signage, walking trails, and heritage programs on land and water.
3. Collaborate with local and regional organizations to promote heritage tourism consistent with preservation goals.
4. Encourage education, outreach, and volunteer initiatives that engage residents in the stewardship of historic and cultural resources.
5. Ensure the Historic District Commission (HDC) maintains clear and well-defined design standards and an efficient review process that balance preservation objectives with the practical needs of property owners.

**Goal HCR-3**

**Protect Bristol's historic waterfront resources from sea-level rise, flooding, and coastal hazards while preserving architectural integrity.**

**(Cross-reference with Resiliency & Climate Element)**

**Policies**

1. Promote resilience measures that preserve the architectural integrity and character of Bristol's historic waterfront resources.
2. Encourage the use of financial incentives, grant programs, and local support tools to advance preservation-compatible resilience improvements.
3. Foster collaboration among Town departments, state preservation agencies, and community organizations to coordinate district-wide resilience strategies.
4. Increase awareness and public understanding of risks and adaptation options for historic and archaeological resources.

**Goal HCR-4**

**Protect and strengthen Bristol's historic districts through updated documentation, expanded local protections, and comprehensive preservation planning.**

**Policies**

1. Maintain an up-to-date inventory of historic and cultural resources to inform preservation priorities and regulatory decisions.
2. Recognize and protect historically significant properties and districts that contribute to Bristol's architectural and cultural heritage.
2. Ensure that preservation planning reflects the breadth and diversity of Bristol's historical development, including its maritime, industrial, immigrant, and neighborhood histories.

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**Preserve and enhance Bristol's scenic and cultural landscapes, including its scenic corridors, to maintain community character and support heritage tourism.**

**Policies**

1. Preserve the scenic and historic character of designated roadways through coordinated planning, design standards, and review.
2. Collaborate with state and regional partners to steward and enhance scenic corridors, including implementation of the Scenic Roadways Stewardship Guidebook and the Revolutionary Heritage Byway Corridor Plan.
3. Promote awareness and appreciation of Bristol's scenic and historic routes through interpretation, marketing, and tourism initiatives.
4. Protect and maintain street trees as defining features of Bristol's historic and scenic corridors, ensuring their preservation as vital components of community character.
5. Promote the reduction of visual clutter within the Local Historic District by encouraging high-quality, coordinated signage, minimizing unnecessary signage, and maintaining streetscape features that reinforce the district's historic character.

## Historic and Cultural Resources: National Register Sites and Districts

Bristol's cultural and architectural heritage is nationally recognized through multiple listings on the National Register of Historic Places, the federal government's official list of sites and districts significant in American history, architecture, and culture. These designations affirm the importance of Bristol's resources, make properties eligible for certain state and federal tax credits and grants, and strengthen preservation planning.

The National Register districts and properties identified and mapped in this Plan (see Map HC1) illustrate Bristol's growth from a colonial seaport to a 19th- and 20th-century civic, cultural, and resort community. Although listing on the National Register does not prevent private owners from altering or demolishing a property, it provides a foundation for local stewardship, planning decisions, and funding opportunities. By including these resources within the Comprehensive Plan, the Town affirms that preservation is a priority in guiding land use and development decisions.

### National Register Historic Districts

- **Bristol Waterfront Historic District** (*listed March 18, 1975*) – Encompasses Bristol's downtown waterfront core, including Hope Street, Thames Street, and the harbor edge. The district contains a dense concentration of Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian architecture that reflects Bristol's early settlement, maritime trade, and 18th–19th century prosperity. Today, the district remains the heart of civic, commercial, and cultural life in Bristol.
- **Poppasquash Farms Historic District** (*listed June 27, 1980*) – A large cultural landscape on Poppasquash Neck that includes early farmsteads, Gilded Age estates, stone walls, and shoreline views. The district illustrates Bristol's transformation from agricultural land to a summer retreat for prominent families and retains a distinctive rural and scenic character.

### Individually Listed National Register Properties

- **Bristol County Court House, High Street** (*listed April 28, 1970*) – A monumental Greek Revival courthouse built in 1816, symbolizing Bristol's historic role as the county seat.
- **Bristol County Jail, 48 Court Street** (*listed April 24, 1973*) – Constructed in 1828, this austere stone jail is a rare surviving early correctional facility in Rhode Island.
- **Bristol Customs House and Post Office, Hope Street** (*listed May 31, 1972*) – A granite federal building erected in 1858, reflecting Bristol's 19th-century maritime commerce and government presence.
- **Joseph Reynolds House (National Historic Landmark), 956 Hope Street** (*listed May 31, 1972; NHL 1983*) – Built in ~~1700-1698~~ and significant for its Colonial architecture and role in Revolutionary War history. The house served as

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Marquis de Lafayette's headquarters in 1778 while he defended Bristol from the British and he also visited the Joseph Reynolds House on August 20, 1824, as part of his victory tour of the United States.

- **Longfield / Charles Dana Gibson House, 1200 Hope Street (listed July 17, 1972)** – A Gothic Revival estate built in 1848, later the home of illustrator Charles Dana Gibson.
- **Mount Hope Farm / Governor William Bradford House, Metacom Avenue (listed May 2, 1977)** – A Colonial-era farmstead and residence with deep roots in Bristol's 17th-century history, later expanded with farm buildings and open landscapes. George Washington visited the property in September of 1790 when he met with then Senator William Bradford.
- **Mount Hope Bridge, Route 114 (listed January 3, 1976)** – A 1929 suspension bridge linking Bristol to Portsmouth, notable as an example of early 20th-century bridge engineering.
- **Blithewold, Ferry Road (listed June 27, 1980)** – A turn-of-the-century estate with a grand mansion and nationally significant gardens, emblematic of Bristol's role as a summer colony for wealthy families.
- **Bristol Ferry Lighthouse, Ferry Road (listed February 25, 1988)** – An 1855 stone lighthouse built to aid navigation in Mount Hope Bay, part of Bristol's maritime heritage.
- **Benjamin Church Home / Benjamin Church Home for Aged Men, 1014 Hope Street (listed September 22, 1983)** – An Italianate institutional building constructed in the 1870s as one of the earliest elder care homes in the nation.
- **Juniper Hill Cemetery, 24 Sherry Avenue (listed June 3, 1998)** – A landscaped 19th-century “rural cemetery” featuring winding drives, funerary art, and mature trees, part of the garden cemetery movement.

### Bristol Waterfront Historic District Re-Survey

In 2023–2024, the Town of Bristol completed a comprehensive Re-Survey of the Bristol Waterfront Historic District (BWHD), which was originally listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The re-survey was conducted by Kathryn J. Cavanaugh, Historic Preservation Consultant and Brent Runyan, Runyan Heritage Associates and funded through a Certified Local Government (CLG) preservation grant. This was the first full re-evaluation of the district since 1978, and it provides the most current and detailed assessment of Bristol's historic resources.

The study documented a total of 1,132 resources within the district, including buildings, sites, structures, and objects. Of these, 813 were identified as contributing resources that retain historic integrity, while 278 were classified as non-contributing, and 41 were identified as needing further evaluation. The re-survey also assessed integrity issues, boundary inconsistencies, and gaps in the district's original 1975 nomination.

The re-survey revealed several important findings relevant to historic preservation and future planning in Bristol:

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- **Previously Omitted Properties:** The survey identified 56 historically and architecturally significant properties that were not included in the 1978 inventory list but are located within the district. These include residences along Bay View Avenue, the St. Michael's Church Bell Tower, the outbuildings of Linden Place, and St. Elizabeth's Church. Although not currently listed, these resources meet the criteria for National Register eligibility and warrant consideration for stronger protection.
- **Boundary Discrepancies:** The survey confirmed that the 1975 nomination contained mapping and documentation inconsistencies that left several historic areas outside the district boundary. For example, historically significant properties on Washington Street, Bay View Avenue, Bay Street, and Walley Street were excluded despite their contribution to Bristol's historic character.
- **Expanded Period of Significance:** The re-survey established that the district's period of significance extends from 1680 through 1974, reflecting not only Bristol's colonial and early maritime heritage but also the town's industrial growth and mid-20th-century community development.
- **Emerging Themes:** The study identified opportunities to broaden the scope of Bristol's documented history to include additional narratives of industrial development, immigration, and the New Goree neighborhood. Incorporating these themes into future preservation planning will support a more comprehensive understanding of Bristol's heritage.
- **Potential New or Expanded Districts:** The study also identified areas that could warrant expansion of the existing district or establishment of new historic districts. These include a potential Northern Hope Street Historic District extending beyond the current National Register boundary, and a potential Wood Street / "New Goree" Neighborhood District.

This recent historic resource re-survey recommends that the Town of Bristol update and expand its historic district documentation and protections to reflect new findings. Suggested actions include updating the National Register nomination, aligning local and national district boundaries, evaluating potential new districts, and advancing more diverse preservation efforts.

### Bristol Historic District Commission

The Bristol Historic District Commission (BHDC), established in 1987, safeguards the Town's historic development patterns, architectural character, and cultural landscapes. Its jurisdiction includes 619 properties, most within the Bristol Historic District, with 35 individually designated for review due to their exceptional historical or architectural significance.

[Map HD1 illustrates the National Register historic sites and districts together with the local historic district and locally designated individual historic sites. The table below lists the BHDC's individually designated properties, including their map ID, plat and lot number, and address.](#)

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Table HC1 - Individually Designated Properties - BHDC		
Map ID	Plat Lot	Address
1	23-139	132 Bayview Ave.
2	19-12	88 Church St.
3	180-21	Colt Lane - Coggeshall Farm
4	29-55	150 Franklin St.
5	29-53	160 Franklin St.
6	166-3	55 Ferry Rd.
7	165-7	Ferry Rd. - Blithewold
8	166-6	Ferry Rd. - Blithewold
9	165-8	77 Ferry Rd. - Blithewold
10	165-6	131 Ferry Rd.
11	165-2	151 Ferry Rd.
12	163-3	70 Griswold Ave.
13	7-11	900 Hope St.
14	3-97	956 Hope St.
15	2-5	996 Hope St.
16	83-35	1013 Hope St.
17	2-1	1014 Hope St.
18	118-80	1030 Hope St.
19	103-2	1200 Hope St.
20	103-15	1222 Hope St.
21	61-34	1237 Hope St.
22	55-4	1303 Hope St.
23	54-5	1343 Hope St.
24	89-59	1382 Hope St.
25	160-17	244 Metacom Ave.
26	136-4	250 Metacom Ave.
27	137-7	300 Metacom Ave.
28	138-1	616 Metacom Ave.
29	167-36	7 Old Ferry Rd.
30	130-2	60 Poppasquash Rd.
31	130-3	66 Poppasquash Rd.
32	183-37	106 Poppasquash Rd.
33	19-20	275 Wood St.
34	29-1	500 Wood St.
35	20-19	27 Cottage St.

The BHDC serves as a design review body for exterior changes to properties within the District. Any alteration, repair, demolition, or new construction requires a Certificate of Appropriateness to ensure compatibility with the property's historic character and the district as a whole. The Commission currently relies on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards but is in the process of developing locally written and tailored Design Guidelines, and The BHDC provides technical assistance to property owners, reinforcing its role as both a regulatory and educational body.

**Key features of the process include:**

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- ~~Mandatory review for exterior changes visible from a public way (interior work is not subject to review).~~
- ~~Landscaping and paint color are not subject to review, except for major site features such as walls or fences.~~
- ~~Administrative review available for minor projects.~~
- ~~Public hearings held monthly, where applications are reviewed and approved, denied, or continued.~~
- ~~Concept review option for early consultation with the Commission.~~

The District reflects Bristol's architectural and cultural heritage through its buildings, structures, sites, and settings. Preservation oversight by the BHDC ensures this legacy is protected while allowing for sensitive adaptation and reuse. By combining regulation with education and technical guidance, the Commission helps property owners understand best practices and supports preservation as a community partnership.

### HDC Priorities & Process Improvements

The Historic District Commission highlighted several priorities during review of the draft Historic & Cultural Resources Element, with a strong emphasis on improving the clarity, accessibility, and efficiency of the HDC review process. Members noted persistent challenges with applicants submitting incomplete or low-quality applications and recommended a suite of process improvements, including development of a short instructional video for applicants, expanded guidance materials (such as style books and sample application packets), and the establishment of monthly open office hours to support homeowners early in the design process. The HDC also recommended that forthcoming Design Standards include clear visuals such as photographs and renderings to illustrate expectations for alterations and new construction. Beyond process-focused improvements, the Commission emphasized voluntary participation opportunities, including creating a pathway for individual property owners to opt into historic district protections and promoting recognition programs rather than regulatory expansion outside the current Local Historic District. Additional priorities included organizing tours of lesser-known historic sites (e.g., Wayposset) to broaden public understanding of Bristol's cultural heritage; supporting state and local tax incentives for historic property rehabilitation; establishing a multi-stakeholder committee including historic to guide the reuse of decommissioned school buildings; and advancing efforts to minimize visual clutter such as signage (working with RIDOT) within the historic district.

### Climate Vulnerability of Historic Resources

Bristol's historic waterfront and cultural resources face mounting risk from sea-level rise and coastal flooding. The Town is committed to incorporating preservation considerations into its broader hazard mitigation, emergency preparedness, and capital planning efforts.

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In September 2022, with Certified Local Government (CLG) funding from the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), the Town of Bristol partnered with Preservation Strategies (Shantia Anderheggen) and the Bristol Historical & Preservation Society (Catherine Zipf) to assess the vulnerability of historic resources within the Bristol Waterfront Historic District (BWHD)—a National Register district listed in 1975—to two feet of sea-level rise and related coastal hazards. The study was designed to inform both this Comprehensive Plan and the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan.

### Key Findings

- At-risk inventory: More than 33 historically and architecturally significant properties within the BWHD are highly vulnerable under a 2-foot sea-level rise scenario within the 100-year flood zone.
- Building types: Residential structures—both single-family and multi-family—represent the largest share of at-risk resources, along with several key commercial and mixed-use properties.
- Value at risk: The assessed value of the 33 highest-significance properties is approximately \$40 million, underscoring both the cultural and economic stakes of coastal resilience.
- Escalating impacts: Tidal flooding and storm-related inundation are increasing in frequency, threatening building integrity, public safety, and the district's historic character.

Recommendations from the 2022 study have been integrated into this Plan's implementation actions, emphasizing a preservation-based resilience approach that protects both the physical integrity and cultural value of historic properties. The Town will continue to maintain an updated record of at-risk resources, develop preservation-sensitive design guidance for resilience improvements, and provide outreach and technical assistance to help property owners and boards make informed, character-conscious adaptation decisions.

### Archaeological Resources

Bristol's archaeological record demonstrates thousands of years of Native American presence. The most significant public example is the Waypoyset Preserve at the Narrows and Mount Hope. This site, recognized as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, underscores the long-term settlement and cultural importance of the Mount Hope area and its associations with Wampanoag history and the leadership of Metacom (King Philip).

In addition to prehistoric evidence, Bristol's historic waterfront has revealed important industrial-era remains. Excavations during redevelopment at the Belvedere and Thames Street area uncovered the remnants of an early nineteenth-century rum distillery. Archaeologists have noted this as one of the most significant rum-distillery finds in the Northeast, also considered eligible for the National Register. These findings

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highlight Bristol's maritime economy and its connections to international trade during the height of the town's port activity.

While precise archaeological site locations remain protected, the Comprehensive Plan identifies two broad zones of high archaeological sensitivity: the Mount Hope and Narrows area, due to extensive Indigenous use and cultural associations, and the downtown waterfront, where industrial and maritime archaeology can be expected. Bristol also forms part of the Sowams Heritage Area, a regional cultural landscape that encompasses the ancestral homelands of the Pokanoket people and other Indigenous communities. Sowams contains numerous archaeological and cultural sites tied to Indigenous history, early colonial settlement, and events such as King Philip's War.

### Cultural Assets and Community Life

Bristol is home to a wide range of cultural institutions that are central to the town's identity as both a historic destination and a vibrant community. Churches, ethnic and social clubs, and major landmarks such as the historic State House, Blithewold, the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, Coggeshall Farm, the Herreshoff Marine Museum, Linden Place Museum, the Bristol Art Museum, Mount Hope Farm, and the Audubon Society's Environmental Education Center contribute to Bristol's distinctive character. These institutions enrich community life, attract visitors, and generate economic activity, and town policies should continue to support their success and growth.

The community also benefits from an active cultural calendar. The Bristol Fourth of July Parade, organized by the Fourth of July Committee, anchors a series of events that celebrate civic pride. School-based programs such as Mosaico's Sense of Pride engage young people in local history and traditions. Volunteer organizations further contribute to this vitality: Bristol Blooms enhances Hope Street with seasonal plantings, while the Bristol Garden Club's Daffodil Program brings color and community spirit each spring through the planting of thousands of bulbs across town. Explore Bristol complements these efforts with coordinated marketing to promote tourism and cultural events.

The cultural assets described here are not a complete list, but they demonstrate the breadth of institutions, organizations, and events that contribute to Bristol's unique identity and its reputation as a cultural and historic destination.

### Key Cultural Institutions and Organizations in Bristol

#### Museums & Historic Sites

- **Historic State House** – A landmark of Rhode Island's early civic life and an enduring symbol of Bristol's role in state history.

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- **Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum** – A nationally recognized estate and public garden showcasing Gilded Age architecture and horticultural design.
- **Bristol Historical & Preservation Society (BH&PS)** – Maintains archives, collections, and programming that document and celebrate Bristol's history.
- **Coggeshall Farm Museum** – A living history site interpreting 18th-century agrarian life in Rhode Island.
- **Herreshoff Marine Museum** – Preserves Bristol's maritime heritage, particularly its legacy of yacht design and America's Cup racing.
- **Linden Place Museum** – A Federal-style mansion and cultural venue offering tours, exhibits, and events.
- **Bristol Art Museum** – A contemporary art museum hosting exhibitions, educational programs, and community arts initiatives.
- **Mount Hope Farm** – A historic farmstead and community gathering place that hosts markets, events, and public programming.
- **Audubon Society Environmental Education Center** – Provides exhibits, trails, and programming focused on coastal ecology and environmental education.
- **Wayposet Preserve Trust** – land trust that manages a 28-acre open space preserve off Narrows Road to the Mount Hope Bay that is open to the public for passive recreation and has been recognized a historical heritage site.

### Arts, Culture & Events

- **Bristol Theatre Company** – A community theatre group founded in 1983 that continues to produce performances, but is currently lacking a permanent venue
- **Bristol Fourth of July Committee** – Organizes the nationally renowned Fourth of July Parade and a series of related community events.
- **Live Music & Festivals** – Bristol hosts a summer concert series and PorchFest on High Street each fall, both of which bring residents and visitors together to celebrate music and community.
- **Mosaico, Inc.** – Provides cultural and educational programming, including the Sense of Pride initiative in local schools.

### Volunteer & Civic Organizations

- **Bristol Blooms** – A volunteer group that plants and maintains hanging flower baskets along Hope Street.
- **Bristol Garden Club** – Enhances the Town's landscape and civic pride, most notably through its Daffodil Program which has planted thousands of bulbs across Bristol.
- **Explore Bristol** – Coordinates marketing and tourism initiatives to promote Bristol as a cultural and historic destination.

**DRAFT** 2026 BRISTOL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**Scenic Corridors, Byways & Heritage Recognitions**

Bristol's historic streetscapes and waterfront roadways are central to the Town's identity and its tourism economy. Several corridors are formally recognized for their scenic and cultural value at both the state and federal levels.

**State Scenic Roadways.** Hope Street and Ferry Road (State Route 114) and High Street (local road) are designated as State Scenic Roadways by the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Board. This designation requires review of roadway alterations, tree trimming, and other changes to ensure that scenic qualities are preserved. The designation applies to the full length of Route 114 from the Warren town line to the Mount Hope Bridge (known locally as Hope Street and Ferry Road) and to High Street, providing an added layer of protection by requiring State review for certain projects.

**Revolutionary Heritage Byway.** The Revolutionary Heritage Byway, designated a National Scenic Byway in 2021, follows Route 114 through Bristol from the Warren town line south through the historic downtown, past waterfront parks, cultural landmarks, and civic institutions, to the Mount Hope Bridge. This corridor showcases nationally significant historic, cultural, and scenic resources. Recent federal funding has supported improvements that balance safety and infrastructure upgrades with preservation of its distinctive character.

[A Corridor Management Plan, completed as part of the Revolutionary Heritage Byway nomination process \(c. 2000/2021\), outlines the corridor's interpretive themes and long-term preservation and tourism goals. Continued coordination with RIDOT and Statewide Planning will support implementation of its recommendations within Bristol.](#)

The Town recognizes that scenic byways are more than transportation routes. They are living cultural landscapes that define Bristol's sense of place, enhance visitor experience, and contribute to the local economy. Protecting these corridors requires coordinated planning and initiatives across transportation, land use, and historic preservation.

In 2025, Bristol became home to a new international heritage designation with the installation of *Our Ancestors Come With Us*, a bronze sculpture in Independence Park. The park was recognized as a UNESCO "Site of Memory" within the Routes of Enslaved Peoples Project, acknowledging Bristol's role in the transatlantic slave trade and honoring the resilience of African-descended peoples. The designation broadens the community's understanding of its past and creates opportunities for interpretation, education, and tourism. Along with Bristol's inclusion in the Sowams Heritage Area, it

**DRAFT** 2026 BRISTOL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

strengthens Bristol's cultural identity and underscores its national and international significance.

### **Relevant State Guide Plan Elements & Reference Documents & Consistency**

This element aligns with and supports several components of the Rhode Island State Guide Plan that support address historic preservation, scenic resource protection, cultural landscapes, and context-sensitive planning. Key reference documents include: The following State Guide Plan elements and reference documents provide the policy framework with which this Comprehensive Plan is consistent:

1. **[Element 210 – Historic Preservation \(2020–2027\)](#)**  
*Protecting Our Legacy of Buildings, Places, and Culture.* Provides statewide preservation goals, policies, and strategies (survey updates, Certified Local Government program, climate risk, inclusion of underrepresented heritage, easements, demolition delay).
2. **[Element 121 – Land Use 2025](#)**  
State's overarching land use policy framework — directing growth while conserving resources and protecting community character, historic landscapes, and scenic roadways.
3. **[Element 152 – Ocean State Outdoors: Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP, 2019\)](#)**  
Guides recreation and open space, and explicitly links cultural resources, scenic landscapes, and heritage tourism to quality of life.
4. **[Element 611 – Moving Forward RI 2040 \(Long-Range Transportation Plan\)](#)**  
Rhode Island's statewide transportation plan; includes policies on context-sensitive design, bike/pedestrian infrastructure, safety, and resilience — directly relevant for scenic corridors and byway management.

This Comprehensive Plan element is consistent with:

- [Element 210 – Historic Preservation, by advancing local preservation goals, supporting survey updates, adaptive reuse, and protection of cultural resources.](#)
- [Element 121 – Land Use 2025, by directing growth and conservation in ways that preserve Bristol's historic landscapes and scenic roadways.](#)
- [Element 152 – Ocean State Outdoors \(SCORP\), by recognizing the role of cultural landscapes, scenic corridors, and heritage tourism in recreation and community vitality.](#)
- [Element 611 – Moving Forward RI 2040, by promoting context-sensitive design and multimodal improvements along scenic byways.](#)

**DRAFT** 2026 BRISTOL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**Scenic Roadways & Byways References**

In addition to the State Guide Plan, the Town also coordinates with RIDOT's Scenic Roadways Program and applies the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Stewardship Guidebook to manage designated corridors.

- RIDOT Scenic Roadways Program – Designates Hope Street (Route 114) and High Street in Bristol as official scenic roadways, requiring review of changes.
- Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Stewardship Guidebook – Guidance on managing scenic corridors (viewsheds, landscaping, signage, lighting).
- Revolutionary Heritage Byway – A state scenic roadway (2000) and National Scenic Byway (2021) that runs through Bristol; recently awarded federal funding for upgrades.

**Consistency with the State Guide Plan and State Standards**

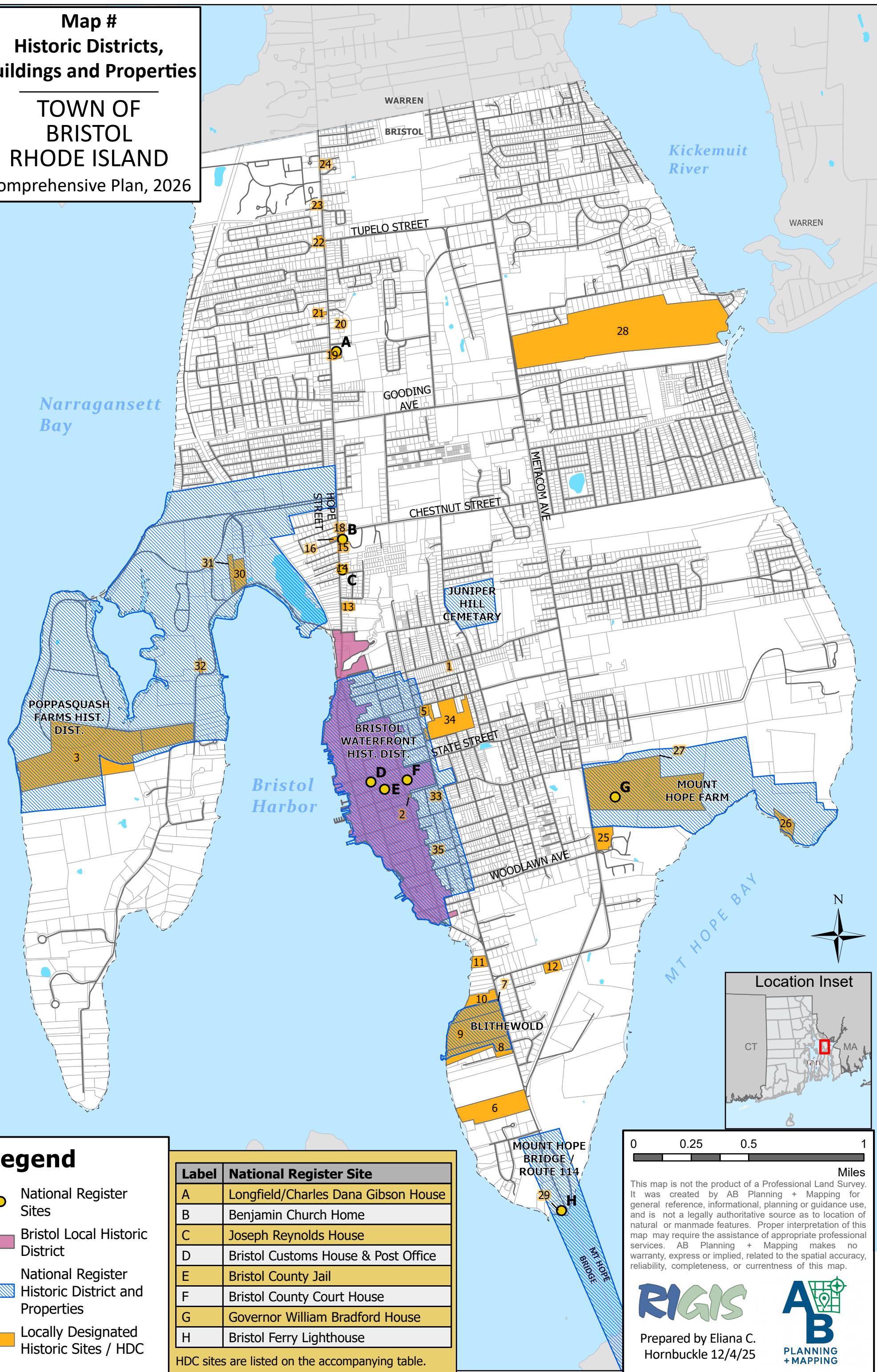
This Comprehensive Plan element is consistent with:

- Element 210 – Historic Preservation, by advancing local preservation goals, supporting survey updates, adaptive reuse, and protection of cultural resources.
- Element 121 – Land Use 2025, by directing growth and conservation in ways that preserve Bristol's historic landscapes and scenic roadways.
- Element 152 – Ocean State Outdoors (SCORP), by recognizing the role of cultural landscapes, scenic corridors, and heritage tourism in recreation and community vitality.
- Element 611 – Moving Forward RI 2040, by promoting context-sensitive design and multimodal improvements along scenic byways.

The Town also coordinates with RIDOT's Scenic Roadways Program and applies the Rhode Island Scenic Roadways Stewardship Guidebook to manage designated corridors.

**Map #**  
**Historic Districts,  
Buildings and Properties**

**TOWN OF  
BRISTOL  
RHODE ISLAND**  
Comprehensive Plan, 2026



Economic Development – <b>Draft</b> Implementation Actions			
ID	Action	Responsible Parties	Timeframe
ED-1	Consider and develop 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 appropriate performance standards.	Dept. of Community Development; Zoning; Town Council	Short
ED-2	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, to ensure appropriate land-use transitions and buffering.	Dept. of Community Development; Zoning; Town Council	Short–Medium
ED-3	Advocate for state-level refinements to the new by-right adaptive reuse law to prevent unintended loss of commercial space in key business districts.	Town Council; Dept. of Community Development	Short–Medium
ED-4	Encourage appropriate reinvestment in aging commercial and industrial buildings, including exploration of grant programs, matching funds, or façade/rehab support.	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council	Medium
ED-5	Develop strategies to address high commercial rents and limited affordable space for small businesses.	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council; Business Community	Medium
ED-6	Create incentives and/or disincentives to encourage occupancy and reuse of vacant storefronts and underutilized commercial buildings.	Dept. of Community Development; Town Council	Short–Medium
ED-7	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-8	Continue to support downtown housing development 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-9	Study long-term parking management options for downtown that protect walkability and historic character while addressing peak-season pressures.	Dept. of Community Development; Police Department	Medium
ED-10	Maintain and strengthen Explore Bristol as the Town’s primary tourism and visitor economy partner; explore funding and staffing models to expand capacity.	Town Administrator / Partners: Explore Bristol; Economic Development Partners	Ongoing
ED-11	Improve tourism-related infrastructure, 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-12	Support networking and cluster development among blue-economy firms to enhance industry synergy.	Town Administrator; Town Council	Ongoing
ED-13	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-14	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-15	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-16	Participate in the Ready, Set, Rhody vulnerability assessment for the Thames Street business district and incorporate the program's recommended resilience and infrastructure improvements into local economic development, capital planning, and downtown revitalization efforts.	Dept. of Community Development	Short–Medium –Long
ED-17	Partner with RWU to expand workforce pathways in marine trades, engineering, blue-tech, and hospitality, including apprenticeships and local job pipelines.	BWRSD; Dept. of Community Development	Ongoing
ED-18	Rezone preserved farmland and properties with agricultural conservation easements into the Agricultural zoning district.	Planning Board; Town Council	Short
ED-19	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-20	Facilitate leasing of publicly owned or conserved land for small-scale or community farming.	Town Council	Ongoing

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# 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 "Destination Bristol" branding and marketing efforts that highlight the community's cultural, historic, and waterfront assets.
4. 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 enterprises.economy.
2. Foster entrepreneurship and small business growth through partnerships, business incubators, and shared workspaces.

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3. Inventory and market vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial properties suitable for redevelopment or adaptive reuse.
4. Encourage property and facility upgrades that improve accessibility, energy efficiency, and site appearance.
5. Prepare for climate impacts by helping local businesses develop continuity and resilience strategies to protect jobs and assets.

### 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. Modernize utilities, broadband, and transportation systems to meet 21st century business and workforce needs.~~
- 2.1. Align infrastructure and capital improvement investments with economic development priorities and areas suitable for reinvestment or redevelopment.
- 3.2. Incorporate flood resilience, sustainability, and green infrastructure features into public and private redevelopment projects.
- 4.3. Coordinate with regional and state agencies to fund and implement infrastructure projects that support economic growth and climate adaptation.
- 5.4. 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.

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- Promote public art, cultural programming, and ~~creative industries~~the creative economy as integral components of Bristol's economic vitality.

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

#### Policies

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

~~Ensure reliable, affordable, high-capacity broadband and digital infrastructure town-wide to support education, remote and hybrid work, local businesses, and municipal operations. Expand broadband and technology access to support education, remote work, and business operations.~~

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

#### Policies

- Preserve remaining farmland and high-quality agricultural soils ~~for continued agricultural use~~ through voluntary conservation tools ~~and~~, purchase of development rights, ~~and~~ ~~compatible~~while ensuring existing zoning ~~continues to support agricultural uses~~.
- Encourage the active use of idle or underutilized agricultural land for farming, horticulture, or community agriculture.
- Support aquaculture and shellfish enterprises in coordination with state agencies and local maritime stakeholders.
- 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.

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### 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 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 Rehabilitation Limited 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, recreational, and civic uses.

### 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.

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### 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.
- Upgrades at the Rogers Free Library, including improved work/study rooms and the new public maker space supported through the Community Learning Center Grant, ARPA funding, and other grants, 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 upgrades to the Town boat ramp.
- 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 to 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, collaboration with partners, and promotion of local food initiatives such as farmers' markets and "farm-to-table" and "boat-to-table" programming.

### 5. 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. The redevelopment of the former Robin Rug mill will deliver 127 new residential units, bringing new residents to the downtown area, supporting local shops and restaurants, and strengthening walkability and year-round activity. Additional phases of downtown revitalization and adaptive reuse remain future priorities.

## Working Draft – 2026 Bristol Comprehensive Plan

### BRISTOL ECONOMIC STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

#### Strategic Regional Location

~~Bristol is conveniently located within southern New England's major travel and economic corridors. The town is approximately 30 minutes from Providence, 1 hour and 15 minutes from Boston, 2 hours from Hartford, and about 3 hours and 30 minutes from New York City. This central location provides businesses with access to multiple labor pools, visitor markets, and regional industry clusters. Bristol also promotes its competitive position through a business friendly environment that includes one of the lowest commercial tax rates in Rhode Island and a federally designated Opportunity Zone that offers additional incentives for investment. Bristol is situated within southern New England's broader travel and economic corridors, providing 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 plays a central role in attracting new residents, businesses, and investment.

#### Presence of Roger Williams University

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 attract visitors, support small businesses, and reinforce Bristol's identity as a lively and creative coastal community.

## Working Draft – 2026 Bristol Comprehensive Plan

### 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 for business continuity.

#### High Cost of Real Estate

High housing costs make it difficult for employers to attract and retain workers, while high commercial rents limit the ability of small businesses and start-ups to secure affordable storefronts, workshops, and office space.

#### State Land-Use Mandates and Loss of Local Control

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 may need to advocate for state-level adjustments to ensure adaptive reuse does 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, but any parking management strategies must maintain Bristol's walkable, historic downtown and not involve adding supply that detracts from character.

#### 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.

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### Seasonal Demand Fluctuations

Tourism-dependent businesses experience seasonal peaks and slower winter months, affecting staffing and year-round financial stability.

### Skilled Workforce Gaps

Marine trades, manufacturing, and blue-economy firms face challenges recruiting workers with specialized skills, despite nearby training resources.

### Economic Data and Local Economic Conditions

Economic indicators are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (2013 and 2023). Employment and unemployment data reflect ACS measures for residents age 16 and over. These indicators provide a snapshot of household assistance levels, poverty, and basic labor-force participation in Bristol. The information offers baseline context for understanding local economic conditions and helps inform future economic development strategies.

#### Key Economic Indicators (ACS 5-Year Estimates)

##### Household Assistance

- Households receiving SNAP benefits (2013): 9.1%
- Households receiving SNAP benefits (2023): 5.6%

##### Poverty

- Individuals below poverty level (2013): 7.7%
- Individuals below poverty level (2023): 6.4%

##### Employment & Labor Force

- Residents age 16+ employed (2013): 86.5%
- Residents age 16+ employed (2023): 88.1%
- Residents age 16+ unemployed (2013): 8.5%
- Residents age 16+ unemployed (2023): 2.7%

### Local Employment Structure (QCEW Data)

QCEW data provides a snapshot of the jobs physically located in Bristol, regardless of where the workers live. The dataset reflects employment within both private industries and government employers, including public schools and municipal operations.

The industries with the largest numbers of jobs located in Bristol include:

- **Educational Services (1,356 jobs)** – the largest employment sector in town, reflecting local schools, Roger Williams University, and other education-related employers.

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- **Government (1,141 jobs)** – including public school employees, municipal staff, police, fire, and other public-sector workers whose workplaces are in Bristol.
- **Accommodation & Food Services (952 jobs)** – representing restaurants, hospitality, and tourism-related businesses that serve residents, students, and visitors.
- **Manufacturing (912 jobs)** – a significant presence in Bristol, including marine trades, precision manufacturing, and specialty production.
- **Health Care & Social Assistance (728 jobs)** – reflecting local medical offices, clinics, and care providers.
- **Retail Trade (609 jobs)** – including downtown shops, grocery stores, and other retail establishments.

Several of these sectors also make major contributions to total wages. The highest overall wage-paying sectors located in Bristol include:

- **Educational Services (\$78.7 million)**
- **Government (\$69.6 million)**
- **Manufacturing (\$59.9 million)**
- **Health Care & Social Assistance (\$38.5 million)**
- **Accommodation & Food Services (\$27.2 million)**
- **Professional & Technical Services (\$27.6 million)**

These industries represent the core of Bristol's job base and include longtime anchors such as Roger Williams University, marine and specialty manufacturers, health care providers, and hospitality businesses serving the community and visitors.

	Bristol		
	Number of Units	Average Employment	Total Wages
<b>Total Private &amp; Government</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>7,600</b>	<b>425,429,708</b>
<b>Total Private Only</b>	<b>854</b>	<b>6,459</b>	<b>355,790,567</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	1	*	*
Mining	0	0	0
Utilities	0	0	0
Construction	96	404	27,494,150
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>59,911,312</b>
Wholesale Trade	82	188	19,941,409
Retail Trade	55	609	24,535,556
Transportation & Warehousing	5	7	448,533
Information	36	50	4,130,393
Finance & Insurance	31	141	12,092,950

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Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	25	68	3,641,895
Professional & Technical Services	159	285	27,611,563
Management of Companies & Enterprises	2	*	*
Administrative Support & Waste Mngmnt.	50	225	12,622,043
<b>Educational Services</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1,356</b>	<b>78,734,589</b>
Health Care & Social Assistance	72	728	38,466,041
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	19	206	5,660,234
<b>Accommodation &amp; Food Services</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>27,209,454</b>
Other services (except Public Administration)	84	308	12,248,507
Unclassified Establishments	0	0	0
Government	16	1,141	69,639,141

Source: RIDLT, Quarterly Census of U.I.- Covered Employment and Wages, City and Town Report, 2022 AnnualData compiled May 2023, subject to revision.

\* Some data are not shown due to the possibility of identifying data of a specific employer.

\*\* Statewide - employment in multiple towns, at unknown locations, or outside RI.

Data compiled May 2025, subject to revision.

### INSERT ADDITIONAL BRISTOL ECONOMIC DATA

#### INDUSTRY PROFILES

Bristol's diverse economy includes both long-standing industries and emerging sectors:

##### Marine Trades & Advanced Manufacturing

Bristol is home to skilled manufacturers producing composites, specialty equipment, and naval architecture services. These industries benefit from access to Bristol Harbor, RWU's marine and engineering programs, and the growing blue-economy cluster in Bristol (described in more detail in the section below).

##### Tourism, Hospitality & Cultural Industries

Historic downtown, waterfront amenities, and cultural venues contribute to a robust visitor economy. Year-round programming—festivals, regattas, concerts, and heritage events—extends the tourism season and supports local businesses.

##### Higher Education & Research

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Roger Williams University is a major employer and innovation driver. Collaborations with the Town and private sector support internships, applied research, planning and design services, and emerging blue-tech initiatives.

### Professional & Technical Services

Small professional firms—including engineering, architecture, IT, consulting, and design—represent an expanding sector driven by remote/hybrid work and Bristol's high quality of life.

### Health Care & Social Assistance

Local medical practices, outpatient facilities, and senior-care providers meet regional needs and support a steady employment base.

## The Blue Economy

The blue economy, defined by the State as the sustainable use of the ocean and Rhode Island's water assets to create a resilient economy with good-paying jobs, is an area where the state has long been a national leader. Industries contributing to the blue economy include ports and shipping, tourism and recreation, offshore renewable energy, marine trades, aquaculture and fisheries, seafood processing, and defense. Statewide studies estimate that blue-economy sectors account for a significant share of Rhode Island jobs and economic output, reflecting the importance of ocean-related activity to the state's overall prosperity.

As a coastal community with a deep maritime heritage, Bristol plays a meaningful role in this statewide blue economy. Bristol Harbor has historically supported shipbuilding, repair, and commercial maritime activity and continues to host full-service marine trades and boatyards, such as Bristol Marine, that provide skilled jobs and year-round economic activity. Roger Williams University further anchors Bristol in the blue economy through its waterfront campus, marine science facilities, and programs such as the Center for Economic and Environmental Development and the emerging Blue Solutions Institute, which support marine research, aquaculture, coastal resilience, and blue-tech entrepreneurship.

The Herreshoff Marine Museum in Bristol recently received a \$59,000 innovation grant from the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation to expand its capacity for marine-industry testing and commercialization of ocean technologies.

Meanwhile, the redevelopment of Unity Park has become a major hub for the state's blue economy initiative; the state awarded it approximately \$2.68 million in tax credits and sales-tax rebates to support adaptive reuse and manufacturing space for ocean-technology firms.

In June 2025 the state announced a \$9.7 million award under the Innovation Campus Initiative for two campuses, including a \$4 million grant for the “Blue Robotics Lab” at Unity Park to accelerate undersea robotics commercialization.

Expanding and attracting additional businesses to Bristol that support the growing blue economy—such as marine trades, aquaculture and shellfish enterprises, marine technology and engineering firms, environmental and coastal consulting, and water-based tourism and recreation—is highly desirable and

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offers significant potential to add jobs to the local economy. Aligning local land use, workforce partnerships, and waterfront planning with the State's blue-economy strategies positions Bristol to capture a larger share of this growth in the coming decade.

**Table EC1. Representative Blue-Economy Firms in Bristol (2025)**

<b>Firm / Institution</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Blue-Economy Segment</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Flux Marine	Unity Park	Electric propulsion; marine technology; advanced manufacturing	Designs and manufactures high-performance electric outboard motors; recognized statewide as a leading blue-economy innovator.
Saab, Inc. – Autonomous & Undersea Systems	Unity Park	Autonomous underwater vehicles; defense; ocean technology	Establishing major AUV manufacturing and testing facility; supported by state incentives; cornerstone tenant of Bristol's blue-economy hub.
Sea Legs	Unity Park	Amphibious marine mobility	Provides amphibious craft technology; part of growing ocean-tech cluster at Unity Park.
Endurance Clean Energy	Unity Park	Clean energy; climate resilience; blue/green tech	Develops clean-energy and storage projects; complements marine and blue-economy innovation at Unity Park.

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Herreshoff Marine Museum & America's Cup Hall of Fame	Burnside St. /Bristol Harbor	Maritime heritage; sailing; workforce development; ocean-tech partnerships	Hosts sailing, composites, and marine programs; securing grants for marine innovation space and water- access testing facilities.
Bristol Marine (Wardwell Boatyard)	Bristol Harbor	Marine trades; boatbuilding and repair; working waterfront	Full-service boatyard providing repair, refit, and haul-out services; anchors Bristol's working waterfront economy.
Bristol Harbor Group, Inc.	Bristol Harbor / 99 Poppasquash Road	Naval architecture; marine engineering	Designs and engineers commercial vessels and advanced hull types; regional leader in marine design services.
Zim Sailing	Ballou Blvd.	Sailing equipment; marine manufacturing	Designs and distributes performance dinghies; supports competitive and recreational sailing markets.
Kinder Industries	Wood Street	Marine fabrication; canvas and enclosures	Provides custom marine covers, enclosures, and fabric products for recreational and competitive boats.
Quantum Sails – Bristol Loft	Tupelo Street	Sailmaking; performance sailing services	Designs and repairs sails for cruisers and racing vessels; reinforces Bristol's role in the sailing

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and marine-services sector.

### Economic Development Programs and Partners

#### *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

#### *Ready, Set, Rhody*

The Town was selected for the Ready, Set, Rhody initiative, a statewide program supporting climate and infrastructure resilience in vulnerable commercial districts. Through this effort, Bristol's Thames Street district will receive a state-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 strengthen downtown's long-term economic health and protect local businesses from climate-related disruptions.

#### *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

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economic development efforts by offering services that help strengthen local businesses and support a coordinated economic identity for the East Bay region.

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

### Geographic Areas of Economic Development Focus

Future economic development efforts should prioritize reinvestment and compatible growth within the following areas:

**1. Unity Park and Surrounding Industrial Properties**

Support the emerging blue-economy cluster, encourage adaptive reuse, and maintain space for marine trades and advanced manufacturing.

**2. Downtown Bristol / Thames Street Corridor**

Strengthen year-round business vitality, improve resilience to coastal flooding, support upper-story housing, and maintain the historic character that underpins economic activity.

**3. Hope Street North and Wood Street Corridors**

Encourage small-business growth, mixed-use redevelopment, and façade and streetscape improvements in areas experiencing transition.

**4. Metacom Avenue / Route 136 Corridor**

Continue long-term efforts to improve corridor transportation, access, and overall appearance along this busy mixed-use roadway. Identify and help market larger parcels suitable for reinvestment or redevelopment.

**5. Working Waterfront & Harbor Area**

Preserve Bristol's marine trades, promote water-dependent economic growth, and coordinate local regulations and investments with the State's Blue Economy initiatives.

### Public Input on Economic Development

Community feedback emphasized the need to support economic growth while preserving Bristol's historic character and coastal identity. Participants expressed a desire to maintain the Town's unique sense of place, including its walkable downtown, working waterfront, and cultural assets, while encouraging reinvestment and a stronger local business environment.

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Residents highlighted the importance of diversifying the business base, revitalizing vacant or underutilized properties, and continuing to support small, locally owned establishments. Many noted that Bristol's waterfront and historic resources present opportunities to attract visitors and strengthen the economy, provided these efforts remain consistent with neighborhood character.

Overall, community members were optimistic about Bristol's economic future and stressed the importance of balanced growth that expands opportunities for residents and businesses while honoring the Town's historic and coastal heritage.

### Major Employers

Major employers in Bristol include Roger Williams University, the Bristol-Warren Regional School District, municipal and state government offices, and a range of marine trades and manufacturing firms. Local media, community service providers, and employers in healthcare and retail also contribute to the town's job base."

<u>Employer</u>	<u>Sector</u>
<u>Roger Williams University</u>	<u>Higher Education</u>
<u>Bristol-Warren Regional School District</u>	<u>Education</u>
<u>Town of Bristol / State of RI</u>	<u>Government</u>
<u>East Bay Media Group (Phoenix-Times)</u>	<u>Media / Publishing</u>
<u>Bristol Marine &amp; Marine Trades Firms</u>	<u>Marine / Manufacturing</u>
<u>Composite Energy Technologies</u>	<u>Manufacturing</u>
<u>Flux Marine</u>	<u>Marine Technology</u>
<u>Stop &amp; Shop</u>	<u>Retail</u>
<u>FCC Bristol</u>	<u>Nonprofit / Community Services</u>

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### For Discussion/Input from Planning Board members / Stakeholders

*Which businesses / industries sectors are most important to Bristol's economy today, and which are growing or declining?*

*Are there specific areas or properties in town where economic activity is changing and/or that may be suitable for reinvestment or adaptive reuse?*

*What opportunities do you see for the Town to better support existing businesses or key local industries (e.g., marine trades, tourism, blue economy, small businesses)?*

*What barriers (regulatory, permitting, infrastructure, etc.) make it harder for businesses to operate or grow in Bristol?*

*Are there specific programs, incentives, or partnerships the Town should strengthen or develop to support local economic development?*

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### State Standards and Guidance for Economic Development *(for reference purposes not for inclusion)*

Standard 6.1 Describe the types and patterns of economic activities that exist within the municipality.

- a. Identify the business and industry sectors within the municipality that are significant employers, large revenue generators, or substantial contributors to the tax base;
- b. (Recommendation) Include an inventory of significant agricultural operations by identifying: i. The scale of the agricultural sector in the community, including supporting uses such as processing centers, distribution centers, etc.; ii. The locations and types of active agricultural operations; and iii. Farmlands that have been protected from development, even if currently idle.
- c. Identify the business, industry, and agricultural sectors within the municipality that are expanding or shrinking; and
- d. Discuss any areas of the community where the economic activity, including agriculture, is changing, whether in terms of size, form, or nature of activity.

Standard 6.2 Assess and discuss the ways in which the local government can improve the local business climate.

- a. Discuss the significant opportunities that exist to further support the businesses within the community's major or expanding business sectors;
- b. Discuss any issues that may exist related to the services and infrastructure provided for local businesses;
- c. Discuss any local economic or regulatory issues affecting the business and industry sectors within the municipality;
- d. Describe any local economic development plans, programs, or other incentives currently in effect or offered by the municipality; and
- e. (Recommendation) Discuss the opportunities to further support agriculture relative to capacity, access, and partnerships.