



# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction, Vision, and Goals**

*Working Draft*

This document is presented in its current form as a preliminary draft for public review. We encourage all stakeholders to provide comments as your input will play a vital role in shaping the final version of the Comprehensive Plan. Please email comments to [compplan@townofriverheadny.gov](mailto:compplan@townofriverheadny.gov).

Please note that the document will be further refined once comments are received from the community. Since it is an interim document, it is in a raw formatted form. The revised draft will be arranged in a more graphic format with photos, figures, and other visual elements to enhance clarity and understanding. Thank you for your time and participation in this important planning process.

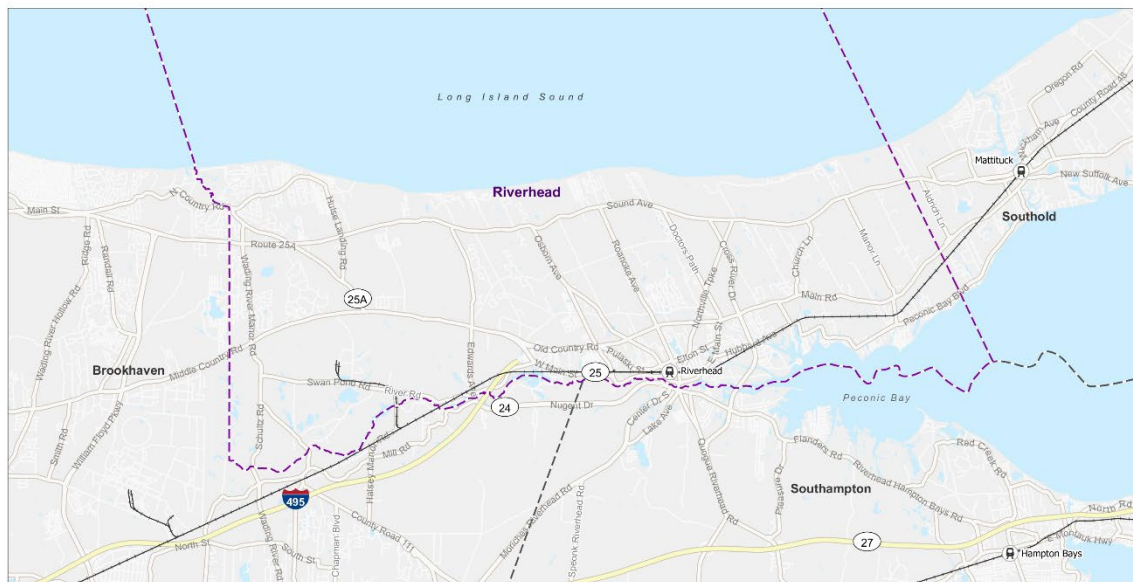
***Submitted by BFJ Planning***

***January 26, 2024***

## INTRODUCTION

### Comprehensive Plan Overview

As the gateway to the East End of Long Island, Riverhead is known for its scenic beauty, historic character, agricultural activity, and diverse range of businesses, cultural activities, and outdoor recreation opportunities. While the Town's location presents many opportunities, it also has its challenges such as increased development pressures, traffic, and other environmental impacts. One of the long-term challenges for the community will be to manage growth effectively and balance the needs of residents, businesses, and the environment.



Town of Riverhead Context

- Town of Riverhead Boundary
- Municipal Boundary
- LIRR Train Station
- Railroad
- Highway
- Other Major Road
- Water



Given this challenge, the Town initiated a planning process to update its comprehensive plan, which essentially acts as a roadmap, steering Riverhead towards a more sustainable, equitable, and livable community. The collaborative planning process involved elected officials, Town staff, content experts, community organizations, volunteers, and individual citizens.

The comprehensive plan represents a significant initiative, marking the first update since the adoption of the previous plan in 2003. Although New York State doesn't mandate a specific frequency for plan updates, the widely accepted best practice is to revisit and revise the document approximately every decade. This approach ensures the integration of current community-

established principles, guiding the systematic and balanced future development across economic, social, physical, environmental, and fiscal dimensions.

The adoption of a Comprehensive Plan is essential for various reasons. Firstly, it provides a clear vision for Riverhead's future, offering a framework for decision-making. This ensures that the community's needs and aspirations are at the forefront of all policies and actions undertaken by the local government. Recognizing the inherently political nature of this process, the plan accommodates diverse views, values, and interests, fostering consensus among stakeholders with differing perspectives.

Moreover, the Comprehensive Plan promotes coordinated development, steering away from haphazard growth that may lead to sprawl, congestion, and other issues. By guiding the location, design, and intensity of land uses and infrastructure, it establishes a rationale for zoning decisions, ensuring alignment with the community's overarching goals and vision.

In addition, the plan facilitates decision-making by providing a basis for informed evaluations of proposed developments and initiatives. This empowers local government officials to align these proposals with the municipality's overall goals and priorities and aids in securing funding for crucial infrastructure and other projects.

This Comprehensive Plan is not just a product of extensive time and effort; it signifies the continuation of a transformative process that involves altering existing conditions, regulations, and procedures within the Town. Some changes outlined may necessitate further, more detailed studies and plans, emphasizing the ongoing need for sustained public involvement to bring the plan's objectives to fruition.

The document is organized into 13 topics and an appendix featuring an Implementation Matrix. While there may be some duplication between chapters for clarity, there should be no conflict among them. The Implementation Matrix serves as a "To Do" list, outlining specific tasks, responsible parties, and proposed timeframes. This structured approach facilitates the Town's ability to review and report on the progress of the plan's action items, providing a tangible guide for effective implementation.

## **Planning Process**

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This Comprehensive Plan was formed through a community-led effort which began in 2020. The planning process involved a series of community workshops, forums, and studies, all of which contributed to the drafting of this document. The process was managed by a Steering Committee, who met regularly with the Town's planning consultants to plan for meetings, provide background information, and review reports as needed. This plan was developed in two distinct stages, which are described below.

### *Stage 1: 2020-2022*

This planning effort builds off research and public engagement completed by the Town and its previous consultant team between 2020 and 2022. During this period, the consultants, in coordination with the Town and a Steering Committee (formerly the Central Advisory Committee or

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“CAC”) conducted public outreach and developed several documents which reported on existing conditions, trends, and goals. The public engagement program included the following in-person and virtual activities:

- 4 Hamlet-focused public meetings,
- 10 Topic-oriented public meetings,
- A public survey with 467 submissions,
- An online interactive map with approximately 110 comments, and
- Stakeholder interviews

The project website includes documentation from all work completed during this period, including summaries of public workshops and all stakeholder meetings, a summary of the public survey, notes from stakeholder interviews, and documentation of other comments. The prior consultant team developed an Economic and Housing Trends Analysis which is further discussed in the Housing and Economy chapters. Extensive roadway data and traffic counts were also conducted during this stage. In 2022 the consultants were released from their contract.

### *Stage 2: 2023-2024*

In March 2023, BFJ Planning was hired by the Town to compile prior work and complete the planning process. The first deliverable was to create an interim summary document which was a starting point to solicit feedback on the baseline of issues and opportunities identified by the prior consultant team. This document provided a preliminary assessment of key issues organized by topic area. It also summarizes key takeaways from technical reports, meeting summaries, and feedback from prior public outreach.

The Public outreach component for the second stage of work included a wide array of meetings to get feedback from the diversity of stakeholders within the community. This process included two public workshops, summaries of which can be found on the Town’s website. The first workshop was held on April 22, 2023 at the Suffolk Theater (~120 participants). The second public workshop was on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at Town Hall (~70 participants). The planning process also included a series of targeted meetings to discuss content and advance the plan including the following:

- Monthly meetings with the Steering Committee
- Weekly meetings with Town Staff
- Briefings with the Town Board
- 10 Focus Group Meetings, and
- Other targeted stakeholder outreach (i.e., department heads, business owners, and civic groups)

Questionnaires were also sent to Riverhead’s established boards, commissions, and civic groups to provide them with an opportunity to formalize their recommendations for the Plan. Of the 29 groups that the questionnaire was sent to, responses were received from the following 11 groups:

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- Environmental Advisory Committee
- Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)
- Landmarks Preservation Commission
- Architectural Review Board (ARB)
- Riverhead Recreation Committee
- TDR Committee
- Open Space Committee
- Wading River Civic
- Greater Jamesport Civic Association
- Heart of Riverhead
- Greater Calverton Civic Association (GCCA)

## Vision and Goals

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A vision statement functions as a compass for the comprehensive plan; it encapsulates the desired future state of the community, outlining the key values, priorities, and objectives that residents, businesses, and stakeholders aim to achieve collaboratively. The following vision statement strives to inspire a sense of purpose, unity, and direction, guiding strategic decisions and actions towards the creation of a sustainable, inclusive, and thriving community.

**Our vision for the Town of Riverhead is a vibrant and sustainable community that balances economic growth, environmental stewardship, and quality of life for all residents. We envision a future where our downtown area is thriving with local businesses, cultural attractions, public art, and recreational opportunities that cater to residents and visitors of all incomes, ages and abilities. We will continue to support farming and the agricultural sector, which provide economic opportunities and is central to *the region's economy, natural beauty, and rural charm*. We will strive to improve economic opportunities for our residents, but plan for the impacts of expanding tourism and economic development to ensure that adverse impacts are minimized, and that the community remains enjoyable for both residents and visitors.**

**We are a welcoming and inclusive town and will work to enhance those attributes so that all residents can continue to thrive and enjoy a high quality of life. We will continue to work collaboratively with our community partners to provide housing opportunities that are attainable for a range of income levels, quality education, and essential services, while preserving our rural character and promoting smart growth.**

**We must also build a sustainable future which supports the long-term wellbeing of our environment and our residents. We strive to become a model for sustainable development by incorporating innovative technologies, green infrastructure, and community-driven initiatives that address our environmental, social, and economic needs.**

## **Goals**

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Chapters 3 through 12 outlines specific goals, accompanied by a set of recommendations for Town to pursue in the next decade and beyond. These goals, reflecting community aspirations, underscore the commitment to sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development. The structured framework not only guides the town's growth but also prioritizes enhancing residents' quality of life while preserving Riverhead's unique character. Visions for those chapters follow.<sup>1</sup>

### **Demographics and Housing (Chapter 3)**

1. Continue to promote housing affordability and the availability of quality affordable and workforce housing in Riverhead and throughout the region.
2. Encourage more diverse housing types to accommodate a wide range of income levels and to address evolving housing needs.
3. Support creation and protection of homeownership for low- and moderate-income households.
4. Promote inclusive housing policies and accessible design standards to ensure that housing is available to people of all ages and abilities.

### **Economic Development (Chapter 4)**

1. Reassess the development strategy for EPCAL to ensure the economic and community benefits of proposed projects align with local needs and that impacts are proactively addressed.
2. Encourage appropriately scaled and designed development in industrial areas which better aligns with the character and needs of the surrounding areas.
3. Emphasize Downtown as the civic, cultural, specialty shopping and historic center of Riverhead.
4. Enhance the Route 58 corridor to create a more attractive destination, improve accessibility, and cultivate a hospitable environment for regional and local traffic.
5. Guide responsible land use planning in hamlet centers.
6. Balance fiscal and community benefits when considering new development and zoning decisions.
7. Continue to work with local partners on economic development initiatives.
8. Promote sustainable economic growth and development and foster the creation of employment opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1 is the Introduction and does not include goals or recommendations. Chapter 2 provides information about existing land use and zoning. Land use and zoning goals and recommendations are found in Chapter 13: Future Land Use. There is not a vision for land use and zoning as the recommendations relate to all of the other chapters.

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9. Achieve a harmonious blend of tourism and rural charm, making Riverhead an attractive destination while upholding residents' quality of life.
10. Promote more environmentally friendly businesses.

### ***Transportation and Mobility (Chapter 5)***

1. Preserve and enhance historic and scenic corridors while improving traffic flow and safety.
2. Support economic growth at EPCAL through a well-defined transportation plan.
3. Reduce congestion, increase safety, and enhance mobility on existing facilities without overbuilding.
4. Foster increased use of public transportation.
5. Encourage use of alternative forms of transportation (pedestrians and bicyclists).
6. Coordinate transportation improvements with adjacent towns and other agencies.

### ***Agricultural Lands (Chapter 6)***

1. Improve the marketplace for the TDR program.
2. Increase use of TDR through administrative improvements and access to new funding mechanisms.
3. Preserve agricultural land through other means.
4. Foster the local agricultural economy and heritage.
5. Support agritourism as a source of alternative income for farms, while ensuring that regulations prevent negative impacts such as traffic and noise.
6. Help promote Riverhead's agricultural industry and products.

### ***Natural Features and Environmental Resources (Chapter 7)***

1. Protect and preserve the ecological integrity of Riverhead's central Pine Barrens area and the water quality of Long Island's sole source aquifer.
2. Protect the quality of ground water and surface waters.
3. Limit future increases in impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff to help reduce flood impacts and surface water pollution.
4. Conserve the coastal features of the Long Island sound including bluffs, shoreline, and dunes.
5. Protect and restore environmentally sensitive lands, wetlands, and marine habitats.
6. Encourage ecofriendly landscaping and maintenance techniques.
7. Increase the town's administrative capacity for working on natural resource conservation efforts.



***Open Space, Parks, and Recreation (Chapter 8)***

1. Expand recreational opportunities to address additional community interests and needs.
2. Activate the Peconic riverfront and other navigable waterways with recreation opportunities and good stewardship.
3. Encourage open space preservation and public access opportunities in new development.

***Scenic and Historic Resources (Chapter 9)***

1. Protect scenic resources and views.
2. Continue to identify, document, and promote public awareness of historic resources.
3. Protect historic resources from destruction, neglect, or diminishment of character, and encourage the faithful restoration and adaptive reuse of historic structures.
4. Protect the visual quality of scenic corridors and work to improve the scenery along other roads.
5. Ensure that design of new development is compatible with its surroundings and scenic and historic resources.

***Community Facilities (Chapter 10)***

1. Ensure public services have sufficient facilities and resources.
2. Enhance responsiveness and service quality of emergency services.
3. Strengthen community well-being through enhanced programming and facilities for all ages.
4. Support expansion of school district facilities to accommodate growing demand.
5. Increase childcare options and promote affordable childcare.
6. Strengthen the town's capacity to address diverse community health and human service needs.

***Infrastructure and Utilities (Chapter 11)***

1. Continue to meet emerging solid waste management challenges as disposal opportunities evolve.
2. Improve the efficiency of the existing town water supply system and ensure its ability to expand to address future demand.
3. Continue to protect groundwater through modern wastewater treatment strategies
4. Coordinate with electric, natural gas, cellular telephone/Wi-Fi, cable tv, and internet service providers.
5. Address localized highway flooding issues.

***Sustainability and Resilience (Chapter 12)***

1. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and proactively adapt to climate change.
2. Embrace renewable energy sources to achieve the state's targets of 70% renewable sources by 2030 and 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040.
3. Promote sustainable building practices, landscaping, and design.

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4. Promote sustainable transportation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
5. Reduce waste and promote circular economy waste management practices.
6. Promote a green economy and green finance, technology, and jobs.
7. Mitigate the effects of flooding, sea level rise, and storm surge.
8. Ensure the safety of residents, employees, and visitors in the event of an emergency and strengthen the town's emergency preparedness.

## **Recent Plans and Projects**

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The process of developing this Plan takes into consideration other planning initiatives undertaken by the Town, County, State, and other groups, agencies. A summary of relevant plans can be found on the project website and recommendations from these documents have been woven into the various chapters of the plan where applicable. Some notable Town initiatives from the last 10 years are discussed below.

In 2012, the Town studied land uses along the Route 25A corridor in Wading River. The report provided zoning recommendations to guide community supported development in the Wading River hamlet. The Town subsequently expanded the MRP Zoning Use District to guide development towards residential uses and away from large retail uses in the northwest part of town.

Downtown Riverhead has undergone a series of strategic planning initiatives aimed at revitalizing and enhancing its urban landscape. In 2016, the Town prepared a Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Nomination Study, which included the Downtown area. Goals of the study were to overcome several obstacles preventing redevelopment/revitalization; to identify key strategic/ areas where redevelopment/preservation will act as catalysts for revitalization of the area as a whole; and to address numerous abandoned properties as well as underutilized sites that have not achieved their highest potential. As the 2016 BOA study progressed, additional elements were added into the program based on input from the community and Town. One element was a Creative Placemaking Plan, which aimed to make Riverhead conducive to hosting large-scale placemaking events. The goal was to increase the Town's appeal and vibrancy through Creative Placemaking and other initiatives.

The Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan (2020) focused on the Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area, introducing amendments to the zoning code to stimulate redevelopment and initiating the TOD Overlay District. Following this, the Downtown Parking Study in 2020 addressed the growing demand for parking driven by increased development, presenting short- and long-term solutions. Subsequently, the 2023 Strategic Parking Plan updated the 2020 version to accommodate new developments, recommending the construction of two proposed garages at Griffing Avenue and Railroad Avenue, and Roanoke Avenue and 1st Street, while addressing a projected parking deficit.

Furthering the momentum, the Downtown Riverhead Activation Plan in 2022 explored strategies to connect Main Street to the Peconic River and activate the riverfront destination. Simultaneously, the Riverhead Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) received a \$10M grant in 2021, leading to the creation of a Strategic Investment Plan prioritizing projects with significant positive impact. Additionally, the

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adoption of the Downtown Riverhead Pattern Book in 2021 established guiding principles for new policies and projects in the Main Street Zoning Use District. The Town Square Design project in the same year engaged the community in designing a public gathering space with pedestrian connectivity from Main Street to the riverfront. Finally, the First Mile/Last Mile MTA Pilot Study in 2022 aimed to improve station accessibility, focusing on bike and micro-mobility infrastructure around the Riverhead Station to encourage alternative modes of transportation. Collectively, these efforts represent a comprehensive approach to transforming Downtown Riverhead into a vibrant and accessible community hub.