



# First Public Workshop Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

## Introduction

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The Town of Riverhead is updating its Comprehensive Plan to provide a long-range 'blueprint' for the future of the Town. It details the community's vision for the future and guides Riverhead on a wide range of issues such as future decisions on land use and development, capital spending, and general policy direction. The Comprehensive Plan also provides strategies addressing economic development, farmland preservation, the agricultural economy, housing, transportation, sustainable development, climate resiliency, natural resource preservation, and water quality.

The Comprehensive Plan will reflect changes that have taken place since the prior plan was adopted in 2003. It also incorporates policies from the Downtown Revitalization Initiative, the Downtown Riverhead Pattern Book, and other recent plans. This planning effort builds off of research and engagement completed by the Town and its previous consultant team between 2020 and 2022. In 2023, BFJ Planning was hired by the town to complete the Comprehensive Plan. LKMA was reinstated as the subconsultant for transportation and infrastructure.

Public engagement is the foundation of Riverhead's Comprehensive Plan. As part of the community engagement process, the Town hosted the first public workshop with the new consultant team on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. The workshop was held at the Suffolk Theater in Riverhead, and approximately 120 residents and community members attended.





The purpose of this workshop was to present a summary of work completed to date and to discuss priority issues and opportunities that the Town should address. The feedback will help to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan is representative of the community as a whole and that it includes realistic and publicly supported goals and objectives. There will be a second public workshop in the Fall and subsequent public hearings before the Plan is considered for adoption.

A recording of the meeting and copy of the presentation can be accessed via the Comprehensive Plan website: <https://townofriverheadcomprehensiveplanupdate.com>

## Project Team

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This Comprehensive Plan update is being led by the Steering Committee, with assistance from BFJ Planning. The steering committee consists of:

- Yvette Aguiar, Supervisor
- Devon Higgins, Deputy Supervisor
- Tim Hubbard, Councilman
- Robert Kern, Councilman
- Joann Waski, Planning Board
- Dawn Thomas, Community Development Department
- Sid Bail, Community Liaison
- Robert Carpenter, Long Island Farm Bureau
- Mark Haubner, Environmental Advisory Committee
- Andrew Mitchell, Peconic Bay Medical Center
- Amy Loeb, Peconic Bay Medical Center and Peconic Bay Medical Center Foundation
- Mitch Pally
- Michael Florio, Long Island Builders Institute
- Patrick Fedun

## Workshop Summary

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The public workshop consisted of a presentation, breakout group discussions, and a 'report back' session where participants shared what was discussed in each breakout group. Supervisor Yvette Aguiar opened the public workshop with a welcome and then handed the presentation over to BFJ Planning. Noah Levine of BFJ planning introduced the project team and gave an overview of the morning's agenda, the planning process, community engagement, and the project timeline.

Following, the consultant team presented a summary of priority issues and opportunities identified through the work completed to date. These issues were grouped by categories such as housing, economic development, and agriculture.

Noah Levine provided a quick snapshot of the Town's demographic and housing trends and discussed priorities related to housing affordability, housing needs, code enforcement, and quality of life issues and opportunities. Frank Fish of BFJ Planning presented an overview of economic development, including socioeconomic trends and commercial and industrial development. He summarized priorities regarding the Town's agricultural economy and rural character. Ray DiBiase of LKMA discussed transportation and mobility, followed by Emily Junker of BFJ Planning who presented priorities for community facilities, scenic and historic resources, and sustainability and resilience.



After the conclusion of the presentation, the attendees were split into seven breakout groups for roundtable discussions moderated by Frank Fish, Noah Levine, and Emily Junker of BFJ Planning, Raymond DiBiase and Vincent Corrado of LMKA, Councilman Robert Kern, and Janice Scherer (Comprehensive Plan Liaison for Riverhead). The moderators started discussions by asking the group to introduce themselves and share their top priorities for the Comprehensive Plan to address in the short-term (next 2 years) and long-term (5-10 years) timeframes. The summaries in the following section reflect topics that were discussed in each breakout group.



## Breakout Room Questions

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1. Go around the table and introduce yourselves. Tell us your top priority to address, both in the short term (next 2 years) and the long term (5-10 years).
2. Discussion (think about the following questions)
  - Is our summary of priority issues accurate?
  - What topics do we need to focus on?
  - Which areas in Town need the most planning attention?
  - Do you have suggestions on how to get more people involved in this and other town planning projects?



## Breakout Group Key Takeaways

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A summary of the key takeaways from the roundtable discussions is provided below. Comments which were repeated in multiple groups are not repeated.

### **Residential Development**

- Many participants expressed concern about the design of new residential development. New development should fit within the current character of the community and address the needs of aging populations.
- Meeting attendees agreed that they were concerned over the pace of development in the town and would like to have a transparent and cumulative understanding of all new development.

### **Industrial Development**

- Meeting attendees were concerned over the impact of future development at EPCAL as well as potential industrial development (i.e. warehouses) in surrounding areas in Calverton.

### **Traffic**

- People generally agreed that truck traffic will increase with the development of warehouse facilities.
- The need for improved public transit service and frequency – both for buses and trains.
- Truck traffic and subsequent noise was highlighted as a concern for senior communities, especially in areas with frequent shortcutting through residential streets

### **Zoning**

- Attendees agreed that TDR needs to be improved to protect agricultural resources and organic farming.
- There was support to use zoning to control, rather than prevent, all new development.
- Attendees were passionate about preserving the town's agricultural community.

### **Environmental Issues**

- Attendees were concerned with environmental pollution in surface water due to fertilizer and gas runoff, as well as decreased air quality due to industrial development.
- Attendees opposed tree clearing for new construction.
- People were generally concerned with battery energy storage and safety, especially its proximity to residential uses.

### **Open Space**

- Meeting attendees supported maintaining and preserving remaining open space, as well as creating a better open space network.

### **Outreach and Engagement**

- There was support for more meetings and engagement with the agricultural community to better understand their needs.
- Attendees agreed that they would like to make the engagement process as diverse and representative of their community as possible.



- Attendees raised concerns about lack of participation from the Hispanic community, a group which demographic trends showed the largest growth.

#### **Community Resources**

- Attendees voiced the need for accessible and affordable medical care and substance abuse treatment, as well as more support for unhoused populations.

## Individual Breakout Group Discussion Notes

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### Breakout Group 1

*Moderator: Emily Junker*

#### **Census and Map Lines**

- Group members expressed concern over the accuracy of census boundaries. For instance, a resident of Jamesport stated that the boundaries of the Census Designated Place do not reflect what the community identifies to be Jamesport.

#### **Traffic**

- Sound Avenue was discussed as a hot spot for truck traffic. There is also a perceived safety issue with drunk driving, although this hasn't been confirmed with crash data.
- Group members expressed concern over trucks using the ferry to cross from Connecticut and bypass NYC, leading to increased truck traffic on local Riverhead roads.
- Group members found Edwards Ave and Route 25 intersection improvements to be disruptive.
- Attendees stated that school overcrowding results in limited space for parents to pick up their children, so they are parking in the neighboring Exxon Lot.

#### **Housing**

- Group members discussed that much of the new multi-family development is being concentrated in downtown and they would like to see alternative locations.
- The breakout group expressed the need for more homeownership opportunities.

#### **Agriculture**

- The group agreed that the TDR program is broken, and the farmers who have used it did so not because it was a good deal, but because it was the only option.
- Attendees stated that the way that TDR is currently set up undervalues the farmers' land and does not incentivize developers.
- Group members expressed a need for someone in the Town Hall or Planning Department to keep track of TDR transactions.
- The group discussed Calverton being a historically farming community. Attendees stated that Calverton, like other parts of Riverhead, wants to maintain its character.

#### **Alternative Modes of Transit**

- Group members would like to see more frequent alternative modes of transportation, such as light rail, electric buses, Hampton Jitney, and increase MTA train service.
- Attendees stated that biking is currently unsafe due to a lack of bike lanes. Additionally, private property owners have placed plantings and mail boxes in the public right-of-way.



### **Community Engagement and Outreach**

- The group would like to see more inclusive outreach, particularly to Hispanic residents. This includes translating all materials into Spanish.

### **Downtown**

- Group members would like the BID/Chamber of Commerce to do a better job of promoting local businesses to visitors who come for the theater and other attractions.
- Concerns were raised regarding the hours of businesses downtown. Group members stated that downtown Riverhead restaurants and bars are not open late enough to capture after-theater crowds from the Suffolk.
- Attendees agreed that there is a negative perception of safety downtown and would like an increased police presence to make patrons feel safer spending time in downtown.
- Group members felt that downtown is not fully revitalized, despite reaching the apartment cap. They would like more information on downtown development projects, such as Town Square.

## Breakout Group 2

*Moderator: Vincent Corrado*

### **Zoning**

- The group agreed that zoning changes should promote economic development and job creation.

### **Climate Change**

- Group members would like to the Town to adopt pro-active approach to climate change, rather than reacting to the effects of climate change.
- Beach erosion and flooding were discussed, particularly on the site of Town Square project which regularly floods.

### **Community Engagement and Outreach**

- Attendees explained that the Town website is confusing, and it is difficult to find information about the Comprehensive Plan online.
- The group agreed that all meetings should be held on weekends.

### **Traffic and Transportation**

- Group members expressed that the availability of parking downtown is major asset, and are concerned that increased development downtown could lead to a shortage of parking.
- Coordination with Town of Southold is needed for traffic improvements on Sound Avenue.

### **Industrial Development**

- The group was very concerned over development at EPCAL and agreed that it should not be approved until the Comprehensive Plan is complete. They would also like to see air quality, noise, traffic, and water examined further.

## Breakout Group 3

*Moderator: Noah Levine*

### **Environmental Issues**

- Group members highlighted runoff into the Peconic River as a major environmental issue,
- Concern was voiced over the utilization of farmland for solar farms. Group members would rather encourage solar on roofs (i.e. big box stores and EPCAL).
- Group members stated that all vertical farming should utilize green building practices.

### **Vision**



- The group agreed that a clear vision needs to be developed for the town to ensure that infrastructure is provided to support any growth.

#### **Public Safety**

- Group members voiced concerns over crime issues downtown, yet believe the police have been a positive presence.

#### **Traffic**

- Attendees described the town's unique positioning as a gateway to North Fork as both positive and negative.
- Group members stated that there needs to be an alternate route to 495 if major development occurs at EPCAL. However, implementation is difficult due to issues with DEC and Pine Barrens.
- Group members noted that traffic is bad on 58, but land on feeder roads parallel to 58 could help provide access.

#### **Universal Design**

- The group agreed that it is important to incorporate universal design principles into new development to ensure it goes beyond just ADA standards due to the needs of the aging population.

#### **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)**

- Group members voiced the need to update the town code because it is not currently working.
- Attendees stated that the Town should encourage ADUs in pre-existing homes.

### Breakout Group 4

*Moderator:* Ray DiBiase

#### **Sustainability**

- Group members stated that they would like to see more renewable energy and green infrastructure, but would like to see other alternatives than solar.
- The opportunity for anaerobic digestors and recycling alternatives was discussed.
- Group members would like to see off-shore wind turbines explored further.
- Attendees would like to see more green spaces downtown, including community gardens supported through public/private partnerships.
- "Farm to table" restaurants were discussed as an opportunity.

#### **Residential Development**

- Attendees expressed concern that the increase in residential development will impact community resources.

#### **Industrial Development**

- The group expressed concern over the proximity of industrial zones to residential uses, i.e. the Riverhead Logistics Center.
- Attendees voiced that the potential EPCAL and cargo airport would be a detriment to the community.
- The effect industrial development will have in Calverton was discussed.
- Group members would like to see a harder look at the contributions of the Riverhead IDA and believe that the IDA should focus on endorsing projects with uses that match the Town needs.

#### **Zoning**



- Group members stated that RLC zoning is inconsistent and special permitted uses should be removed.
- Attendees voiced that an elected body should not approve special permits like conditional uses.

## Breakout Group 5

*Moderator:* Robert Kern

### **Industrial Development**

- Group members discussed the benefits and drawbacks of high cube warehousing versus traditional warehousing.

### **Traffic**

- Traffic on Sound Ave and Sound Road was highlighted as an issue.

### **Community Resources**

- Group members discussed crime as a significant issue in Riverhead, specifically in reference to the downtown's proximity to prisons.
- The group agreed that resources for homeless populations was a priority.
- The need for accessible mental health resources was discussed.
- Group members agreed that they would like to improve the perception of the school system.

## Breakout Group 6

*Moderator:* Frank Fish

### **EPCAL**

- The group agreed that the critical issue of EPCAL is its size and impacts, including the 35,000 daily truck trips it would create.
- Attendees expressed concern over the Comprehensive Plan's ability to influence EPCAL's outcome. The first step for EPCAL is planned for Oct, 2023 and the Comprehensive Plan will not be finished until Feb, 2024, however the SEQR EIS is not likely to be in any approval stage until late 2024. Group members stated that the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations should be an alternative in the DEIS.
- Group members questioned landings and take-off, which will be controlled by FAA and not locally.
- Health and safety related to what is being stored in the warehouses was discussed as a major concern. The group agreed that chemical storage of any kind should be carefully regulated or prohibited.
- Attendees expressed concern over home values and the potential for industrial accidents.
- Ground water management was discussed as an issue due to its location in a sensitive D-3 ground water area.
- One group member stated that current allowable building coverage is 40% and it should be closer to 17% according to a recent unidentified study.





### **Traffic**

- Group members discussed the need to identify Middle Road as a quiet zone.

## Breakout Group 7

*Moderator:* Janice Scherer

### **Zoning**

- The breakout group acknowledged that the current Comprehensive Plan does not account for many new land uses, such as logistics warehousing, anaerobic digesters, fuel cells, and battery storage.
- The group agreed that the Board should enact a moratorium on specific uses that require Code amendments.
- Group members agreed that they would like zoning to retain what they love about the Town, including scenic vistas, farms, and beaches with public access and parking.

### **Community Engagement and Outreach**

- The group advocated for diverse residents on committees.
- Attendees discussed the opportunity for Channel 22 to host more information, including public meeting information and notices in Spanish.

### **Industrial Development**

- Group members would like to discuss EPCAL and high cube warehousing at future meetings.
- The proposed warehouse on Manor Road was discussed as a major concern. Group members were concerned with impacts, such as noise air pollution, and recharge, where there is now a forest.

### **Traffic**

- Attendees expressed dissatisfaction with the urbanization of roadways due to truck traffic. They stated that there is not enough public engagement regarding roadway design in places like the Edwards Ave. intersection.
- Traffic resulting from fast food uses across from Home Depot at Mill Road was discussed as a negative impact.

## Appendix A – Meeting Recording

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The recorded meeting can be watched on YouTube, accessed via the project page:

<https://townofriverheadcomprehensiveplanupdate.com/>