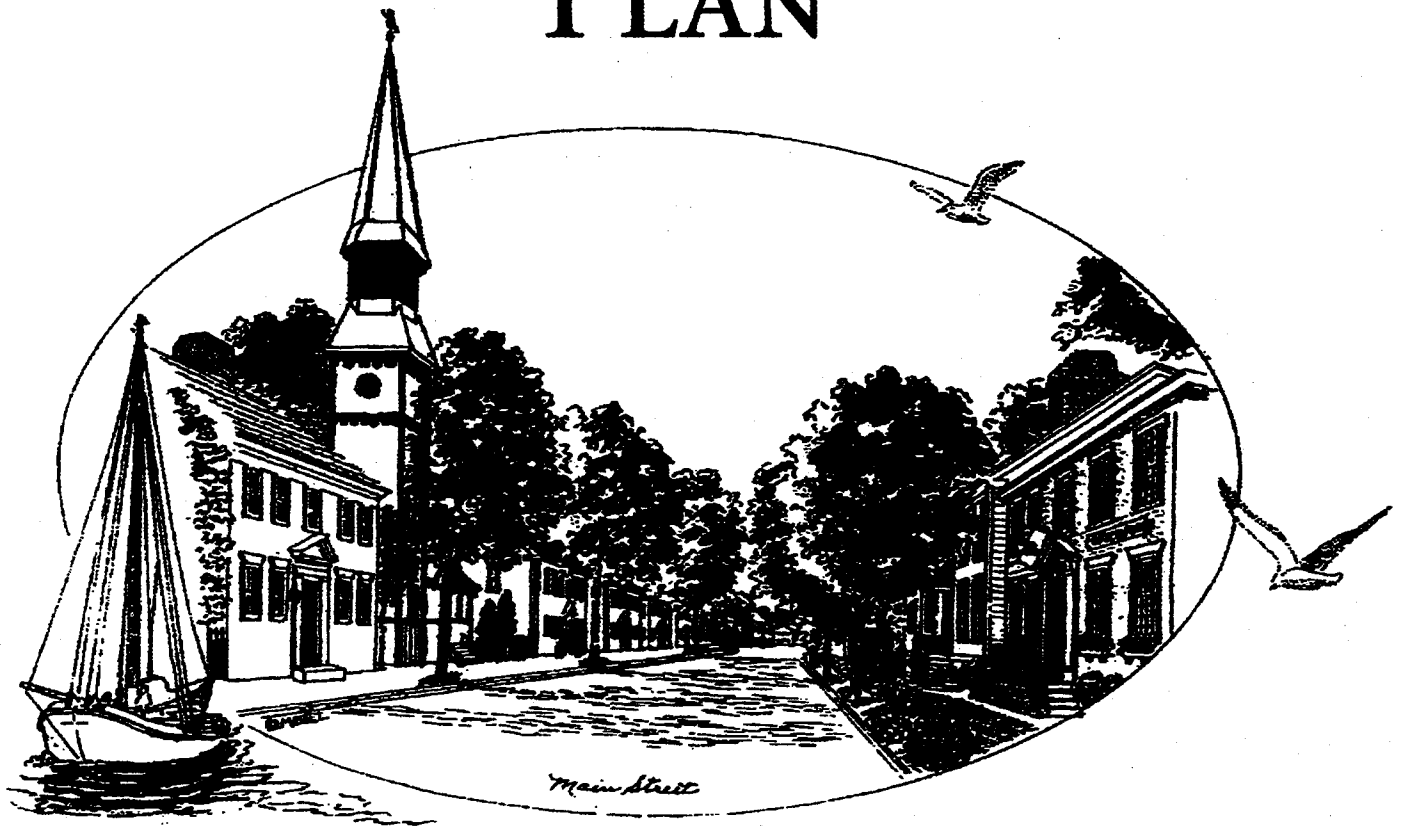


# WICKFORD VILLAGE PLAN



WICKFORD VILLAGE PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
*and*  
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
*North Kingstown, Rhode Island*

May 1998

PLAN DEPT  
OFFICE COPY

## **WICKFORD VILLAGE PLAN**

**April, 1998**

**Wickford Village Planning Advisory Committee  
and the  
Department of Planning & Development  
North Kingstown, Rhode Island**

**COVER ILLUSTRATION: MARJORIE VOGEL**  
**COVER DESIGN: RALPH RIZZO**

**WICKFORD VILLAGE PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Henry L.P. Beckwith, Conservation Commission  
Katharine H. Cutting  
Mary Paul Davis  
Robert T. Fitzsimmons  
Carol Lynn Gibson  
Marsue Harris  
Maureen D. Johnson  
Ed Lennon, North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce  
H. Al Lewis, Harbor Management Commission  
Ernest V. Moncrieff  
J. Peter Morgan, Tree Warden  
Jesse Nalle, AICP  
Robin Porter  
Clifford M. Renshaw, Historic District Commission  
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Frank Romeo, Planning Commission  
Kathleen S. Romeo  
Irving A. Spaulding, Historic Wickford  
Lester B. Stevens  
Mary Packard Turkel, Co-Chair  
Kurt R. Van Dexter  
J. Paul Wilson, Wickford Merchants Association  
James Wynne, North Kingstown Police Chief

**Department of Planning & Development**

Marilyn F. Cohen, AICP, Director of Planning & Development  
Lee R. Whitaker, AICP, Supervising Planner  
Edward Pimentel, AICP, Senior Planner  
KarenLu LaPolice, Office Supervisor

The preparation of the Wickford Village Plan and the Design Guidelines were funded in part by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation through the Antoinette F. Downing Preservation Services Fund for Rhode Island.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

**The purpose of the Wickford Village Plan is to protect and enhance the traditional character of historic Wickford Village by preserving the village's sense of place as well as natural, historical, cultural and aesthetic values; to maintain Wickford Village as an attractive community with economic vitality; and to establish design standards as well as guidelines for public safety and mobility while improving village infrastructure.**

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## **PLANNING AREA GOALS**

**The Wickford Village Plan Advisory Committee adopted four goals for the planning area:**

**Goal No. 1 - Enhance the historic character and vitality of Wickford Village.**

**Goal No. 2 - Improve the Village's Infrastructure, traffic and pedestrian circulation, parking, and alternative modes of transportation.**

**Goal No. 3 - Explore and maintain the balance in the residential and business community.**

**Goal No. 4 - Anticipate, prepare for, and manage growth and change.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The report of the Wickford Village Plan Committee has two major components: the Action Plan that follows and a set of village Design Guidelines prepared by consultant, ABACUS, Inc. Preparation of the Design Guidelines was funded with a matching grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Action Plan sets the stage for the Design Guidelines. The richness of Wickford's history is described to enhance understanding of the need for a blueprint for the future. Issues and concerns raised by the Committee and through a citizen's survey are described. Based on the issues, goals were established around four themes that emerged from the issues discussion: sense of place, functionality, quality of life, and aesthetics. Citizens and business owners responding to the survey questionnaire noted that what they liked most about the village was the variety of services; the sense of community; the village charm; the harbor and water views; and pedestrian scale.

The Guidelines provide the Town, its boards and commissions, residents and businesses with guiding concepts for use in the development or redevelopment of structures or land in the village area. The Guidelines address both public and private buildings and sites. While the Guidelines focus primarily on the built environment, ideas about the need for walking trails, parks, and street trees are also presented. Finally, the Guidelines provide a framework for creating and sustaining the Town's vision of a village. The guidelines were developed for the village of Wickford, in particular, but many of the components and features displayed are appropriate for the Town's other villages.

One component of the design guidelines prepared by ABACUS is a set of intersection improvement plans for three key intersections: Brown Street and Phillips Street; Brown Street and West Main Street; and Phillips Street and Tower Hill Road. The Committee believes that accomplishing these improvements is important to the overall implementation of the Plan and improving the pedestrian nature of Wickford. The Committee understands that these improvements must be accomplished in concert with the State Department of Transportation.

The Design Guidelines were intended to be, in fact, guidelines. However, there may be some guidelines that the Town may choose to formally adopt either within the Village Design Guidelines of the zoning ordinance or, in some cases, as a dimensional standard in the ordinance.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has developed a model "Main Street" Program which offers useful guidelines for Wickford's future. The Main Street Program focuses on four points: design, organization, promotion, and economic development.

Many of the elements of the program have already been applied in Wickford, but have



not yet been formalized as a management approach.

Four primary goals were developed for the Plan; each goal is presented with a set of objectives, strategies and actions. The four goals address the issues of enhancing the historic character and vitality of the Village; improving Village infrastructure such as streets, sidewalks, the proposed development of a boardwalk along the water, and intersection improvements; the creation of an advisory committee to foster communication among residents, the business community, and the Town; and managing future growth such that it continues to support the Village.

The Plan identifies improving Brown Street as its highest priority. There are several categories of improvements suggested. Infrastructure improvements such as sidewalk improvements, the narrowing of key intersections for pedestrian enhancements, the replacement of existing lighting fixtures, linking and enhancing the public green spaces such as Updike and Library Parks; and adding to public spaces by the development of a boardwalk along the water are key elements of the Plan vision. Undergrounding utilities during a future public works project is also considered an important infrastructure improvement. Some components of the Plan require no action by the Town; most notable of these recommendations is the importance to the village of keeping the Town Hall Annex as a municipal building.

Programs that support the business community in Wickford are a part of the Brown Street improvement program. The Plan recommends tax incentives to encourage façade and sign improvements and the development of directory signage for business establishments and to Town facilities, such as the restrooms, that assists visitors to Wickford.

Finally, it is the sense of place and pedestrian scale and the character of the village that attracts visitors and residents to Wickford village. The Plan recommends supporting these attributes by developing a means of protecting the character of Brown Street in a manner comparable to that afforded West Main and Main Street. Implementing this recommendation could take a variety of forms including the extension of the local historic district, or a variant, to include Brown Street or perhaps, the development of zoning guidelines that assure that not only scale but design are considered in the review of development or redevelopment proposals.

# **WICKFORD VILLAGE PLAN**

## **PART 1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Town of North Kingstown is a community with a diverse physiography and a variety of settlement patterns ranging from Slocum's rich agricultural plain to the Pettaquamscutt estuary and from the large industrial park at Quonset Point / Davisville, fashioned from former U.S. Naval facilities, to the scattered villages. At the center of the Town is historic Wickford Village, which dates from Rhode island's earliest period. In August, 1996, the Town applied to the National Trust for Historic Preservation for a grant from the Antoinette F. Downing Preservation Services Fund for local preservation efforts. The National Trust responded in September, 1996, with approval of a \$1,000 matching grant for the preparation of a plan for Wickford Village with design guidelines.

On November 18, 1996, the North Kingstown Town Council adopted Resolution No. 19 which established the Wickford Village Plan Advisory Committee to prepare a plan for Wickford Village to "preserve and enhance the traditional character of Wickford Village, its sense of place and its economic vitality." The committee was charged with the responsibility of developing guidelines for public improvements and design guidelines for lighting, utilities, parking, street trees, pedestrian movement, vehicular circulation and access to local businesses, the waterfront, and to public spaces.

When commenting on the protection of Wickford's "sense of place", we are in fact referring to the protection of an idea that is characterized by elements which are uniquely manifested by the Village of Wickford. Wickford is a 300-year old village that is characterized by all the major attributes that are essential to a successful community: a well-developed village center that combines residential and business uses; interesting, coherent, and historically significant architecture; and a scale and ambiance that promote extensive pedestrian use.

### **1.1 Village Plan and Town Comprehensive Plan**

The North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan was completed in 1992, pursuant to Chapter 45-22.2 of the Rhode Island General Laws. It was adopted by the Town in August, 1992, and approved by the State in February, 1995. Preparation of the Comprehensive Plan was guided by a Citizen's Advisory Committee, similar to the committee created for the preparation of this Village Plan. The Comprehensive Plan recommended that the Town thoroughly analyze the Town's villages, determine their unique characteristics and qualities, including historic, natural, and cultural resources, and to prepare plans to ensure that village character is preserved in North Kingstown. This Village Plan will become a critical component of the Town Comprehensive Plan upon adoption by the Planning Commission and the Town Council.

## **1.2 Methodology**

Following creation of the Village Plan Advisory Committee, the Town Council advertised in the local Standard Times newspaper for citizen volunteers to serve on the Committee. Membership on the committee was open to all residents of North Kingstown, and a total of 23 volunteers were appointed to serve. The committee included Wickford Village residents as well as residents from other sections of town. It also included members of the Town Planning, the Historic District, Conservation and Harbor Management Commissions, as well as representatives of Historic Wickford, Inc. a residents group, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Wickford Merchants Association.

Thus, the committee possessed a wide range of design, business, management, and other skills. The Committee first met on January 23, 1997 and regularly thereafter to prepare a plan. Meetings generally were conducted twice monthly at the Cold Spring Community Center on Beach Street. Meetings were posted as required by law. The committee elected two members to serve as co-chair persons. Committee members signed an attendance form at each meeting, and meeting minutes were maintained for each meeting. Subcommittees were formed to address the issues related to: (1) waterfront and maritime concerns; (2) village infrastructure; and (3) protecting historic character and managing growth.

The Committee began by defining the boundaries of the planning area, defining issues associated with the village, and setting goals. The Committee conducted a walking tour of the village on May 22, 1997, to assess its physical characteristics, to identify problems, and to suggest improvements. On June 5, 1997, the committee met with Wickford Merchants and reviewed with them slide photographs taken by Planning Department staff during the walking tour and discussed topics and themes that village merchants have identified to improve the village. It was discovered at that meeting that the merchants and the committee shared many of the same ideas and concerns addressed in this report.

To gain an understanding of public sentiment on Wickford Village, the Committee developed a survey questionnaire for residents. The questionnaire was distributed town-wide in the "Compass," a newsletter about municipal affairs, through the North Kingstown Villager, a monthly publication mailed to all households. More than 200 residents responded to the survey. Nearly 87 percent of the respondents said Wickford Village was a positive factor in their choice to live in North Kingstown. An even larger number, 95 percent, said that the historic character of the village should be protected and enhanced. Ninety percent supported regulations to maintain the Village's historic character. A copy of the questionnaire and the survey results is provided in the Appendix.

The committee decided to secure a design consultant to assist with the development of Design Guidelines. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was prepared and advertised in the Providence Journal. A list of design firms, maintained by the Town's division of purchasing was notified of the RFQ. Four firms responded and made presentations to the Committee. The Committee selected ABACUS Architects & Planners of Boston and Wareham, MA. ABACUS met with the Committee and with the Wickford Merchants Association and Historic Wickford, Inc. to discuss issues and ideas pertaining to the Village and the preservation of Village character. Drafts of the design guidelines were submitted for review by the Committee in December, 1997 and January, 1998.

Following completion of the village plan and the design guidelines, and adoption by the Plan Advisory Committee, the plan was presented to the Planning Commission and the Town Council for review and adoption.

## **Part 2.0 DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA**

Wickford Village is located along the western shore of Narragansett Bay, south of Quonset Point. The village is one of nine historic villages in the Town of North Kingstown and the only one with a sheltered harbor (figure 1). Principle transportation routes to the village are Post Road (Route 1) from the north and Boston Neck Road (Route 1A) from the south. Route 102 provides direct access from the west to the village, from Route 4 the major limited access highway servicing the region, and further west, Interstate I-95. Tower Hill Road (Route 1) provides direct southerly access. Future development plans by the State Department of Transportation include improvements to Routes 4 and 1. There is also to be a new limited-access highway connection between Route 4 and the developing industrial park and port at Quonset Point/Davisville. Both projects will improve access to North Kingstown. The prospective development at Quonset Point/Davisville will continue to increase development pressures on the Town.

Wickford village is served by the municipal water system. The village, similar to most of the Town, is not serviced by a central sewage collection system. All sanitary waste is disposed in on-site septic systems. The Town plans to develop a wastewater management program to assure the proper operation and maintenance of on-site systems. Lack of an adequate wastewater management plan has been identified as a contributor to failing harbor water quality. The wastewater management program will encourage introduction of innovative septic systems to improve the quality of effluent discharged to the groundwater.

A significant historical area, Wickford Village is defined by a local Historic Zoning District and a National Register Historic District (figure 2). Of the two, the local Zoning

District encompasses the smaller geographic area. The local District does not include the Brown Street business district in the heart of the village. The larger National Register District does not extend to historic Smith's Castle. Smith's Castle is listed as an individual property on the National Register of Historic Places. The entire Cocumscussoc site is recognized as a National Historic Landmark. The National Register Historic District will be resurveyed in 1998 to evaluate the historical resources of the district and its immediate environs. It is anticipated that an application will be prepared in 1999 for the purpose of increasing the National Register Historic District boundaries.

In defining the boundaries of the village, the Committee noted that the Village could be defined in a number of ways: i.e. the local historic district and the national district. The Committee also recognized that the Village could also be defined by characteristics such as the distance covered in a fifteen-minute walk.

The Village Committee understood that the history and the historic character of Wickford Village would play an important role in the committee's work, but selected a wider definition of the village's boundaries, encompassing more of the waterfront and the highway approaches to the Village. The Committee recognized that the waterfront is integral to the historic development and the present economy of the Village as well as to the Town. The highway approaches serve as "gateways" and transition zones into the Village whether it be the destination or a location along the route to the south shore, Conanicut Island, or Newport.

The agreed village planning area encompasses a total land and water area of approximately 750 acres. In addition to those areas traditionally considered to be a part of Wickford village, the Committee's planning area incorporates the Wickford State Police Barracks, Smith's Castle, the Town Beach, the community center, the senior center, and the Poplar Point neighborhood, none of which are presently included in the historic district (figure 3).

## **2.1 Historical Background**

North Kingstown's human settlements probably date back 10,000 years before the grant to Roger Williams of land by the Narragansett Indian in 1636. Over a period of approximately 2100 years the Narragansett Indian culture had evolved into permanent settlements along the coastal plain and the fertile inland terraces, based on agriculture, fishing, and hunting. In 1637, Roger Williams established a temporary trading post in the vicinity of Cocumscussoc, convenient to land and water transportation, close to Indian villages and near the home of the friendly Indian Chief Canonicus. In 1643 he built a permanent home which he sold to his friend Richard Smith in 1651. Smith's Castle, as it came to be known, was burned after the Great Swamp Fight in 1675 and rebuilt around 1678. It became the political, social, and religious capital of the developing region.

Lodowick Updike laid out a road to the salt water for the purposes of creating a port. The road led down from the "Pequot Trail- Post Road" to the town he called Updike's Newtown. By 1709 the town was platted and lots were being sold along Pleasant Street and present day Main Street. The Old Yellow, which was built during this period in 1735, is the oldest surviving dwelling in Wickford. It was recently repaired and renovated through the inspiration and hard work of the Old Yellow Corporation, a group comprised of Wickford Village residents and others. All repairs were conducted under the auspices of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Wickford, as Updike's Newtown came to be known, grew slowly and by the time of the Revolution there had been a history of land speculation involving unbuilt lots. Preservation Report W-NK-1, published by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission in November 1979, estimates that there were probably twenty standing houses by the time of the American Revolution. Twenty pre-Revolution houses and inns remain today and six date to before 1737.

Following the Revolution, Wickford entered a sustained period of growth. Boat building and shipping prospered. Agricultural products from inland regions were brought to Wickford for shipment to other towns and regions. As the Village's economy grew, so did local cultural, religious, and governmental institutions. But, by the third decade of the 19th century, the Village was eclipsed by other ports, as rail transport became increasingly more important for shipping. Wickford continued as a secondary port and a mill village. Fishing was an important economic activity and has remained so to the present, with numerous shell and lobster fishing boats operating from the town wharf.

As Wickford Village moved into the twentieth century, it became an important summer recreation colony. In 1932, the Main Street Association, formed as a civic improvement organization began its work. The association sought paved sidewalks, street trees, inaugurated a program of historic house markers and worked for the first zoning ordinance. In 1937, Colonel Hunter White published "Wickford and its Old Houses," the basis for the Wickford Historic District in 1959. This second Historic District formed in Rhode Island, led to the preservation Wickford and its fine old buildings, a fate not always the experience of other New England villages. Wickford survived the 1938 Hurricane, but the salt water contamination of local wells resulted in the construction of a town owned water distribution system. Following World War II, Wickford harbor became an important yacht basin for recreational boats and continues so today.

## **2.2 Overview of Existing Conditions**

Wickford village is a thriving example of a well-preserved colonial era village that

has evolved over a period of more than 350 years. Brown Street, the center of commercial activity, is complimented by stores and specialty shops on Main Street, West Main Street and Phillips Street. On these streets and others within the planning area, the village has food markets, a hardware store, a pharmacy, clothing and apparel stores, restaurants and delicatessens, antique and gift shops, art galleries, a book store, business office space, professional design offices, craftsmen and artisans, medical professionals and law offices, beauty shops, a liquor store, municipal offices and parking, a municipal dock and town wharf, a commercial fishing fleet that "works" Narragansett Bay, recreational boating facilities, marine repair shops and craftsmen, public recreational facilities and parks, a bird sanctuary, the town beach, the senior center, the community center, a band stand, the public library, an elementary school, a middle school, police, fire and rescue services, florists, a funeral home, automotive services, real estate sales offices, and several places of worship. More than 50 local businesses belong to the Wickford Merchant's association. The village is home to the popular Wickford Art Festival, now in its fourth decade and a number of seasonal events such as the festival of lights, the tuba concert, and the summer concert series.

The residential population of Wickford and its environs, according to the 1990 census, is somewhat less than 2,900 persons. The Village does not now experience a significant influx of seasonal residents.

Access to the Village is by highway from Post Road, Boston Neck Road, Tower Hill Road, and Ten Rod Road, all state highways; major improvements recommended by this plan that involve these roads recognize the involvement of the state in accomplishing such improvements. There is waterfront access for a limited amount of transient boaters. The state Department of Transportation is evaluating the feasibility of establishing a bay commuter service as a demonstration project. The service may connect at Quonset Point rather than at Wickford. Formerly, rail access to Wickford via the Seaview Railroad provided service along the shore route, and the Newport and Wickford Railroad extended from Wickford Junction through the village to Poplar Point. However, portions of the Seaview right-of-way remain and the Wickford Branch right-of-way is largely intact, for possible use as biking trails.

Wickford Harbor has two dredged federal channels, one in Mill Cove and one in Wickford Cove, and substantial boat mooring space to complement dock space. Moorings are managed by the Town's Harbor Master who is an employee of the Police Department. The harbor entrance is protected by a stone rubble breakwater. This breakwater is in need of repair. Even modest storm surge and very high tides overtop the structure. Maintenance of the federal project areas is the responsibility of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The U.S. Coast Guard breaks the channel ice during winter freezes.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, in its August 6, 1997 Water Quality Classifications, has classified the outer harbor's water quality as SA

(b) and Mill Cove and the inner harbor as SB. The SA(b) classification defines waters that support extensive recreational boating and are otherwise designated for shellfish harvesting for direct human consumption, primary and secondary contact recreational activities, and fish and wildlife habitat. They are suitable for aquacultural uses, navigation and industrial cooling, and have good aesthetic value. The SB classification defines waters that are designated for primary and secondary contact recreational activities, shellfish harvesting for controlled relay and depuration, and fish and wildlife habitat. These waters are considered to likewise be suitable for aquaculture, navigation, and industrial cooling, and have good aesthetic value.

The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program, as amended, classifies the water uses for the inner Wickford Harbor and an area along the southern shore of Mill Cove (Cedar Tree Point to Pleasant Street) as a commercial and recreational harbor, the outer harbor as a high-intensity boating area, Fishing Cove as a low-intensity use area, and Mill Creek as a conservation area. These classifications reflect existing conditions.

The local economy in Wickford and North Kingstown is strong. In fact, there has been continuous public and private investment in Wickford in recent years. The Town has made major improvements to the Town Hall and to the Town Hall Annex over the past two years which has greatly improved the appearance and physical condition of these facilities. A major repair to the Town Wharf at the end of Main Street began in late 1997. The Town Dock off Brown Street behind the Town Hall Annex is a favorite for visitor short term transient docking. Several local streets have received pavement overlays and Loop Drive was improved with the extension of municipal water service. New culverts beneath that road maintain tidal flow between the inner and outer coves. Future public and public/private partnership investments are likely in public spaces, public buildings, and infrastructure.

Recent commercial investment in the Village has included: the painting of building facades, the opening of new businesses where none existed and the replacement of businesses that have relocated, the repair of antiquated on-site sewage disposal systems, new roofs on several buildings, the opening of a new 62 slip commercial marina to replace a former shellfish business, and the redevelopment of a commercial fin fish and shellfish wholesale business. Other investments include the rehabilitation of one of the oldest homes in the village; the repainting, rehabilitation or remodeling of numerous residential dwellings throughout the village; the construction of new residential docking facilities; and new homes in an architectural style that fits into the neighborhood. The rehabilitation of Updike Park, prominent in the village center, was accomplished recently through the efforts of private citizens and the municipal government, coordinated by the Updike Park Citizens Committee.

Future investment in the village by the private sector is likely to continue in the form of building improvements of all types. A recent change was the relocation of the



Village post office to a larger building, modern facility just north of the planning area on Post Road. The building that formerly housed the post office is expected to be reused, but the loss of Postal Service near the village center is regretted by many. At its new location, the Post Office regional facility, contributes to the revitalization of Post Road.

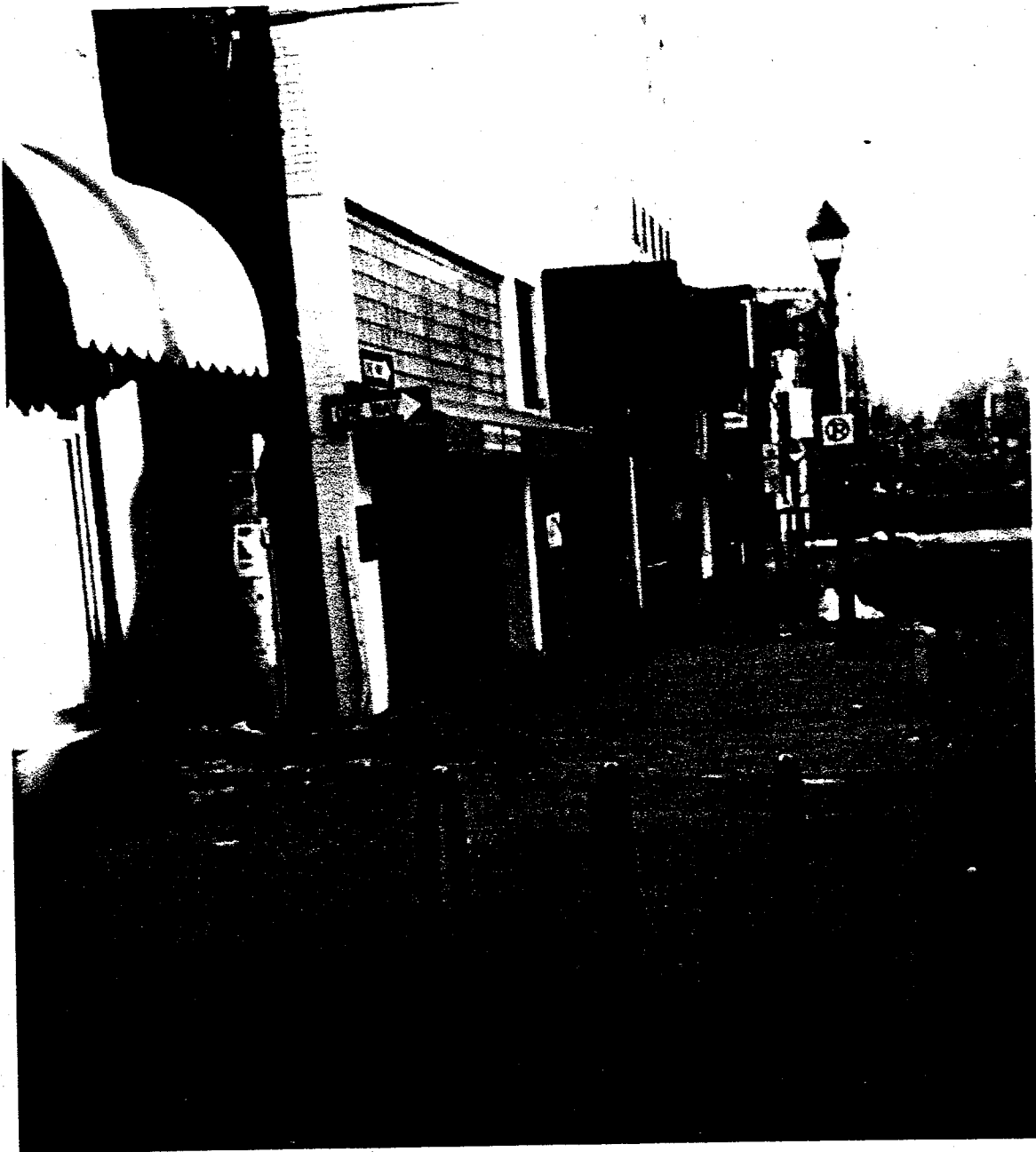
## **2.3 Issue Analysis**

The issues most frequently voiced by the Wickford Village Planning Advisory Committee can be summarized into the following categories: (1) sense of place, (2) functionality, (3) aesthetics, and (4) quality of life.

Sense of place as defined by the Village of Wickford refers to its ability to thrive as a "working place" where people live, do business, visit, and where there continues to be extensive investment in the community by both residents and businesses. Contributing also to the sense of place associated with Wickford is the placement of residences and businesses which provide the services essential for a given quality of life. The unique placement of these uses provides landmarks by which residents and visitors alike orient themselves to the "place" we call Wickford. Participation in the living, shopping and everyday chores are also contributing elements that define ones life and surroundings. Efforts must be made to ensure that there is a balance between changes to infrastructure as well as residential and commercial land uses which are unavoidable as one progresses into the future. The successful juxtaposition of 20<sup>th</sup>-century life, and 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup>-century history has created a truly unique "sense of place" in Wickford that should be carefully preserved and enhanced.

Functionality refers to the working interrelationships of the various parts of the village: good traffic circulation, safe roads, proper and effective signage, good sidewalk conditions, trash receptacles, parking, lighting, drainage, public restrooms, and postal service. It also includes the usefulness of public spaces, such as the Town wharf and the municipal parking lot. It would include sewers if the town should install sewers and road improvements if the state Department of Transportation and the town decide on investing in them. Good functionality will be a guiding principle in the design of such improvements. Functionality may or may not typically include good access, but for the purposes of this plan, good access is considered integral with good function, and access may be by various modes of transportation. All but air and rail transportation should be considered, and even air transport via helicopter cannot be discounted for special purposes. The Committee believes that pedestrian and bicycle access and continued wharf or dock access is crucial to the ongoing functionality of the Village.

purposes of this plan, good access is considered integral with good function, and access may be by various modes of transportation. All but air and rail transportation should be considered, and even air transport via helicopter cannot be discounted for special purposes. The Committee believes that pedestrian and bicycle access and continued wharf or dock access is crucial to the ongoing functionality of the Village.



Providing bike racks, similar to this one in Flagstaff, Arizona, supports bicycling as a means of transportation.

