



Town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island

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To: Ralph Mollis, Town Manager
North Kingstown Town Council
From: Planning Department
Date: June 7, 2017
Re: Comprehensive Plan Re-Write Update

In 2015, the Town of North Kingstown began the process of re-writing the comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan is a living document that sets the vision and goals of the community and provides the town with a roadmap for accomplishing these actions. This comprehensive plan is an important document utilized in establishing effective policies and practices that will guide North Kingstown to a sustainable future.

The town hired Interface Studios to assist us with this re-write. We have been working with them since the spring of 2015. The following provides a summary of what we have accomplished thus far in the process.

PHASE I - COMMUNITY VISIONING

This first step in the process was to create a vision for the community that would act as a basis of the goals, policies and actions, the centerpiece of the plan. A Steering Committee was created to assist the town with the re-write. This Steering Committee was appointed by the North Kingstown Town Council and was comprised of representatives of various boards and commission as well as at large public members. The committee met several times and provided a wide range of insight and feedback to the team. In addition, a public participation plan was drafted by the consultant. To date the following public input activities have taken place as part of this plan: *stakeholder interviews, walking tours of local neighborhoods and corridors, creation of a Facebook page and town web pages to host information on the re-write, survey (over 600 responses) and collaborative map exercise, focus group meetings, three public forums (July 2015, October 2015, & February 2016), meetings with municipal department heads, meetings with local organizations (Chamber of Commerce and Quonset Development Corp), update to Town Council November 23, 2015, Review Studio online collaborative tool, Planning Commission meetings (December 2016 – present).*

PHASE II - ANALYSIS

In the second phase of the project, we moved into the analysis portion of the project. Interface Studios reviewed previous plans completed for the town as well as all major projects in the pipeline in North Kingstown. They also examined the detailed list of state requirements that are necessary for the comprehensive plan re-write.

The consultants also reviewed local demographic data and identified key trends. This allowed us to see in what direction the town is moving. Social demographic trends were ascertained, a summary of key economic development trends were recorded, and housing values and conditions were established. All of these indicators were summarized to help tell the story about North Kingstown.

Phase III - RECOMMENDATIONS / FINAL PLAN

The final phase of the project focused on creating the recommendations and drafts of the final plan. **This phase is ongoing.** The Planning Commission has been meeting diligently to thoroughly review the draft document. At the same time, staff is reviewing some of the “administrative” aspects of the plan – we are reviewing the mapping provided in the plan parcel by parcel to ensure accuracy, we are in touch with the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program regarding its preliminary comments on the plan. Most importantly, we are discussing how to package all of the comments and edits from the review process into the current draft in order to create a final document with the project consultant.

What does the draft document include that is part of this review? Based upon all of the information gathered, a draft vision statement and goals for the future of North Kingstown was developed and reviewed by the town and steering committee. Based upon these vision statements, a set of policies and actions related to each element of the comprehensive plan was created. The steering committee reviewed and discussed all of the vision statements, goals, policies and actions. The policies and actions have been a primary focus of the Planning Commission review.

With the vision, goals and strategies completed, a Future Land Use Plan was drafted. This draft is based upon the results of the work completed above and addressed comments provided by the town, steering committee and public. The plan must not only meet the state requirements for comprehensive planning but also translate the planning principles and strategies into one overall land use approach for the town. A future land use map (FLUM) is created as part of the land use plan. The re-write of the comprehensive plan has also provided us an opportunity to update our mapping to the parcel level – previous versions of our mapping were done prior to today’s technology. Land use categories on the earlier versions of the maps were “bubbles” – in some instances two or three categories overlapped a parcel. We have used this opportunity to make the map clearer and at the same time have analyzed the accuracy of the designations within the FLUM. The review of the FLUM is still being finalized. This an important step in establishing the future land use vision for the town in map form. Both the future land use plan and map will help identify any necessary zoning changes required for consistency with the FLUM. This means we also have to analyze our current zoning designations in relation to the FLUM, as any proposed zoning changes must be documented as a part of the comprehensive plan re-write.

An implementation program is also required and has been drafted as part of the re-write. The town (currently in the hands of staff and the Planning Commission after being suggested by the consultant) must review potential partners to complete and a time frame for each action.

As part of the creation of the re-written comprehensive plan, the 2008 Comprehensive Plan was reviewed by planning department staff as well as by various town department heads. Goals, objectives and strategies that should be removed from the plan, remain in the plan as is or remain with some edits have been identified. This review also helped identify any duplicative / overlapping policies that could be consolidated. This provided an understanding of the primary gaps in current comprehensive planning policies. Staff is working with the consultant to determine if any material from the 2008 Comprehensive Plan that was not yet addressed in the draft rewrite should be incorporated within the rewrite.

The public was given an opportunity to review this draft utilizing the ReviewStudio tool noted above in the community input section. The ReviewStudio portal provided an easy-to-use markup tool that allows you to submit comments digitally to the Planning Department as you reviewed the plan. In addition, the steering committee reviewed the draft rewrite and forwarded suggested changes to the Planning Commission for its consideration. The Planning Commission has been provided with the comments from the public review and the board is incorporating each comment or suggestion into its review process -the Planning Department merged all of the comments received from the Steering Committee into one document along with the comments received from town departments and those received through the Review Studio portal. The Planning Commission is reviewing each comment as it reviews the individual elements of the plan. Some of the comments are simply observations and do not require action by the Planning Commission. Others require a decision by the commission. As review proceeds, the Planning Commission continues to determine

how to address those comments by either incorporating it into the plan, in full or in part, or not incorporating the comment at all.

NEXT STEPS

Staff hopes the Planning Commission will complete its review by mid-summer 2017. Once this review is complete and the full breadth of materials are incorporated into a final draft by our consultant, we will forward the draft plan to the Town Council for its review. The Planning Commission and Town Council may hold separate public hearings to review and adopt the plan when their individual reviews are complete or they may hold one joint public hearing if preferred. At this time, staff suggests a joint workshop or two with the Planning Commission and a joint public hearing to make the process as cohesive as possible. Our consultants have indicated that the final draft may not be a redlined version of the current draft due to the format of the document, but staff will work with them to provide a listing of changes that we will submit to the Town Council membership with both the original and final drafts.

Once adopted, the final plan will be forwarded to the Statewide Planning Program (SPP) for its final review and approval. The Planning Department has already shared the initial draft of the plan with the Statewide Planning Program and we have received their initial feedback. We are communicating with SPP regarding this feedback and we are working with the consultant to address their comments.

The following provides a summary of the final steps in the process of completing the plan:

- Discuss SPP comments with Interface and Planning Commission
- Complete review of Future Land Use Map and Zoning map
- Address any land use and zoning inconsistencies
- Incorporate any significant issues from 2008 plan not incorporated into the re-write if deemed appropriate
- Complete Planning Commission review
- Interface and Planning Department will incorporate recommended changes
- Planning Commission “blessing” of final draft
- Town Council Review of plan – suggested as a workshop with the Planning Commission
- Joint public hearing by Town Council and Planning Commission (suggested process, other choice is separate public hearings)
- Locally approved plan distributed to SPP for final approval
- Address comments from SPP
- Review final comments from SPP by Town Council as necessary
- Final plan adoption

We are looking forward to finalizing this plan and having a document that will successfully guide North Kingstown over the next twenty years.

If you should have any questions or are looking for additional information, please feel free to contact me at nlafontaine@northkingstown.org or 268-1571.