

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan

### Update



September 4, 2024



Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update

*Suffolk County, NY*

---

---

*September 4, 2024*

*Prepared for:*

**Riverhead Town Board**

4 W 2nd St  
Riverhead, NY 11901

*By:*

**BFJ Planning**

115 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10003



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

Development of Riverhead's Comprehensive Plan Update (CPU) was a collaborative effort of Town elected officials, staff, organizations, volunteers and individual citizens. The Town Board also wishes to acknowledge the important contributions of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, who played a critical role in the planning process, helping to ensure the CPU is inclusive, transparent, responsive to the needs of the community, and has policies that can effectively guide future growth and development.

### ***Riverhead Town Board***

- Tim Hubbard, Supervisor
- Kenneth Rothwell, Councilman
- Robert Kern, Councilman
- Denise Merrifield, Councilwoman
- Joann Waski, Councilwoman

### ***CPU Steering Committee***

- Tim Hubbard, Supervisor
- Robert Kern, Councilman
- Joann Waski, Councilwoman
- Devon Higgins, Deputy Supervisor
- Yvette Aguiar
- Dawn Thomas, Community Development Director
- 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
- Mitch Pally
- Michael Florio, Long Island Builders Institute
- Patrick Fedun

### ***Department of Planning and Economic Development***

- Dawn Thomas, Community Development Director
- Greg Bergman, Senior Planner
- Matthew Charters, Senior Planner
- Heather Trojanowski, Planner

### ***Consultant Team (BFJ Planning)***

#### ***BFJ Planning***

- Noah Levine, AICP, PP
- Emily Tolbert, AICP
- Frank Fish, FAICP
- Sarah Yackel, AICP
- Eshti Sookram

#### ***L.K. McLean Associates (LKMA)***

- Vincent Corrado, PE, Associate
- Raymond DiBiase, PE, PTOE, PTP

#### ***Urbanomics***

- Tina Lund, AICP
- Peter Furst

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>1</b>	<b><i>Introduction, VISION, and Goals</i></b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2</b>	<b><i>Development Patterns: Land Use and Zoning</i></b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3</b>	<b><i>Demographics and Housing</i></b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4</b>	<b><i>Economic Development</i></b>	<b>51</b>
<b>5</b>	<b><i>Transportation and Mobility</i></b>	<b>67</b>
<b>6</b>	<b><i>Agricultural Lands</i></b>	<b>89</b>
<b>7</b>	<b><i>Natural Features and Environmental Resources</i></b>	<b>105</b>
<b>8</b>	<b><i>Parks, Open Space, and Recreation</i></b>	<b>125</b>
<b>9</b>	<b><i>Scenic and Historic Resources</i></b>	<b>135</b>
<b>10</b>	<b><i>Community Facilities</i></b>	<b>151</b>
<b>11</b>	<b><i>Infrastructure and Utilities</i></b>	<b>165</b>
<b>12</b>	<b><i>Sustainability and Resilience</i></b>	<b>175</b>
<b>13</b>	<b><i>Future Land Use</i></b>	<b>189</b>

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 1 *INTRODUCTION, VISION, AND GOALS*

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

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



*Regional Context*

# INTRODUCTION

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. First, 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. Guidance in the plan also helps government officials to make informed evaluations on where infrastructure or other investment is needed.

This Comprehensive Plan is not just a product of extensive time and effort; it signifies the continuation of a long-term, transformative process that involves altering existing conditions, regulations, and



**Town of Riverhead**

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; while there may be some duplication between chapters due to the nature of overlapping topics, there should be no conflict among them. Chapter 13: Future Land Use serves as a "To Do" list, outlining specific tasks related to land use and zoning. 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.

This document is intended to capture the existing conditions and priorities as of the adoption date in 2024. It is recognized that this plan should be re-examined as needed as conditions change. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Plan be reevaluated every 10-years, to ensure that recommendations continue to reflect priorities in the Town.

### PLANNING PROCESS

This Comprehensive Plan was formed through a community-led effort that 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, described below.

#### Stage 1: 2020-2022

This Plan builds off research and public engagement completed by the Town and its initial consultant team between 2020 and 2022. During this period, the consultants, in coordination with the Town and a Central Advisory Committee, or CAC, conducted public outreach and developed several documents 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.

Work completed during this period included summaries of public workshops and all stakeholder meetings, a summary of the public survey, notes from stakeholder interviews, and documentation of other comments. The initial consultant team also 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 summarized key takeaways from technical reports, meeting summaries, and 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. The first workshop was held on April 22, 2023, at the Suffolk Theater (~120 participants), while the second public workshop was on December 13, 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:

- 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)



Public Workshop #1 (top) and #2 (bottom)

## RECENT PLANS AND PROJECTS

The process of developing this Plan considered other planning initiatives undertaken by the Town, County, State, and other groups and agencies. 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 the Wading River hamlet, with zoning recommendations to guide community-supported development. The Town subsequently expanded the MRP Zoning Use District to guide development toward 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 landscape. In 2016, the Town prepared a Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Nomination Study, which included the Downtown area. The study sought to overcome obstacles to redevelopment/revitalization; identify key strategic/ areas where redevelopment/preservation would spur revitalization of the area as a whole; and address abandoned and underutilized properties. As the 2016 BOA study progressed, more 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 and to enhance its appeal and vibrancy.

The Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan (2020) focused on the Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area, introducing zoning amendments to stimulate redevelopment and initiating the TOD Overlay District. Following this, the 2020 Downtown Parking Study presented short- and long-term solutions to address the growing demand for parking driven by

increased development. Subsequently, the 2023 Strategic Parking Plan updated the 2020 study to accommodate new developments, recommending the construction of two 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 \$10 million grant in 2021, leading to the creation of a Strategic Investment Plan prioritizing projects with significant positive impact. Additionally, the 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.

Recent plans

## VISION AND GOALS

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 and guide strategic decisions and actions toward 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 are central to the region's economy, natural beauty, and rural charm.*

*We will strive to improve economic opportunities for our residents, while planning 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

The Comprehensive Plan encompasses a strategic roadmap for sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development, structured across 13 chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 serve as the foundational pillars, introducing the planning context and providing an overview of land use patterns and zoning. The subsequent chapters, from 3 to 12, meticulously outline specific goals aligned with community aspirations, each accompanied by a set of recommendations to guide the town's trajectory over the next decade and beyond. These goals are designed not only to foster growth but also to prioritize the enhancement of residential quality of life while safeguarding Riverhead's distinctive character. Chapter 13, titled "Future Land Use," serves as the culmination, offering a comprehensive overview of recommendations regarding potential changes in land use and zoning, thus providing a roadmap for the town's sustainable development and growth.

### 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 workforce 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. Continue to promote economic development opportunities in the Enterprise Park (EPCAL) area, while creating a framework to assure potential negative impacts are addressed.
2. Encourage appropriately scaled and designed development in industrial areas that 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.
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. Alleviate congestion, elevate safety, and improve mobility on current infrastructure without excessive expansion.
2. Preserve and enhance historic and scenic corridors while improving traffic flow and safety.
3. Support economic growth at EPCAL through a well-defined transportation plan.
4. Foster increased use of public transportation.
5. Encourage safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle transportation.
6. Coordinate transportation improvements with adjacent towns and other agencies.

### Agricultural Lands (Chapter 6)

1. Improve the marketplace for the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.
2. Increase the use of TDR through administrative improvements and access to new funding mechanisms.
3. Safeguard agricultural land through diverse approaches to preservation.
4. Cultivate agricultural resilience and innovation for a sustainable future.
5. Support agritourism as a sustainable income source, balancing economic growth and community well-being.
6. Promote Riverhead's agricultural industry and products.

# 1 Introduction, Vision, and Goals

## ***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 Long Island Sound's coastal features including bluffs, shoreline, and dunes.
5. Protect and restore environmentally sensitive lands, wetlands, and marine habitats.
6. Encourage eco-friendly landscaping and maintenance techniques.
7. Increase the Town's administrative capacity for 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. Continue to identify, document, and promote public awareness of historic resources.
2. Protect scenic resources and views.
3. Ensure that design of new development is compatible with its surroundings and scenic and historic resources.
4. Protect historic resources from destruction or neglect and encourage their restoration and adaptive reuse.

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

1. Enhance responsiveness and service quality of emergency services.
2. Strengthen community well-being through enhanced programming and facilities for all ages.
3. Support expansion of school district facilities to accommodate growing demand.
4. Increase options for affordable, accessible childcare.
5. Strengthen the Town's capacity to address diverse community health and 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 to ensure quality and availability of service.
5. Address localized roadway flooding issues.

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

1. Embrace renewable energy sources to achieve the State's targets of 70% renewable sources by 2030 and 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040.
2. Promote sustainable building practices, landscaping, and design.
3. Promote sustainable transportation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Reduce waste and promote circular economy waste management practices.
5. Promote a green economy and green finance, technology, and jobs.
6. Mitigate the effects of flooding, sea level rise, and storm surge.
7. Ensure the safety of residents, employees, and visitors in the event of an emergency and strengthen the Town's emergency preparedness.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 2 *DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS: LAND USE AND ZONING*

This chapter provides a general overview of the historical development patterns and existing land uses that have shaped Riverhead. This context is vital for understanding the forces that have molded the community and the factors that drive its current planning initiatives. Acknowledging the past and current conditions provides valuable insight that helps to make informed decisions about the future.

This chapter also summarizes the Town's zoning districts, which represent the primary tool the Town uses to plan and manage how land use is utilized. Fundamental to this Comprehensive Plan is the establishment of appropriate zoning recommendations that align with the Plan's overarching vision. Given that zoning is a pivotal component of the Plan, discussions of zoning recommendations are not confined only to this chapter. Instead, they are distributed throughout the various topic-oriented chapters, reflecting the specific challenges and opportunities presented by each topic area.

A comprehensive summary of land use and zoning recommendations can be found in the Future Land Use Chapter. This consolidation ensures that all key directives related to land use and zoning are readily accessible and can be reviewed in conjunction with the corresponding thematic chapters for a more in-depth understanding.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The history of the Town of Riverhead stretches from the life and times of the Corchougs Indians—before the arrival of the first European settlers to Long Island in 1640—through the Revolution, the Civil War, and the suburbanization of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> The historical development pattern of Riverhead can be grouped generally into the main periods described below:

#### ***Pre-1640: Native American Settlements***

The Corchougs, one of 13 Algonquin tribes originally inhabiting Long Island, lived within today's limits of Riverhead, with village found in places now called Aquebogue, Cutchogue, Mattituck, and Hashamomuk.<sup>2</sup> These locations at the head of the Peconic River gave the Corchougs access to both freshwater and saltwater landings.

#### ***1640-1776: European Settlements, Land Divisions, and Early Farms and Mills***

In the 1640s, European settlers began to arrive in the area. In 1649, settlers from Southold purchased the main portion of Riverhead from the Corchougs as part the "Aquebogue Purchase."<sup>3</sup> By 1671, there was also a small settlement in Wading River, and in 1680, those settlers joined with a contingent from Southold to divide up the available land between their two communities.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the Revolutionary War, Colonial settlers established farms for both local consumption and trade. They also laid out roads (including King's Highway from Southold to Wading River by 1710), and established a County jail, courthouse, and seat in Riverhead.

During this period, Africans were imported as slave laborers, contributing significantly to the local economy. In 1790, the Town (which included Southold at the time) had 206 free Blacks and 179 enslaved, totaling 11.5% of the population. After the Revolutionary War, New York State passed a series of laws that gradually emancipated slaves by 1827.<sup>5</sup> Almost all the former slaves moved to other parts of Long Island, leaving the local population primarily made up of descendants of the original 17th century Puritan settlers of the North Fork.

Riverhead's location at the mouth of the Peconic River made it ideal for water-powered mills. The Town has the state's oldest flour milling establishment — the Hallett Brothers flour mill of 1696.<sup>6</sup> By 1800, industry dotted the length of the river and included sawmills, iron forges, fulling mills, and gristmills.

#### ***1776 – 1870: Town Incorporation and Growth of Industry***

In 1792, Riverhead separated from Southold and gained its current status as the official county seat of Suffolk County. Agriculture remained the primary industry, fueled by the expansion of the road network and the advent of the railroad. Beginning around 1800, three main roads were built across the length of Long Island: North Country Road along the north shore, South Country Road along the south shore beaches, and Middle Country Road. The first railroad line to run through Riverhead was the Greenport line in 1844.<sup>7</sup> Potato production began as early as the 1700s, but did not become a standard crop until the railroad facilitated transportation.

Long Island's shorelines are well-suited for building small seafaring vessels, and the outfitting of ships became a thriving industry in the towns of Riverhead, Northport, Sag Harbor, Port Jefferson, and Greenport starting in the early 1800s. In this period, Riverhead grew in population and in the number of civic and cultural institutions. Major landmarks built during this time frame include the Female Seminary (1834), First Methodist Church (1834), First Congregational Church (1841), and the County Clerk's Office (1846).<sup>8</sup> By 1875, Riverhead had six churches, two grist mills, two moulding and planing mills, a paper mill, three

<sup>1</sup> The history of Riverhead during the Colonial period is fairly well documented through a number of secondary sources. However, there is a lack of secondary source information from the late 19th century to the present day. Those sources that exist are summarized below, providing a framework for further research into the significance of existing historic resources within the Town.

<sup>2</sup> Hood, Peter. *A History of North Sea Beach Colony*; the Bicentennial Book Committee. Riverhead Bicentennial Album.

<sup>3</sup> History of Suffolk County, New York, 1.

<sup>4</sup> The Riverhead Story, 9; Long Island, A History of Two Great Counties, Nassau and Suffolk, 1949, 183-184.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus, Grania, B., *A Forgotten People: Discovering the Black Experience in Suffolk County (NY)*.

<sup>6</sup> The Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, Counties of Nassau and Suffolk, Long Island 1609-1924, 727.

<sup>7</sup> Kramer, Frederick, *Long Island Rail Road*.

<sup>8</sup> The Boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, Counties of Nassau and Suffolk, Long Island 1609-1924, 727.

hotels, 20 stores, a cigar factory, a wagon jack factory, an organ factory, many shops and offices, and a population of 1,600.

Starting in the 1840s, a wave of Irish immigrants arrived in Riverhead, initially as farm laborers, but many later became farmers, especially in the Calverton area. Parts of downtown Riverhead became heavily Irish; these immigrants founded St. John's Roman Catholic church in 1869.

### ***1870 to 1945: Thriving Agricultural Industry and a seasonal character***

Riverhead continued to grow into a thriving agricultural community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with cauliflower and duck production becoming economic staples. Duck production reached its peak just after World War II, when the approximately 788 duck farms in Suffolk County raised two-thirds of all ducks produced in the U.S. Like the potato, the duck and cauliflower industries leveraged railroad transportation. The railroad also facilitated the sale of other produce, and return shipments on the rail lines contained manure from New York City to be used for fertilizer. Other important industries during this time were cordwood (firewood) and ice which took advantage of the Peconic River's supply of clean water.

With the enormous growth and industrialization of New York City after the Civil War, eastern Long Island, particularly the South Fork, became a popular summer destination for families eager to escape the city during the hottest months of the year. Tourism was facilitated by train service to the East End. During the early 20th century, the Hamptons first became a well-known vacation destination for wealthy New Yorkers, as more and more people purchased personal automobiles and eschewed the railroad and drove their cars instead.

Starting in the 1880s, a wave of immigrants arrived in Riverhead from eastern Europe, including Poland and Ukraine. Like the Irish before them, they primarily worked as farm laborers, but quickly saved money and acquired farms of their own. These immigrants founded St. Isidore's Roman Catholic Church in 1903 and John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in 1924. In some areas, such as the neighborhood of the Hallockville Museum Farm, Polish immigrants owned up to 70% of the farms by 1920.

African Americans also moved to Riverhead from the south during the Great Migration from around 1920. By 1940, almost 10% of the Town's population was Black, and almost all came from Powhatan County, Virginia.

### **1945-Present: Suburbanization to North Fork Tourism**

Since World War II, Riverhead has seen continued development and modernization. It has evolved from a primarily agricultural community into a suburban area with residential and commercial development. The tourism industry also has become important due to proximity to the Hamptons and the Long Island Wine Country.

Riverhead has remained the center of Long Island's agricultural industry. In the early 1990s, the Town had 20,000 acres in production. While potato, cauliflower, and duck production have declined, crops such as grapes, sod, and greenhouse growing, which require fewer acres but yield higher profits, have maintained Suffolk County as the leading agricultural producer in New York State.

Riverhead underwent an important transformation in the 1950s and 1960s with the construction of the Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant (NWIRP) in Calverton. The NWIRP was a major employment

center until being closed by the federal government in 1995, and the site has is a long-term opportunity for economic development.

Construction of the Long Island Expressway (LIE) made Riverhead easily accessible to the rest of the New York metropolitan region, further facilitating truck farming but also creating new development pressures. With this new access, the Town started changing into a fringe suburb of the job centers in Nassau County and western Suffolk County. Low-density subdivisions were built throughout Riverhead, particularly in Wading River and downtown Riverhead, and strip-style shopping centers were constructed along Route 58. Downtown and the hamlet centers lost much of their pedestrian activity and commercial vitality.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the North Fork wine industry emerged, and the East End gained recognition as an important wine-producing region. This trend not only added a new element to the agricultural industry, but also introduced the concept of agri-tourism to the East End. Wine makers now offer wine tasting, tours, shops, and banquet facilities to attract tourists and visitors. The bucolic nature of Riverhead and the rest of the North Fork has also made it popular destination for tourists as well as for people looking for second homes.

Figure 1 shows the age of structures in the Town based on assessor's data. The data do not show historic development patterns, but rather homes present when the data was collected. However, the map does give some indication of general settlement patterns. As seen in the map, older buildings that still exist tend to be clustered in the Downtown area and the older hamlet areas such as Aquebogue and Jamesport, along Main Street and Sound Avenue.

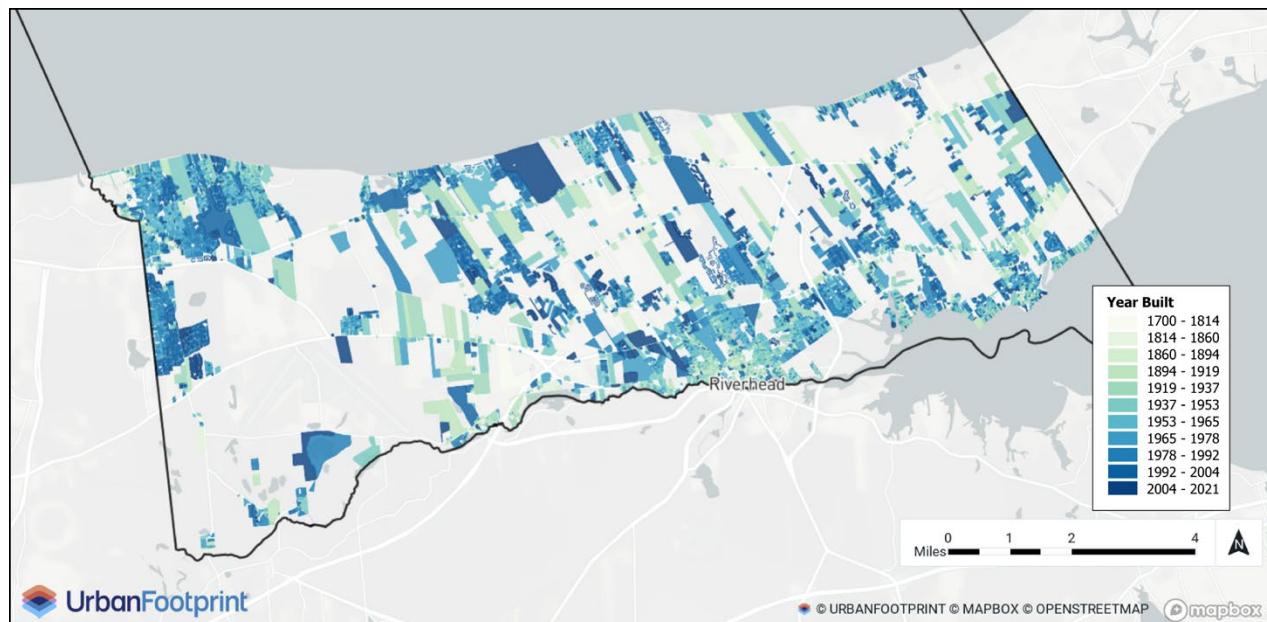
## Hamlet Areas

The Town of Riverhead has nine hamlet areas, which are akin to neighborhoods, each with their own character, history, and unique set of amenities. These areas are very important to community identity for many residents, and businesses often use the name of a hamlet as part of their name.

While these areas are culturally important, the term "hamlet" is not defined under New York law, and official hamlet boundary maps are not designated. Hamlets often share names with that of a local school district, post office, or fire district. The boundaries of these various districts do not always align, which is a source of confusion and a lack of consensus on where the boundaries are. Likewise, the U.S. Census uses hamlet names to outline statistical areas in the Town that do not align with the boundaries that communities or individuals may recognize. This Comprehensive Plan does not define hamlet, district, or census boundaries but recognizes these hamlets for their community significance.

## Aquebogue

Located east of downtown Riverhead, at the mouth of the Peconic River on Meeting House Creek, Aquebogue is known for its agricultural tradition and scenic beauty, with lush farmland, vineyards, and water views. The Peconic Bay and nearby Long Island Sound provide opportunities for boating, kayaking,



**FIGURE 1: YEAR BUILT**

and other water-based recreation. The bay is also significant for its significant aquaculture operations. Historic sites in the hamlet include approximately 48 houses, a windmill base, a post office, a former schoolhouse, and one prehistoric site.

## Baiting Hollow

Baiting Hollow, primarily a residential community, is located on the north shore of Long Island and is characterized by rolling hills, wooded areas, and scenic vistas. Historic sites include about 19 houses, several water towers, a church, farms, and one prehistoric site.

## Calverton

Calverton is located inland at the west end of Riverhead. Initially developed with the arrival of the Long Island Rail Road in 1844, the hamlet is home

Source: Corelogic, Urban Footprint, Mapbox, Openstreetmap

to Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL), formerly the Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant. In addition to this business complex, Calverton has a mix of residential neighborhoods and open farmland. Historic sites include approximately 19 houses, a pickle factory, several farms, a hotel/inn, and two prehistoric sites.

## Jamesport & South Jamesport

These historic settlements, located near the Great Peconic Bay, were originally a farming and fishing community and retain much of their historical charm. The hamlet includes farms, wineries, residential neighborhoods, and a historic center along Main Road. South Jamesport is particularly known for its waterfront real estate, including homes with private docks and direct access to the bay. Historic sites include approximately 46 houses, two cemeteries, eight farms, 15 cottages, and one prehistoric site.

### Laurel

Laurel is immediately east of South Jamesport, along the Great Peconic Bay, and is split between Southold and Riverhead. The sparsely developed hamlet is characterized by agricultural land and forest, with some commercial properties along Main Road.

### Manorville

Manorville, located in both Riverhead and Brookhaven, developed initially as a farming community but grew with the opening of the railroad station at St. George's Manor. Manorville is surrounded by parks and nature preserves, including the Pine Barrens Core Area and Robert Cushman Murphy County Park. Development in the Pine Barrens Core Area is subject to density restrictions to preserve the integrity of this environmentally sensitive area. Commercial areas in Manorville are largely in Brookhaven along Route 111, which has direct access to the Long Island Expressway. Historic sites in Manorville (within Riverhead) include six houses and one prehistoric site.

### Northville

Northville, formerly an incorporated village, is on the north shore of Long Island in the eastern portion of Riverhead. Primarily agricultural and single-family residential in nature, Northville is part of the larger wine region on Long Island, and there are several vineyards and wineries in the vicinity. The historic center is on Sound Avenue and includes historic houses and a church. The United Riverhead Terminal in Northville is a petroleum bulk storage and distribution facility featuring a deep-water platform on the Long Island Sound. This industrial area is a pre-existing non-conforming use, meaning that it can continue its operations and may only expand its operations with a Special Permit from the Town Board, pursuant to Town Code §301-222A.

### Riverhead

The hamlet of Riverhead developed as the seat of Suffolk County, since 1727 when the Suffolk County Court House was built. The most densely populated area within the Town, the hamlet contains the historic downtown area as well as several commercial corridors including portions of Route 58. The Peconic River is a significant waterway that flows through the downtown area, offering recreational opportunities and contributing to its vitality. One of the notable attractions in Riverhead Hamlet is Tanger Outlets, a large outlet complex with brand-name stores, making it a popular destination for shoppers. The hamlet also includes Polish Town, settled by Polish immigrants at the turn of the 20th century and encompassing about 15 blocks along Pulaski Street. Historic sites in Riverhead include approximately 210 houses, one cemetery, an assortment of historic commercial and civic buildings and sites, churches and farms, and two prehistoric sites.

### Wading River

Wading River is on the northwestern portion of the Town, bordering on Brookhaven and the Long Island Sound. The hamlet's history dates to 1671, when European settlers established a community there. Wading River contains a historic village center, with a village green, churches, cemeteries, and historic houses. The hamlet also has several beaches and waterfront areas along the Long Island Sound and is also home to many farms, vineyards, and wineries. It is also near the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant (within Brookhaven).



Downtown Riverhead



Jamesport (Route 25)



Wading River Shopping Center

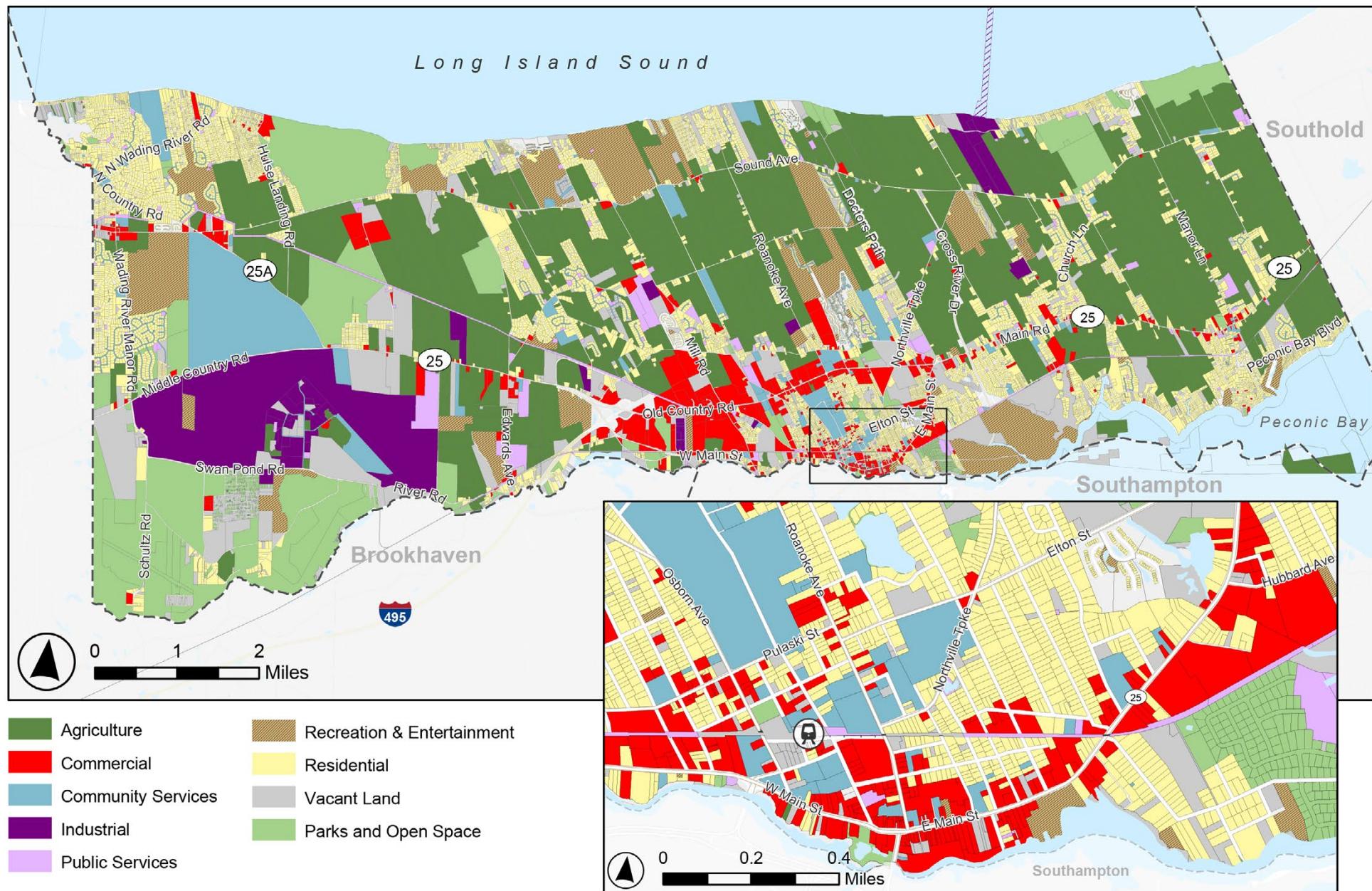


FIGURE 2: EXISTING LAND USE

## EXISTING LAND USE

Land use refers to the distribution of various activities across public and private lands, typically ranging from commercial, industrial, and residential uses to conservation, recreation, and “vacant” land (i.e. land that is not currently being put to any particular use). Land use is different than zoning. While land use describes the current use of the land, the Town’s zoning ordinance regulates the use of land that can occur, both now and in the future. In each of Riverhead’s zoning districts, the ordinance sets specific standards for uses, densities, and dimensions that must be followed. Current uses may generally continue, but any change must go through a permitting and approval process and be consistent with the ordinance or obtain a variance.

As seen in Table 1, the Town’s land areas include over 41,000 acres, or approximately 65 square miles. There are also almost 94,000 acres of land in the Town’s jurisdiction that are underwater (e.g., the Long Island Sound, Peconic River, and Peconic Bay), and are excluded from the land use coverage calculations. Agricultural use is the largest use, comprising over 15,000 acres or 36% of Town lands. The next largest category is residential (16%) followed by open space. Most of the land use categories are not anticipated to change significantly. Some 9.5% of land is “vacant”, meaning it is undeveloped, either in a natural state or cleared for potential future development. The vacant designation implies that the area is available for potential use or redevelopment; however, it is possible that some of the lands listed as vacant have deed restrictions or are preserved through other means, so the actual size of vacant parcels may be somewhat less. Additional details about preserved lands can be found in Chapters 6 and 8.

## Distribution of Land Uses

**Residential Areas:** Riverhead has various residential neighborhoods, including single-family homes, apartments, and condominiums. The Town offers a mix of housing options, from historic homes in the downtown area to suburban-style neighborhoods and waterfront properties. Additional details on housing trends, issues, and opportunities are provided in Chapter 3.

**Commercial and Retail:** Commercial areas include:

- Downtown Riverhead, which serves as a central business district with a mix of shops, restaurants, and cultural institutions.
- Route 58 features numerous shopping centers, big-box stores, restaurants, and other retail establishments. Commercial and retail development has expanded significantly along this corridor since the prior Plan was completed.
- Tanger Outlets, a major shopping destination for the wider region. It is home to a wide range of brand-name outlet stores and includes indoor and outdoor shopping areas.
- Other scattered commercial corridors, which feature local shops, restaurants, and service providers are along Roanoke Avenue, West Main Street, Main Road, Middle Country Road, and Route 25A in Wading River.

Additional details on trends, issues, and opportunities for commercial areas are provided in Chapter 4.

**Agriculture:** Agriculture is an essential part of Riverhead’s identity. The Town is home to farms, vineyards, and orchards, particularly in its eastern portion. The Long Island Wine Country is known for its vineyards and wineries, making it a significant component of the local economy. It has also been

Land Use	Land Area (Acres)	%
Residential	6,802	16.40%
Commercial	1,985	4.80%
Industrial	2,630	6.30%
Agricultural	15,145	36.50%
Community Services	2,216	5.30%
Public Services	787	1.90%
Recreation & Entertainment	2,834	6.80%
Open Space (Conservation Lands & Public Parks)	5,141	12.40%
Vacant Land	3,931	9.50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>41,471</b>	

**Table 1: Riverhead Land Use**

Source: Town of Riverhead

a draw for tourists and wine enthusiasts. Further discussion of agriculture and agritourism can be found in Chapter 6.

**Waterfront and Marinas:** Riverhead has a substantial waterfront area along the Peconic River and Flanders Bay, which features marinas, boat docks, and access to Peconic Bay. The waterfront is often used for recreational boating and fishing.

**Industrial and Manufacturing:** Some areas of Riverhead are designated for industrial and manufacturing purposes. These zones may include warehouses, manufacturing facilities, and other industrial establishments. Calverton also includes the EPCAL site which includes a range of businesses in industries such as manufacturing, technology,

aviation, and warehousing. Calverton is also home to several large-scale commercial solar energy production facilities that generate renewable energy.

**Educational and Institutional:** Riverhead has many educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and other institutional land uses. This includes facilities owned by the Town, Riverhead School District, Shoreham-Wading River School District, Eastern Suffolk BOCES Riverhead Charter School and other private or parochial schools, Peconic Bay Medical Center, Suffolk County Community college, religious institutions, and other cultural and historical institutions. A more detailed discussion of community facilities can be found in Chapter 10.

**Cultural and Entertainment Attractions:** Riverhead has invested in cultural and entertainment attractions, with the revitalization of downtown Riverhead being a notable example. The Suffolk Theater, for instance, has become a cultural hub with live performances and events. Other notable attractions include the Long Island Aquarium, Vail-Leavitt Music Hall, and East End Arts.

**Open Space and Parks:** The Town has open space and parkland areas, including municipal, county and state-owned parks, nature preserves, and recreational spaces, which provide opportunities for outdoor activities and community gatherings. A description of parks is provided in Chapter 8.

**Historic Districts:** Riverhead has designated historic districts, particularly in its downtown area, aimed at preserving and showcasing historic architecture and landmarks. A more detailed discussion of historic districts is provided in Chapter 9.

## Existing Zoning Districts

Zoning is depicted on the map in Figure 3. This is not the official zoning map of the Town of Riverhead and is provided for reference only. The following section provides a general overview of the Town's zoning districts for informational purposes only. For specific regulations and requirements applicable to each district, refer directly to the official Town zoning code. This description is not intended to replace or supersede the authoritative information contained within the Town's zoning code, which should always be consulted for precise and up-to-date zoning information.

### Residential Districts:

Approximately 65% of the Town is zoned for single-family residential housing (Residence A-40 (RA40), RA80, RB40, RB80, APZ, and HR zoning use districts).

**Residence A-80 (RA80) and Residence B-80 (RB80):** These districts can generally be found in Jamesport, Wading River, and areas north of Sound Avenue. Both RA80 and RB80 generally allow for low-density residential at a 2-acre minimum lot size (80,000 SF). These districts have the same dimensional regulations; however, there may be some differences in other regulations such as permitted uses. The RA80 district allows for the use of TDR credits to increase density to 1 acre per lot (40,000 SF).

**Agricultural Protection (APZ).** The APZ zone covers a substantial amount of the Town and is broadly located between Sound Avenue and Middle Road. This district is similar to RA80 with regard to dimensional regulations; it allows for low-density residential at a 2-acre minimum lot size (80,000 SF). This focus of this district is to maintain highly productive agricultural lands by limiting encroachment of nonagricultural development. It is the only district designated as a sending district for TDR credits.

### Residence A-40 (RA40) and Residence B-40 (RB40):

Both districts generally allow for medium-density residential at a 1-acre minimum lot size (40,000 SF). They also allow attached single-family dwelling units within a cluster subdivision. These districts have the same dimensional regulations; however, there may be some differences in other regulations such as permitted uses. The RA40 district allows for the use of TDR credits to increase density to 0.5 acre per lot (20,000 SF), and it also has a workforce housing option that allows an increased development yield of 10%, provided that such additional development is reserved for workforce housing.

**Hamlet Residential (HR):** HR is generally located along Church Lane (Route 23) north of Route 58 and just north of the hamlet center in Jamesport (on Manor Lane). The district is similar to RA80 with regard to dimensional regulations. It allows for low-density residential at a 2-acre minimum lot size (80,000 SF) and allows for an increase to 1 acre per lot (40,000 SF) with the use of TDR credits.

**Retirement Community (RC):** This district is in one large area north of Middle Road. RC permits the construction of medium density living accommodations for seniors and disabled older individuals in a congregate setting. The district is intended to be in areas near shopping, medical offices, public services, and public transportation. It provides for the use of TDR credits to increase development yield not to exceed 4 dwelling units per acre (40,000 SF). The minimum parcel area to be considered for inclusion within the RC district is 15 acres

**Multifamily Residential Professional Office Zone (MRP):** This district is located in one area along Route 25A in Wading River. MRP provides for medium-density residential options such as multifamily condominiums and townhomes, as well as professional offices. The number of dwelling units permitted is variable, based on the number of bedrooms per dwelling unit and

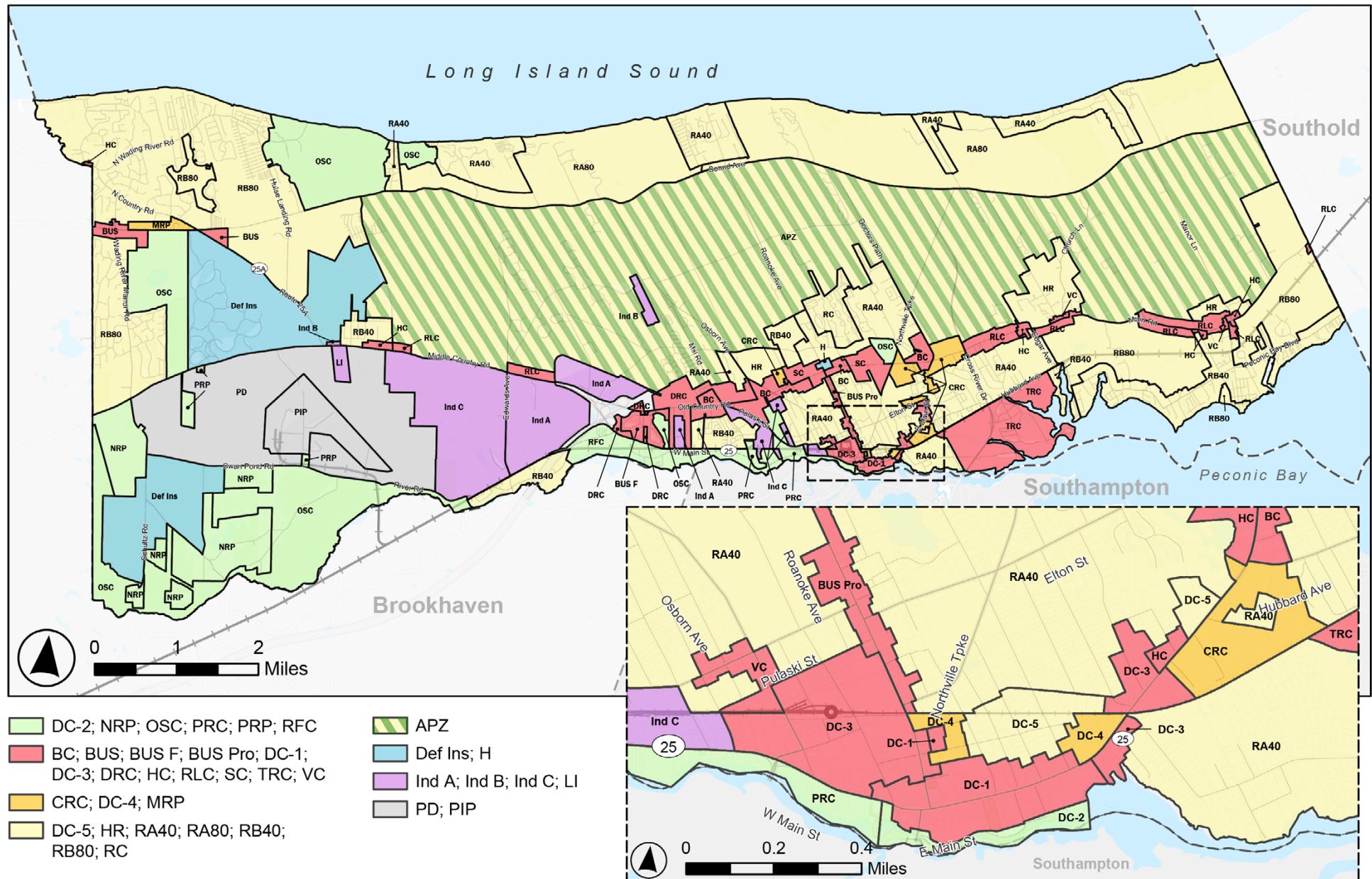


FIGURE 3: EXISTING ZONING

the availability of water and sewer infrastructure. The maximum density is 4 units per acre, assuming one-bedroom units and the provision of necessary infrastructure.

### **Commercial Districts:**

**Downtown Center (DC):** The DC district is divided into five categories (DC-1 thru DC-5) in order to balance downtown land uses and development patterns with the historic and natural context of the area. DC Districts are intended to limit sprawl and protect open space; develop the downtown as a cultural, civic, and tourist center by creating a high-density of mixed uses; increase public access to the waterfront; promote transit, pedestrian, and bicycle use; preserve historic resources; and provide community facilities.

**Downtown Center 1: Main Street (DC-1):** DC-1 allows a variety of commercial and cultural uses found in a downtown core area. It also permits professional offices, residential units on upper floors, B&Bs, and townhouses. Prohibited uses include office buildings only, flea markets, gas stations, car washes, and drive thru windows.

**Downtown Center 2: Waterfront (DC-2):** This district allows marinas, resorts, and retail stores, while hotels, inns, B&Bs, and indoor recreation are allowed by special permit. It is zoned for areas along the Peconic River near the downtown core area.

**Downtown Center 3: Office (DC-3):** This district is similar to DC-1 but with lower intensities. It complements the State Supreme Court of Suffolk County Complex by allowing a moderate intensity mix of uses, with ground-floor offices and retail and a greater mix of housing types. The Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area (RRA-OD) is an overlay district allowing for a higher-intensity mix of uses in DC-3, emphasizing ground-floor offices and retail, along

with residential spaces on upper floors for larger sites, with site plans reviewed by the Town Board. RRA-OD is discussed further in this section.

**Downtown Center 4: Office/Residential Transition (DC-4):** This district permits professional and public offices, single-family units, townhouses, places of worship, and funeral homes, while retail and personal services are prohibited. Professional offices, B&Bs, day care, and nursery schools are allowed by special permit.

**Downtown Center 5: Residential (DC-5):** DC-5 provides for a downtown residential neighborhood with permitted uses including live/workspaces and home occupations.

**Hamlet Center (HC):** HC zoning is located along Main Road in Aquebogue and Jamesport and along Route 25 in Calverton. This district provides for small clusters of shops and professional services in a rural setting, with a residential character. Development is meant to be pedestrian-friendly, small-scale, and clustered in a campus-style pattern. HC is intended to have larger front and side setbacks and more landscaping than the Village Center (VC) district. Apartments are permitted on upper floors.

**Village Center (VC):** VC districts are in hamlet center areas in Polishtown, Aquebogue, and Jamesport. The purpose of VC is to encourage "Main Street" style commercial nodes with small shops, restaurants, and professional services following a traditional pattern of development and design in a compact, pedestrian-oriented setting.

**Business Center (BC):** BC encourages single, freestanding roadside commercial uses, primarily along Route 58, between the existing Destination Retail Center (DRC) and Shopping Center (SC) districts. Preservation credits (TDR) may be used to increase the development yield, with sewer infrastructure.

**Shopping Center (SC):** SC allows for moderate-sized convenience shopping centers, mainly on Route 58, in central locations that are accessible from adjacent neighborhoods. Retail development is intended to be arranged in a shopping center layout, with large-scale stores complemented by ancillary small-scale stores. Professional office buildings are intended to be arranged in a campus-style layout. Strip or freestanding development is discouraged. TDR credits can be used to increase the allowable development yield.

**Destination Retail Center (DRC):** DRC provides for large regional retail centers along Route 58 while linking development to open space protected in the Agriculture Protection (APZ) district. Development is intended to have a campus-style layout, with no strip or freestanding businesses permitted. This district was amended in February 2024 to allow several additional commercial uses that would complement the retail sales center.

**Commercial/Residential Campus (CRC):** CRC aims to provide for office development as well as additional housing alternatives which are near service and arterial roads. The district permits housing types that are more dense than single-family homes; the dimensional regulations effectively increase the maximum density to 2 units per acre (with the use of TDR). CRC is primarily located in areas around East Main Street between the downtown core and Route 58.

**Manufacturer's Outlet Center (BUS F):** This district, located adjacent to the I-495 interchange/terminus, includes most of Tanger Outlets Riverhead. BUS F provides for outlet centers and their customary accessory and attending uses at sites that are appropriate due to their location relative to public infrastructure, and which are accessible to arterial roadway networks.

**Riverfront Corridor (RFC):** RFC provides for a mix of residential, commercial, and recreational uses that are in harmony with the ecologically sensitive areas of the

Peconic River. It allows for single-family homes, river-related retail uses, and non-motorized open space uses.

**Peconic River Community (PRC):** This district, located along West Main Street, west of the downtown core, provides for an array of commercial, and recreational uses while preserving the ecological resources along the Peconic River. While the stated intent of this district includes residential uses, no residential uses are currently permitted.

**Rural Corridor (RLC):** This district allows a very limited range of roadside shops and services that are compatible with the agricultural and rural setting along major arterial roads, such as Route 25, leading into downtown Riverhead and areas zoned Hamlet Center (HC) or Village Center (VC).

**Business (PB):** This district, which provides for a variety of professional office uses, is mapped along Roanoke Avenue to provide a transitional area between Route 58, the downtown area, and adjacent residential areas.

**Business CR (Rural Neighborhood Business):** This district is limited to a small area along Sound Avenue and 25A in Wading River. It allows small clusters of shops and professional offices oriented to nearby residents. The scale and design of new development in CR are intended to complement the Town's rural character and preserve and enhance natural open space areas and habitat. Where lot sizes and depths permit, development is intended to be clustered in a campus-style pattern.

**Tourism/Resort Campus (TRC):** Mapped on Indian Island County Park and Indian Island Golf Course, TRC provides opportunities for overnight accommodations and recreational amenities in a campus setting with significant open space preserves.

**Hospital (H):** The H district is mapped for lands owned by the Peconic Bay Medical Center. It is designed to optimize the hospital's services and meet the growing needs of the Riverhead community. Site plans in the H district are reviewed by the Town Board.

**Industrial A (Ind A):** Ind A allows for industrial and warehousing uses, primarily north and west of the terminus of the Long Island Expressway. IND A is intended to allow heavier uses than the Industrial C (Ind C) district.

**Industrial B (Ind B):** This district is found in two locations in the Town. While the zoning code provides for a variety of general industrial uses, no lot, yard, bulk, and height requirements are specified.

**Industrial C (Ind C):** Ind C allows for a mix of light industrial, warehouse development, recreational uses, and office campuses in the area between Enterprise Park and the terminus of the Long Island Expressway. It is also zoned for several scattered sites in more developed areas between Calverton and downtown. Ind C is intended for moderate-sized businesses and also allows and encourages commercial recreation businesses. The use of generous landscaping and open space buffers is intended to help protect the rural appearance and minimize views of development from the expressway and arterial roads.

**Light Industrial (LI):** This district encourages the development of employment-creating enterprises within buildings in an industrial park setting in accordance with modern development standards.

**Planned Industrial Park (PIP):** PIP provides for industrial and office development in a comprehensively planned and designed environment. It encompasses the bulk of the former Grumman facilities, sometimes referred to as the "industrial core" or the Burman Subdivision.

**Open Space Conservation (OSC):** OSC provides for conservation and preservation of lands, whether in public or private ownership, which are areas of significant environmental importance and are wholly exempt or have nontaxable status. Robert Cushman Murphy County Park, Sawmill Creek, Andrew Sabin Nature Preserve, Schiff Scout Reservation, and Wildwood State Park are mapped within this district.

**Def Ins:** This district is zoned for Calverton National Cemetery and other properties on Route 25A. This zoning district is not explicitly described in the Town's zoning code.

**Planned Recreational Park (PRP):** This district is mapped for some portions of the former Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant at Calverton. PRP allows for commercial recreation complexes within a regulatory framework which allows flexibility both in the use and design of these facilities in a single location.

**Natural Resources Protection (NRP):** This area is known as the "Pine Barrens Protection Zone." The Pine Barrens provide vegetation, wildlife habitats, and areas for groundwater supply located over a sole source aquifer. The zoning is intended to encourage clustering to create open space and minimize disturbances.

### Overlay and Other Districts

**Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area (RRA-OD):** This district was intended to spur investment in the DC-3 district to build off recent investments in the DC-1 area. The overlay district was formed in recognition of the existing blighted conditions and the unique obstacles facing the area. The area also has access to several resources such as the Suffolk County Supreme Court Complex, Riverhead Town Hall, LIRR Station, Riverhead Public Library, Railroad Museum, and Riverhead Historic Society Museum. The overlay

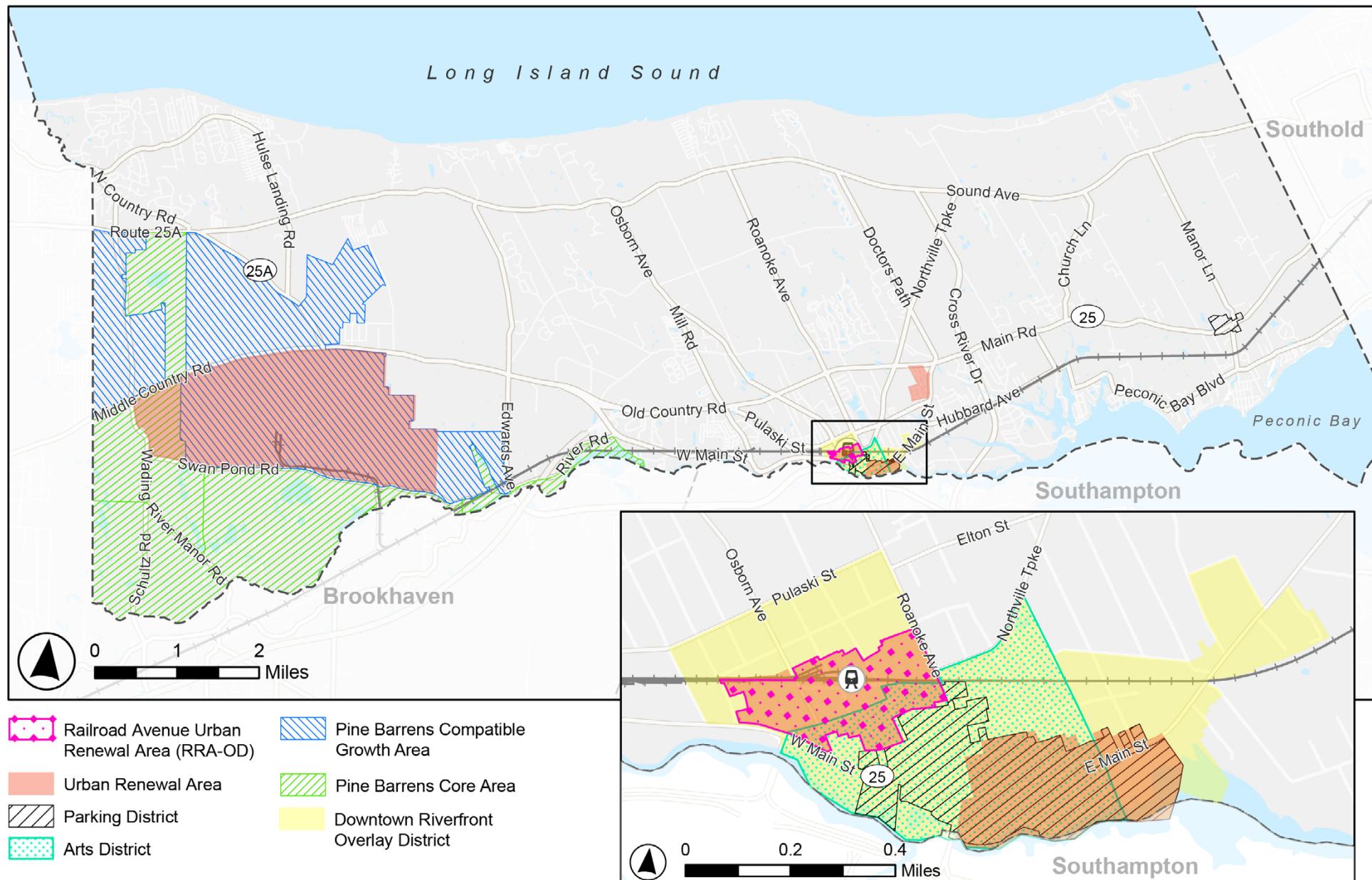


FIGURE 4: EXISTING OVERLAY ZONING

Source: Sources: Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

district permits a higher-intensity mix of uses, with ground-floor offices and retail and residential on upper floors for larger sites. Site plans in the Urban Renewal Area are reviewed by the Town Board.

**Arts District:** This overlay district is mapped in the central business district to help with the revitalization of the downtown area. It allows for unused floor space on upper floors to be used for art and cultural resources, together with living accommodations for artists.

**Downtown Riverfront Overlay:** This overlay district aims to promote waterfront development that enhances recreation and tourism, and to manage land uses so that the district becomes a people-friendly civic area with active uses, additional entertainment facilities and events, specialty retail, and restaurants. While a Downtown Pattern Book was developed to guide new development, it has yet to be adopted into the zoning code. Therefore, the use, dimensional, and other requirements for the underlying zoning use district apply.

**Pine Barrens Overlay District:** This district was designed to provide additional restrictions to protect the Pine Barrens Core and Compatible Growth Areas.

**Community Benefit District (CBD):** CBD is, in effect, a floating zone that would permit clustered multifamily rental dwelling units. Permission for use of this district requires the concurrent construction of on-site community center and nonresidential use(s). This district is only permitted on lots larger than 10 acres situated on State or County arterial roadways.

### Other Districts

**Federal Opportunity Zone:** A portion of downtown (Census Tract 1698) is in a Federal Opportunity Zone, along with portions of Calverton and Manorville including the EPCAL property. The Opportunity Zone program uses federal income tax incentives to

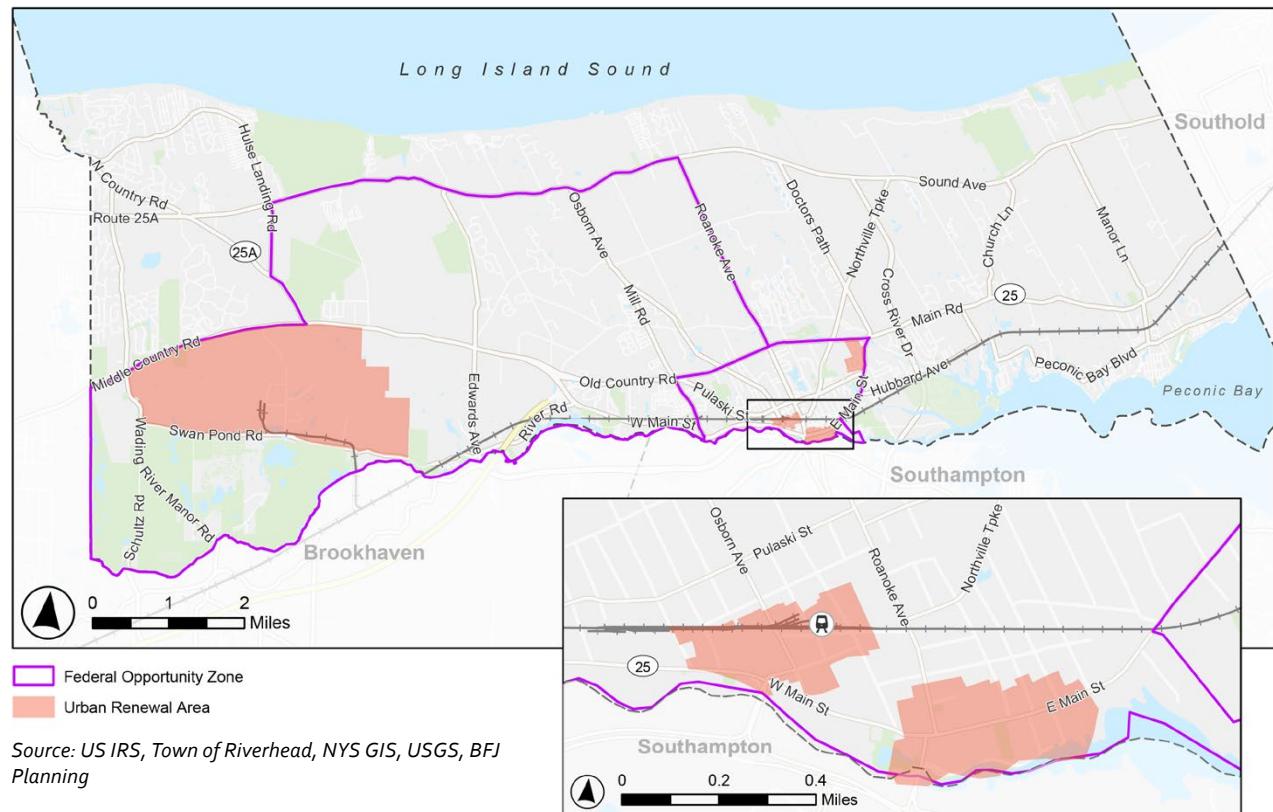


FIGURE 5: ZONES DESIGNATED TO PROMOTE INVESTMENT

spur economic development by allowing taxpayers to defer capital gains by reinvesting those gains into communities designated as "qualified opportunity zones."

While the Federal Opportunity Zone designation provides funding opportunities and developer interest in the downtown Riverhead area, the existing 500-unit cap for the DC-1 zoning area limits new growth. With a strong push for development and a Federal Opportunity Zone in play, investors and developers need predictability in the process and to know whether they can or cannot build.

**Parking District:** The Riverhead Parking District No. 1 is an official Town Special District, a taxing jurisdiction that levies taxes on all property owners within the district. Properties within the parking district do not have to provide off-street parking. The purpose of the district is to create additional parking spaces that serve the downtown area. The Town Board serves as the regulating board of the district.

## ZONING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One objective for this Comprehensive Plan is to provide a clear and effective roadmap for guiding sustainable growth and preservation of the Town. Fundamental to this process is the establishment of appropriate zoning recommendations that address identified issues and align with the Plan's overarching vision.

As noted earlier, discussions of zoning issues and recommendations are not confined to this chapter, and recommendations are distributed throughout the various topic-oriented chapters.

A brief synopsis of zoning issues addressed in other chapters is below:

### ***Demographics and Housing (Ch. 3)***

The Demographics and Housing Chapter includes four goals which collectively address the diverse housing needs of Riverhead, encompassing affordability, diversity in housing types, homeownership support, and inclusivity.

Goal 1 focuses on promoting housing affordability and workforce housing availability, with recommendations including regular monitoring of housing dynamics, reviewing housing policies, and addressing the impact of short-term rentals on the housing stock. The chapter also stresses the importance of encouraging other East End towns to contribute their fair share of affordable and workforce housing.

Goal 2 emphasizes diversifying housing types to accommodate various income levels and evolving needs. Initiatives include eliminating minimum home size requirements and utilizing TDR to allow for new housing types (i.e. townhomes and garden apartments) in areas that can accommodate increased densities. In the downtown area, the chapter recommends allowing

for adaptive reuse of buildings for residential purposes and evaluating the 500-unit cap for the DC-1 District. This review should be conducted regularly, potentially on an annual basis.

Goal 3 aims to support the creation and protection of homeownership workforce households. Strategies include providing resources and incentives for first-time homebuyers, revising the 500-unit cap to promote homeownership opportunities, and changing affordability thresholds for ownership versus rentals.

Goal 4 focuses on promoting inclusive housing policies and accessible design standards. Recommendations include supporting home improvement funding for low-income senior residents, allowing residential health-care facilities in designated zones (i.e. assisted-care and continuing care facilities), and developing accessible design standards.

### ***Economic Development (Ch. 4)***

The Economic Development chapter outlines a comprehensive set of initiatives to guide land use and zoning strategies, aiming to balance economic growth with community needs. One topic is the reassessment of the EPCAL development strategy with a collaborative study involving residents and stakeholders. The goal is to proactively address potential impacts, improve infrastructure, and align development with local needs. Additionally, the chapter emphasizes responsible industrial development by encouraging recreational opportunities, scaling back allowable density in industrial areas "outside the fence," allowing for slightly higher building heights (with increased setbacks), and incorporating design standards for aesthetics and environmental harmony.

The chapter addresses other key areas such as revitalization of the downtown area, enhancement of the Route 58 corridor, and responsible land use planning in hamlet centers. Future study is needed in some of these areas, including the creation of design guidelines for Route 58 and the development of several focused hamlet studies. Overall, the initiatives reflect a holistic approach to economic development, which balances fiscal considerations, and the diverse needs of the community and the environment.

### ***Agricultural Lands (Ch. 6)***

This chapter underscores the importance of aligning zoning regulations with the goals of sustaining agricultural activities, preserving the rural character, and managing environmental impacts. Several recommendations address how the TDR program can be improved to make it a more attractive tool for property owners and developers. One initiative would be to revisit the transfer formula to improve the demand for TDR Credits; another involves creating new receiving areas for TDR credits. Several other TDR recommendations are administrative in nature. The plan also highlights policy and code changes to help to preserve more agricultural lands during subdivisions.

## Natural Features and Environmental Resources (Ch. 7)

Recommendations in this section focus on the myriad ways riverhead can protect and preserve these resources. Land use regulations address how the Town code and incorporate best practices for stormwater management, landscaping, and conservation. The chapter also recommends several initiatives to protect the forest such as a tree preservation law. Land use decisions could be better informed through the mapping of the Town's forest as well as an updated inventory of wetlands.

## Open Space, Parks, and Recreation (Ch. 8)

This chapter discusses the Town's parks and open space resources and presents strategies to safeguard and enhance them for generations to come. Land use recommendations address opportunities to provide new parks and facilities for recreational programming, prioritizing underserved areas. The Town should continue to implement the vision for the Town Square and other public spaces Downtown. There are also opportunities to improve areas along the Peconic River to make it a more attractive destination for recreation. The chapter also addresses opportunities to strengthen open space requirements such as through cluster development.

## Sustainability and Resilience (Ch. 12)

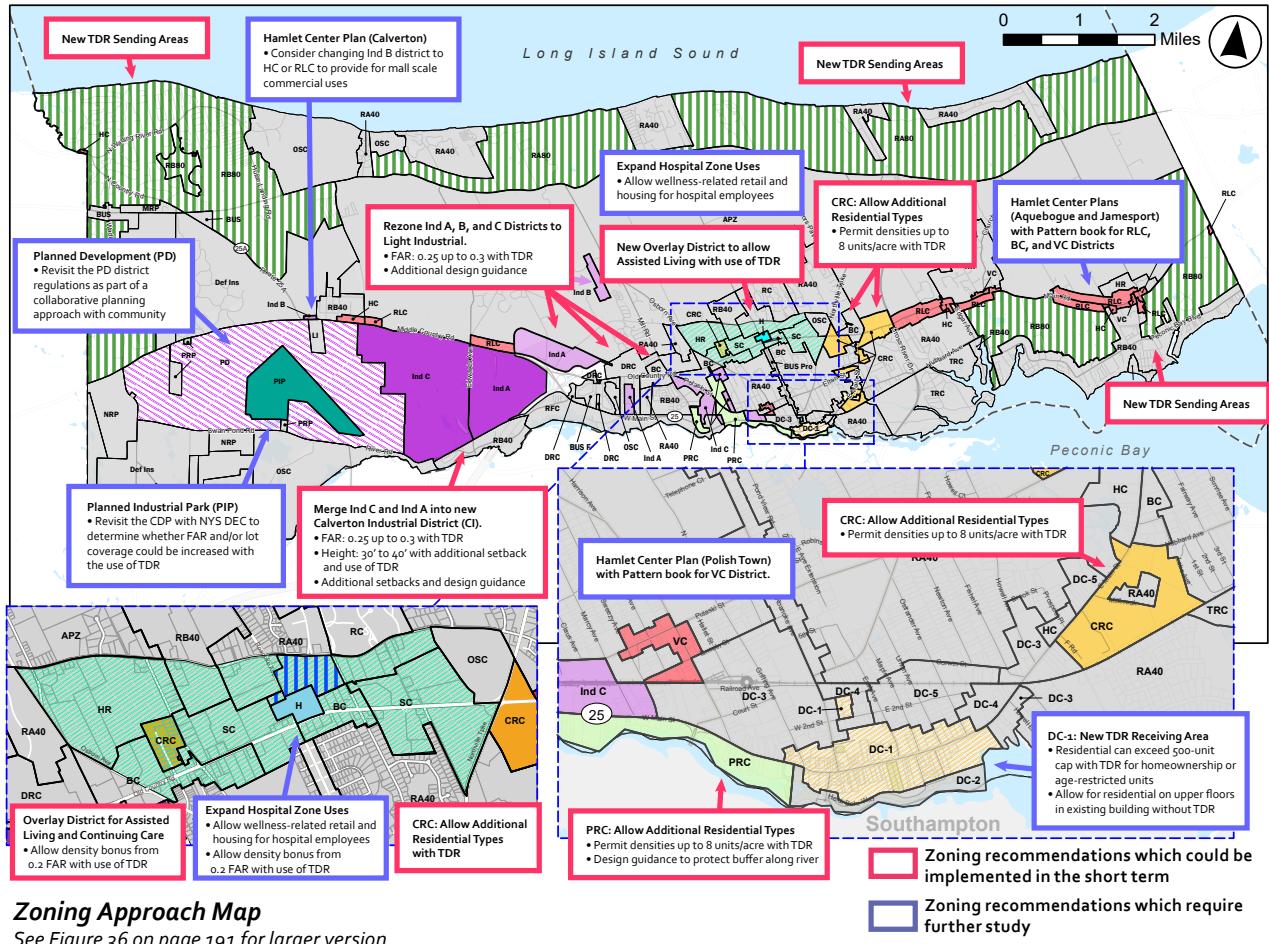
This chapter discusses a variety of strategies to promote sustainable patterns of development. One zoning-related strategy is the incorporation of sustainable construction and design standards.

## Future Land Use Chapter and Implementation (Chapter 13)

The Future Land Use Chapter acts as a roadmap, providing a framework for decision-making by local authorities, developers, and residents, fostering a cohesive and sustainable development trajectory. This chapter provides specific land use policies and goals to guide the allocation of land for various purposes, balancing the need for economic development with the preservation of natural resources and community character. This chapter incorporates zoning

recommendations, density regulations, and strategies for sustainable development, aiming to align future growth with the community's values, economic goals, and environmental considerations. A summary of major zoning recommendations is shown below, and is further detailed Figure 36 on page 191.

While this chapter provides a digest of major zoning recommendations, the Town Board, government agencies, community members, and other stakeholders should explore the plan in its entirety to gain a holistic perspective on the proposed vision for Riverhead.



Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 3 DEMOGRAPHICS AND HOUSING

Demographic trends help understand how the population composition has changed over time in Riverhead in comparison with Suffolk County and neighboring communities. Findings from this analysis inform the recommendations of this Plan by highlighting changing needs in the Town. For example, an aging population indicates an increasing demand for senior services and housing.

This analysis primarily uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau, including the Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS). The Decennial Census has the most reliable and accurate data because it is a count of the population. However, the census only captures a handful of data points (e.g. age, race). For other population attributes that describe social and economic characteristics (e.g. median household income, educational attainment), the ACS 5-year estimates are used. Estimates rely on population samples and are thus susceptible to error. This data provides a general description of trends rather than precise counts. These estimates should be tempered with the community's observations of changing social and economic characteristics.

Some of the key findings of the demographic analysis are listed below:

- Riverhead's population grew at a greater rate than Suffolk County.
- Riverhead's population is aging. The Town's share of senior residents increased more than the County's, and Riverhead has a higher percentage of residents over 60.
- As of 2020, Riverhead's minority population grew to 34%, with the Hispanic population seeing the largest gain.
- Riverhead's median household income was estimated to be 28% less than that of the County in 2021, and when adjusted for inflation, has fallen since 2010.
- The Town has a smaller household size than the County and has a higher percentage of non-family households than surrounding communities.<sup>1</sup>
- Riverhead has a lower percentage of the population who attended college than the County.
- The Town has a higher percentage of residents with limited English-speaking skills than the County. Spanish is the most common language spoken by this group.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Non-Family Household" is defined in the U.S. Census as a household that consists of a householder living alone (one-person household) or where the householder shares the home exclusively with people to whom they are not related.

## DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

### POPULATION GROWTH

In 2020, Riverhead's population was 35,902 people. This represents growth of 30% between 2000-2020, much greater rate than Suffolk County (8%) (see Chart 1). However, the rate of growth for both geographies slowed after 2010, with ACS 2021 estimates suggesting that the population has stabilized, or potentially begun to decline slightly, in both the Town and County. The data may partially reflect trends from the COVID pandemic, where there was a population shift from more dense urban areas to more rural areas. However, during the pandemic, many part-time owners became permanent residents. Continued monitoring and assessment is needed to better understand how much of the recent growth will be sustained.

### Projected Population Growth

The New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) projects population growth for the region, including Suffolk County. The most recent NYMTC forecasts to 2055, adopted in October 2020, were created with the full cooperation of the Suffolk County Department of Economic Development and Planning and reflect the significant changes in land use throughout the County. Further, the forecasts consider all known development in the pipeline as of 2020 for the County, including Riverhead.

NYMTC's 2020 estimates show Suffolk County's population will grow 14% from 2010 to 2055 (see Chart 2). If Riverhead's population were to grow at the same rate from its 2010 population, the Town would expect to see a population of about 35,756 by 2035. In the 2020 Decennial Census, the County's actual population was somewhat higher (about 1.7% greater) than projected, while Riverhead's population

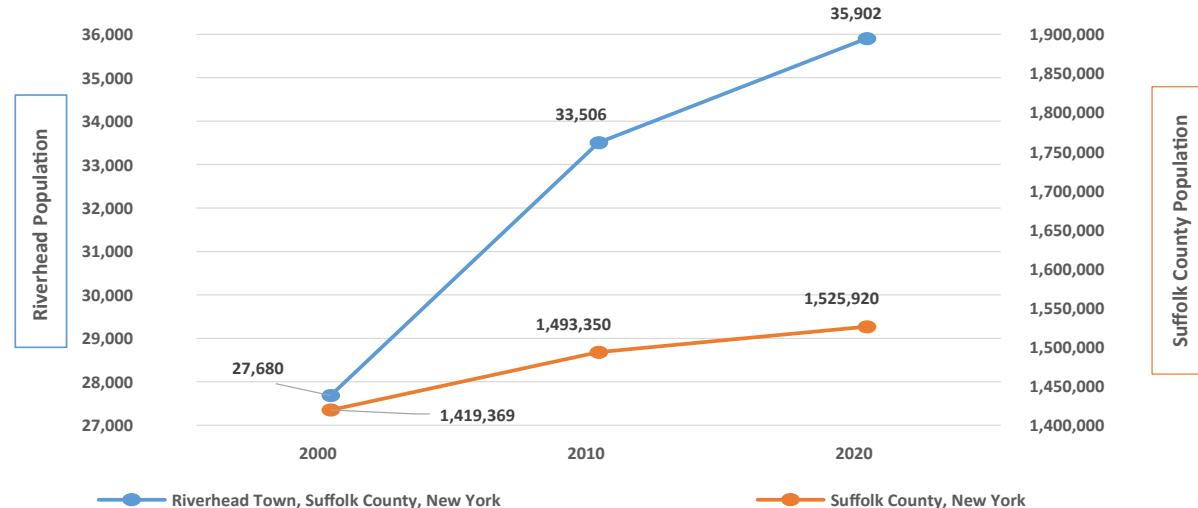


Chart 1: Population in Riverhead and Suffolk County (2000 – 2020 )

Source: U.S. Decennial Census (2000-2020)

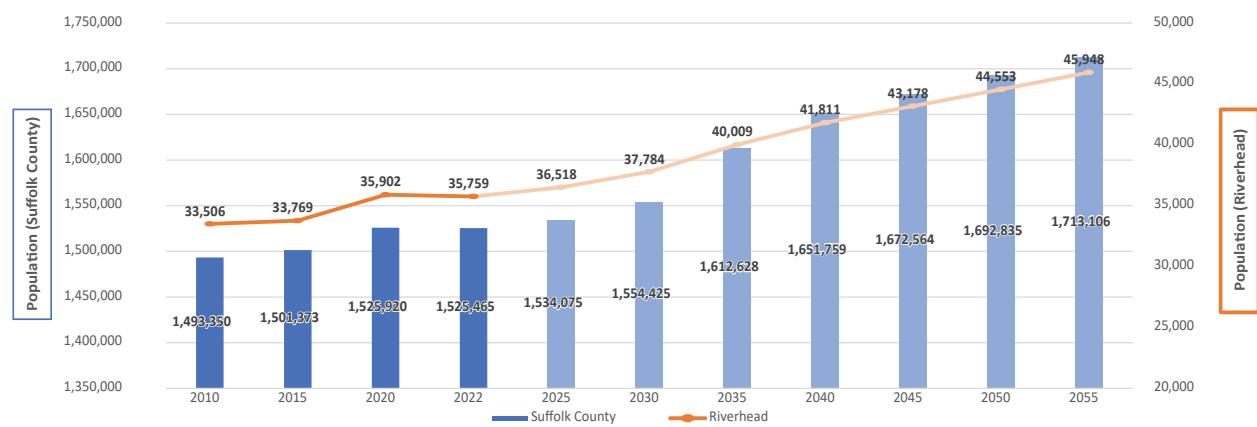


Chart 2: Projected Population Growth in Riverhead and Suffolk County (2010 – 2055 )

Sources: NYMTC 2055 SED Forecasts, 2022\*; U.S. Decennial Census, 2010-2020; ACS 5-Year Estimates 2015, 2022\*

\*Note: The projected population for Riverhead Town is estimated by using the most recent NYMTC numbers for Suffolk County, which include observations until 2022, determining Riverhead's share of the Suffolk County population from 2010-2022, and using a function to trend the change in share through 2055. The trended share was then applied to the County totals from 2025 to 2055.

was 6.6% greater than projected. As previously noted, Riverhead's population has recently grown faster than the County. If trends hold, these factors suggest a higher-than-projected long-term population. Therefore, as shown in Chart 2, NYMTC issued revised projections for Suffolk County and Riverhead which now project a population of 40,009 residents by 2035.

## Age

Riverhead's population is aging and has a larger share of residents over 60 than the County (see Chart 3). The median age in Riverhead in 2020 was 46.9 years, up from 44 years in 2010. While the County's population is also aging, its median age is younger at 42 years, up from 38.9 in 2010.

In 2020, 32% of the Town was over 60, up from 26% in 2010. This is due to aging in place and in-migration of retirees. Suffolk County is also aging, although a smaller portion of its population is over 60 (25% in 2020 and 19% in 2010). The data suggest that there will be an increasing need for senior housing as long-term residents age out of their homes.

As a percent increase, the over-60 population over 60 grew by 30% in Riverhead and 33% in the County from 2010 to 2020. During this period, the Town saw the largest growth in the population aged 70-79 years old (plus 1,370 people) and the greatest decrease in the population aged 40-49 years (minus 833 people). This pattern is consistent with the County.

The percentage of children as a share of Riverhead's total population is declining. In 2020, people 19 years old and under made up 21% of the population, versus 23% in 2010. The County shows the same pattern, but a larger proportion of its population is under 19.

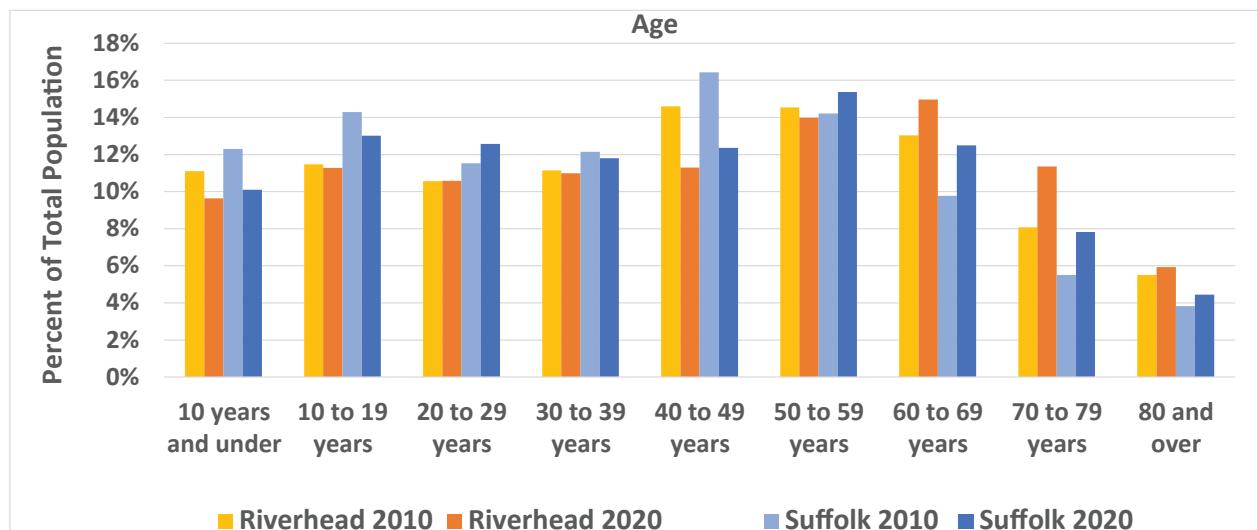


Chart 3: Age of the Population in Riverhead and Suffolk County (2020)

Source: U.S. Decennial Census (2010-2020)

## Diversity

In terms of race and ethnicity, Riverhead's population is about a third minority and two-thirds White Alone (see Chart 4). The Town's population has seen a 49% increase in its minority population (about 3,900 people) from 2010-2020. Riverhead's Hispanic population made up most of the growth, increasing by 78% (from about 4,600 to 8,300 people) during this period (see Chart 5).

At the County level, the minority population also grew, but at a lower rate. The most growth was in the Hispanic community, which increased by 35% (by 86,700 people). The County saw greater increases by percent change in the Asian Alone and Black or African American Alone populations than the Town. The Asian Alone population grew 29% (14,700 people) in Suffolk County, while the increase was only 1% in Riverhead (69 people). The Black or African American Alone population in Suffolk County grew by 7% (5,000

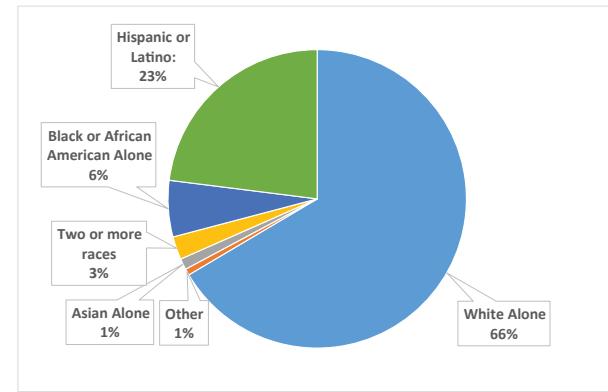
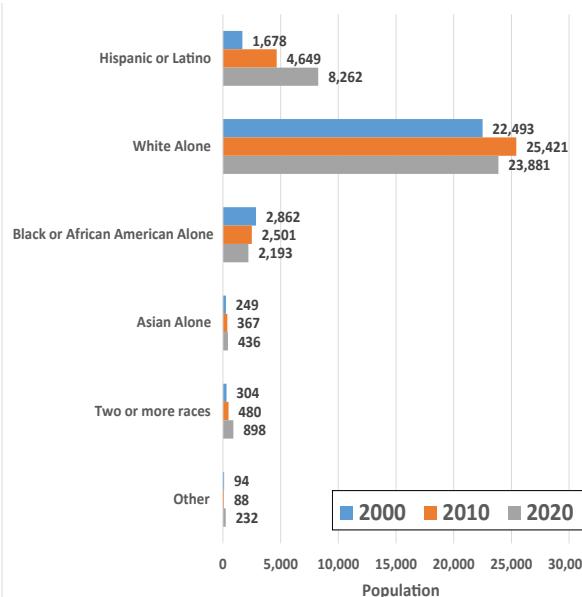


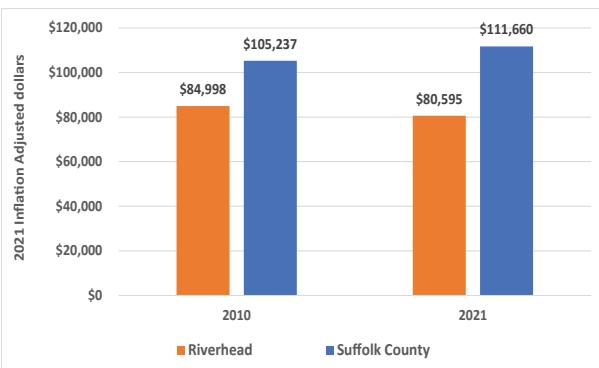
Chart 4: Population by Race and Ethnicity (2020)

Source: U.S. Decennial Census (2020)



**Chart 5: Change in Race and Ethnicity of the Riverhead Population (2000-2020)**

Source: U.S. Decennial Census (2000-2020)



**Chart 6: Median Household Income (2010-2021)**

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2010, 2021

people). By contrast, in Riverhead, the Black or African American Alone population decreased by 12% (from approximately 2,500 to 2,200 people).

### Income

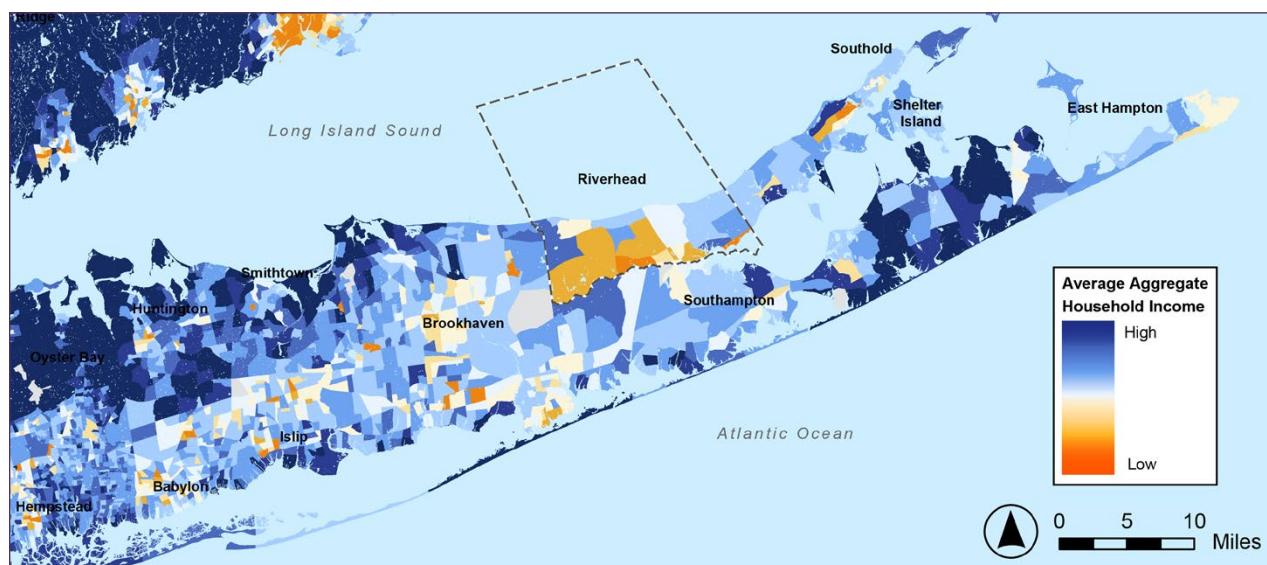
The 2021 median household income in Riverhead was \$80,595, about \$31,000 below, or 72% of the County's \$111,660. While the Town's median household income has historically been lower, the gap has grown. This disparity underscores the pressing need for initiatives to bolster economic opportunities and increase household incomes in Riverhead. Moreover, while Suffolk County's median household income experienced a modest increase of about \$6,400 between 2010 and 2021, Riverhead's median household income decreased by about \$4,400 when adjusted for inflation. This decline highlights the urgency for targeted interventions and support

mechanisms to reverse this negative trajectory and foster economic stability and prosperity for Riverhead residents.

Looking at the average aggregate household income by census tract on Long Island reveals income disparities within and between the Town and neighboring jurisdictions (see Figure 6). Areas of Riverhead have some of the lowest incomes in the region.

### Households

The average household size in Riverhead is 2.5, smaller than Suffolk County's 3.0; the average household size of both remained stable between 2000 and 2021. Riverhead has a higher percentage of non-family households than surrounding communities. In 2021, non-family households comprised about 35% of all households in the Town, compared with about 27% for the County. When viewing this data on a



**FIGURE 6: AVERAGE AGGREGATE HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

Source: US Census, 2020, CDC, 2020, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

map of Long Island, it becomes clear that Riverhead is unique (see Figure 7). It's important to note that the category of non-family households is broad and encompasses various living arrangements, including individuals living alone, roommates, unmarried couples, and more. Therefore, there may be multiple contributing factors to why Riverhead has a higher percentage of non-family households compared with the surrounding areas.

### Educational Attainment

In Riverhead, 12% of the population over 25 years old has less than a high school education, a larger percentage than in Suffolk County (9.6%, see Chart 7). The County has a higher proportion of people with a high school diploma or equivalent, some college, a bachelor's degree, master's degree, professional degree, or doctorate. Riverhead's share of the population with less than a high school diploma or equivalency has increased from 11% to 12% between 2010 and 2020, with a slight decline in the percentage attaining higher levels of education. The County experienced the opposite trend.

### Language Spoken at Home

Of Riverhead's population five years and older, about 17%, or 5,800 people, speak a language other than English at home (see Chart 8). The majority speak Spanish at home (62%, 3,600 people). About half of those who speak another language at home speak English less than "very well" (47%, 2,700 people). This portion is higher in the Spanish-speaking population (57%, 2,100 people.) Riverhead's other language and Spanish-speaking groups increased from 2010 to 2021, by 19% and 20%, respectively. At the same time, the population who speak English less than "very well" has decreased by 13%, indicating that the other language and Spanish-speaking populations have grown and their ability to speak English has improved.

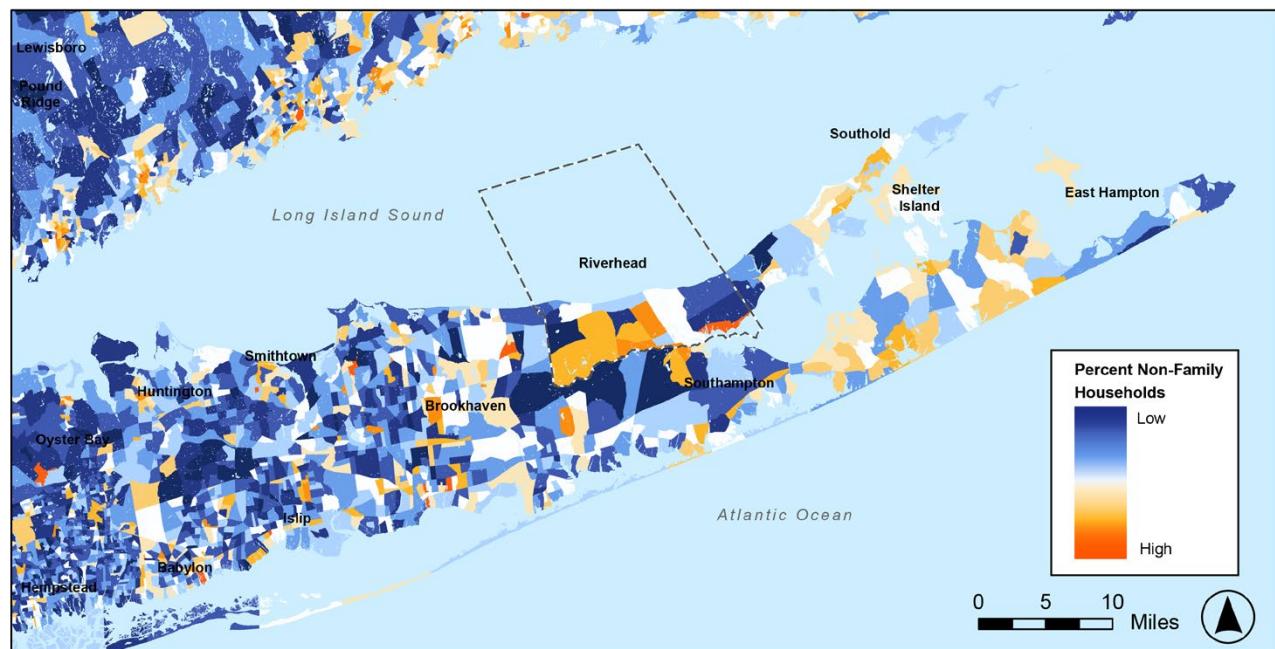


FIGURE 7: PERCENT NON-FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS

Source: Urban Footprint, Household Characteristics - Census Planning Database (2021); ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2019

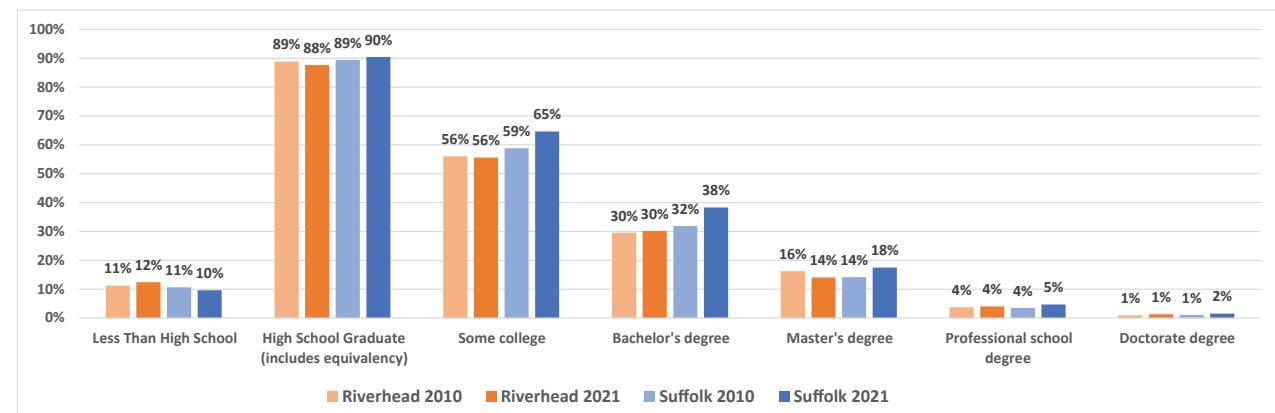


Chart 7: Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Older (2010-2020)

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimate, 2010, 2021

The County has a higher percentage of the population five years and older who speak a language other than English at home (22%) than Riverhead (17%). At the County level, about a third of that group speaks English less than "very well" (37%). The proportion of Spanish speakers is about the same in the County and Riverhead. However, a much smaller portion of the County's Spanish speakers speak English less than "very well" (37%) than in Riverhead (57%), indicating that a larger share of the Spanish-speaking population in Riverhead has difficulty speaking English.

## SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) created the social vulnerability index to help jurisdictions plan for and respond to public health emergencies and natural disasters. The index factors in 16 different census characteristics to determine the level of vulnerability. Vulnerable areas may have characteristics such as high percentage of population aged 65 and older, high poverty rates, overcrowded housing, or lack of access to transportation. Figure 8 shows the social vulnerability index for Riverhead and Long Island census tracts. The data indicates that some areas of Riverhead have more vulnerable populations.

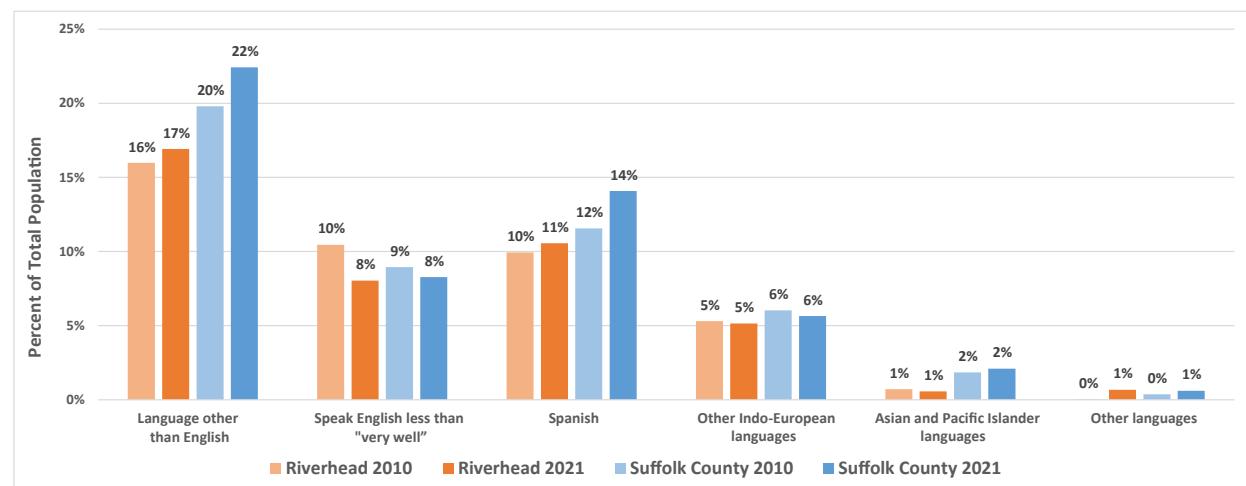


Chart 8: Population 5-Years and Older Who Speak a Language Other Than English At Home (2021)

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimate, 2021

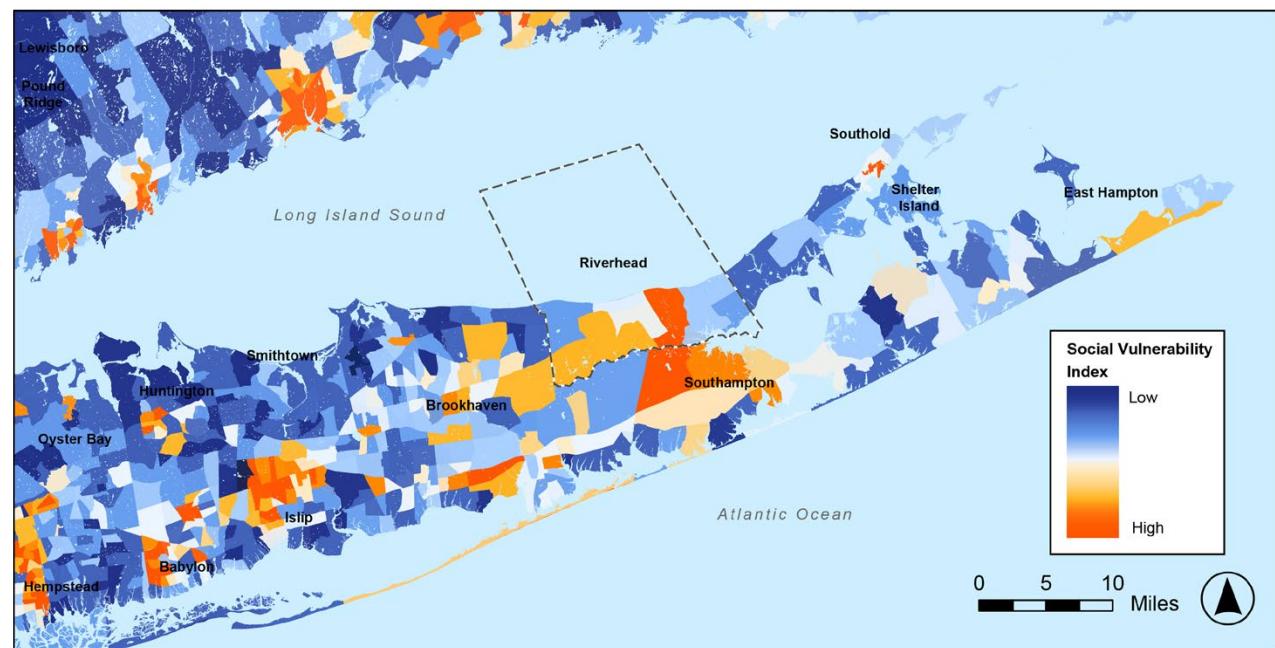


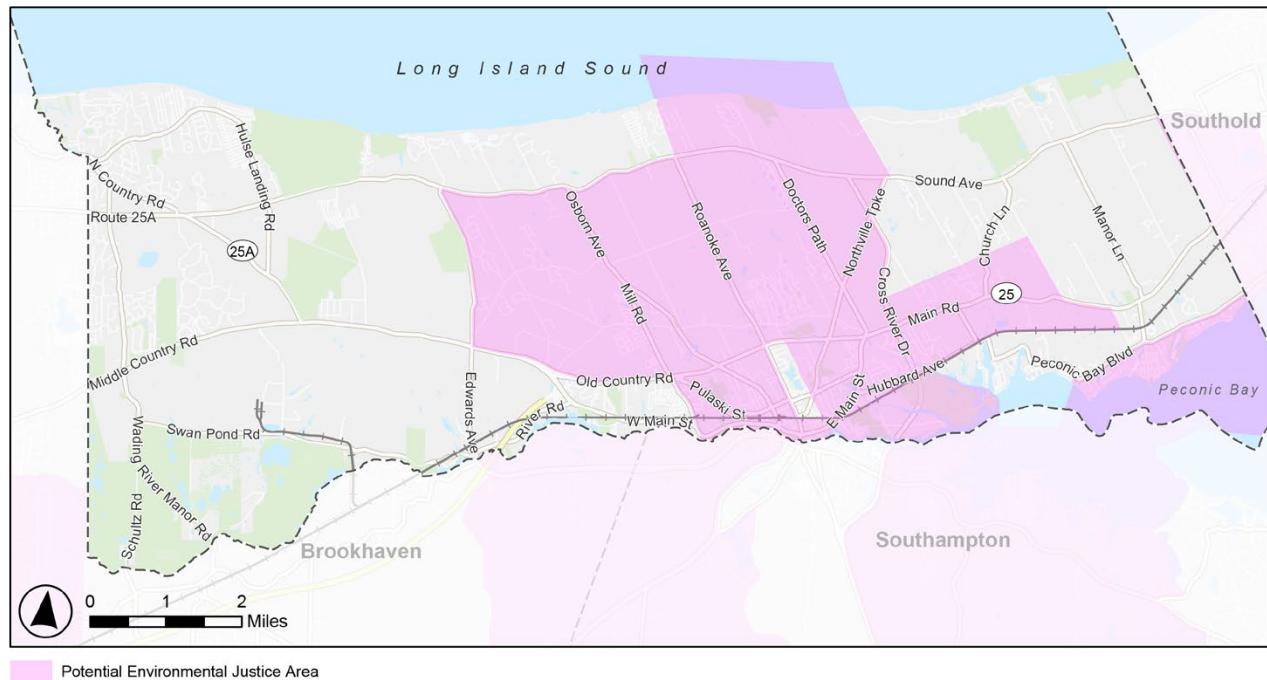
FIGURE 8: SOCIAL VULNERABILITY INDEX

Source: US Census, 2020, CDC, 2020, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

## Potential Environmental Justice Areas

NYCDEC defines Potential Environmental Justice Areas as, “a minority or low-income community that may bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies.”<sup>1</sup> During the environmental permitting and SEQR process of proposed projects within PEJAs, there are enhanced public participation requirements, additional requirements for projects that will have at least one significant adverse environmental impact, and dispute resolution opportunities. Environmental justice is also considered for some grant programs. The purpose of this policy is to promote environmental justice, which DEC defines as, “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies.”<sup>2</sup>

Areas of Riverhead that met this criterial are highlighted in Figure 9. PEJAs are determined by NYDEC using U.S. Census Block groups of 250-500 households each that meet the following criteria:<sup>3</sup>



**FIGURE 9: POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREAS**

Source: US Census Bureau, Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

1. At least 52.42% of the population in an urban area reported themselves to be members of minority groups; or
2. At least 26.28% of the population in a rural area reported themselves to be members of minority groups; or
3. At least 22.82% of the population in an urban or rural area had household incomes below the federal poverty level.

<sup>1</sup> New York Department of Environmental Conservation, Office of Environmental Justice, “Commissioner Policy 29, Environmental Justice And Permitting,” <https://dec.ny.gov/regulatory/guidance-and-policy-documents/commissioner-policy-29-environmental-justice-and-permitting>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> New York Department of Environmental Conservation, Office of Environmental Justice, “Potential Environmental Justice Areas,” <https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/environmental-justice/gis-tools>

## HOUSING TRENDS

Riverhead's housing sector demonstrates several key areas of success. The Town has a significant amount of existing affordable housing, particularly in some hamlets and downtown areas with convenient access to transit. Its location as a gateway to the East End, coupled with its proximity to the Peconic River and popular attractions like anger Mall Outlets, positions Riverhead as an attractive residential destination. Additionally, the burgeoning food and beverage scene, along with opportunities in agri-tourism, further enhance its appeal. However, there are notable areas in need of improvement. Overcrowded housing, a lack of diverse housing stock, and challenges with enforcement of short-term rentals present hurdles. Moreover, the saturation of sober homes highlights the need for balanced housing solutions that cater to various demographics and needs within the community.

Federal Opportunity Zones, coupled with the demand for market-rate housing and alternative housing types such as assisted living, co-ops, condos, and townhouses, present avenues for housing growth in Riverhead. Initiatives like the Long Island Workforce Housing Act and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan offer strategies to address housing needs while promoting sustainable growth. Repurposing vacant big-box stores or other underutilized commercial areas for new purposes, such as assisted-living facilities or medical offices, can also help meet evolving community needs. However, threats such as the lack of senior housing options, impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and vulnerabilities to climate change and severe weather events require careful consideration in Riverhead's housing development strategy.

The housing section builds on work completed by AKRF for the Town in 2022 as part of this Comprehensive Plan effort. The Economic and Market Trends Analysis

considers both micro-economic and macro-economic real estate trends and opportunities. The report also provides an Affordable Housing Analysis, which was included as an appendix to the Economic and Market Trends Analysis report. Data in this chapter were updated to reflect current trends; however, many of the issues and opportunities identified in 2022 remain valid.

### Housing Types

Single-family detached homes make up the largest share of housing in Riverhead (69% of total housing units in 2021). According to the ACS, between 2000 and 2021, the Town saw a 27% increase in this housing type (added 2,435 homes for a total of 11,383). The County's growth in single-family detached homes was slower at 8% and its share of such homes decreased (from 82% to 80%).

Mobile and manufactured homes make up the second largest share of housing in Riverhead after single-family detached homes (2,343 units, or 14.2% of total housing stock in 2021). The number of these homes in the Town grew by 30% (about 538 units) over 20 years, roughly 40% of the County's increase in that category. The Census differentiates between mobile and manufactured homes strictly by date of construction, with the former produced before June 15, 1976, and the latter after that date. Within the industry, mobile homes have non-permanent foundations with land leased from park owners, while manufactured homes have permanent foundations and the land is also held by homeowner. As of January 2024, of the 2,343 total mobile and manufactured homes, 1,513 were age-restricted manufactured homes, while the remainder were mobile homes, both all ages and senior. A more detailed breakdown of mobile homes in the Town can be found in the Market Trends Analysis completed by AKRF.

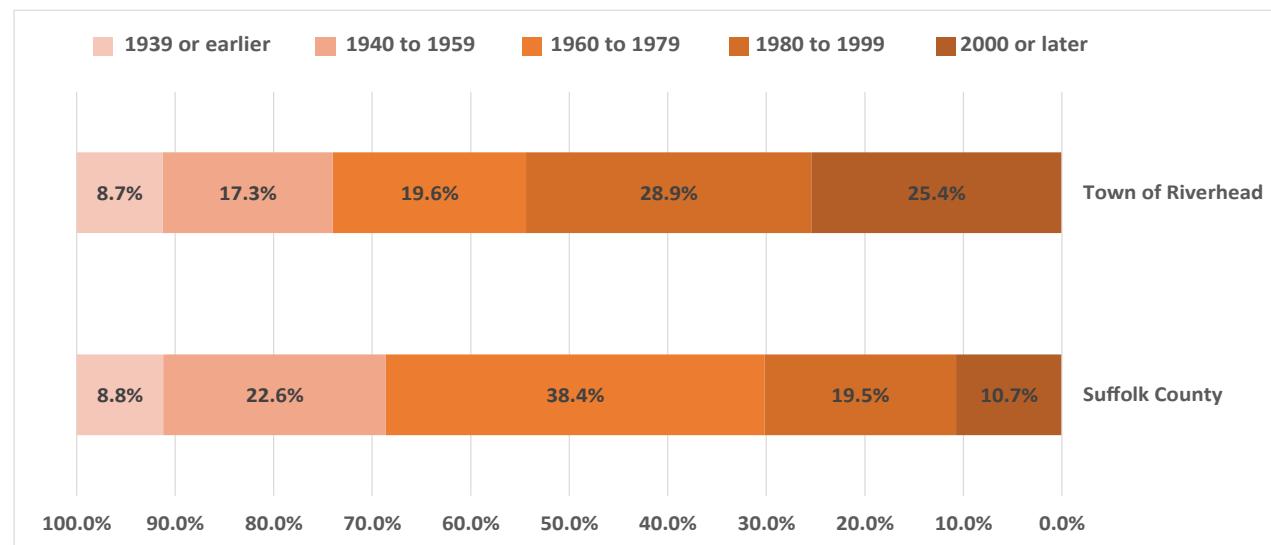


Chart 9: Year Structure Built

Source: US Census Bureau, ACS, 2017-2021 5-Year Estimate

In Riverhead, the share of single-family attached, 2-family, and 3-4 family homes increased substantially. Single-family attached homes nearly quintupled (from 187 units to 984 units) while the number of 2-4 family homes almost doubled (from 487 units to 838 units). Growth in these housing types was much faster in the Town than in the County as a whole.

### Recent Housing Development

Since the Town's 2003 Comprehensive Plan, the housing market has shown significant growth and change. Over one-quarter of Riverhead's current housing stock was built after 2000, compared with just over 10% for Suffolk County during the same period.

Between 2000 and 2020, Riverhead added 2,945 housing units. As shown in Chart 11 this growth as a percentage was much higher in Riverhead compared with other East End towns as well as Suffolk County as a whole.

### Housing in Downtown Area

There are several recently completed and ongoing initiatives and programs designed to revitalize Downtown Riverhead with new investment in housing and the public realm. The Pattern Book for the downtown area estimates net new development could essentially double built square footage in Downtown Riverhead and accommodate about 1,200 rental apartments (assuming a 50/50 mix of 1- and 2-bedrooms). As shown in Table 2, over 900 new multifamily units have recently been built or proposed for Riverhead's downtown.

While there has been a significant amount of growth, there is a 500-unit cap on residential units allowed in the core area zoned DC-1. This cap has effectively been reached, so new development in the core area is unlikely to occur unless this restriction is changed.

Recent planning initiatives including the Railroad Avenue URA TOD development (2021), the Pattern Book (2021), the Downtown Riverfront Activation Plan, and the DRI Strategic Investment Plan (2022), will continue to feed investment and development in Downtown Riverhead. A portion of the downtown is in a Federal Opportunity Zone (Census Tract 1698), along with portions of Calverton and Manorville including the EPCAL property (See Chapter 3 for map). The Opportunity Zone program uses Federal income tax incentives to spur economic development by allowing taxpayers to defer capital gains by reinvesting those gains into communities designated as "qualified opportunity zones."

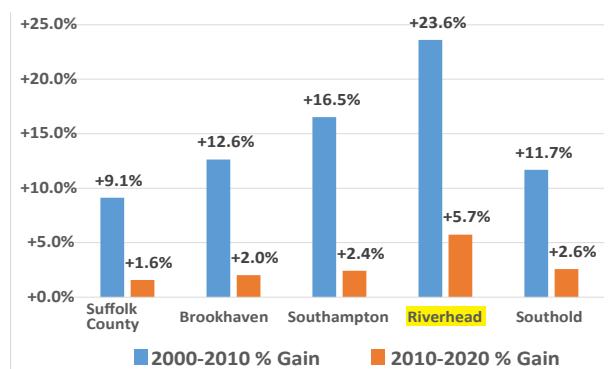


Chart 10: Growth in Housing Units (2000-2010 and 2010-2020)

Source: US Census 2000, 2010, 2020

Project	Status	# of Apartments
<b>DC-1 District</b>		
Summerwind	Constructed	52
Woolworth	Constructed	19
Peconic Crossing	Constructed	45
Riverview Lofts	Constructed	116
203/213 E. Main St.	Approved, but not yet constructed	165
Suffolk Theater Addition	Preliminary approval by Town Board	28
Zenith Building	Site plan application approved by Town Board	9
331 E. Main Street	Constructed	36
Landmarks of Riverhead	Site plan application under review by Town Board	45
Barth's Drug Store	Site plan application under review by Town Board	1
<b>DC-1 – Subtotal</b>		<b>516</b>
<b>DC-3 District/RRA-OD</b>		
205 Osborn Ave	Under Construction	37
The Vue	Preliminary approval by Town Board	133
TOD Apartment Building	Site plan application under review by Town Board	243
<b>DC-3/RRA-OD – Subtotal</b>		<b>413</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>929</b>

Table 2: Recent Downtown Multifamily Projects

Source: Town of Riverhead, as of April, 2024

### Tenure

As seen in Table 3 below, Riverhead has a higher percentage of renter-occupied homes (24%) versus surrounding towns and the County as a whole (22%). Affordability is a significant factor influencing homeownership. Higher housing prices or a lower median income in Riverhead compared with surrounding areas could make it more challenging for residents to afford homes, resulting in lower homeownership rates. Employment opportunities and income levels in the Town may also affect

residents' ability to qualify for mortgages and sustain homeownership. For renters, the distribution of home sizes (i.e., 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, 3-bedroom, and 4+ bedroom) is comparable to the County overall. For homeowners, the Town has a higher proportion of 2-bedroom homes and a lower percentage of 4+ bedroom homes compared with the County. This is consistent with the demographic data which shows that the average household size in Riverhead is smaller. If the Town's population consists of more single individuals, couples, or smaller families, there could be a higher demand for 2-bedroom homes.

Location	Total Housing Units	Owner-occupied		Renter-occupied	
		Number	%	Number	%
Riverhead	13,879	10,523	75.8%	3,356	24.2%
Southampton	25,806	19,841	76.9%	5,965	23.1%
Southold	10,010	7,897	78.9%	2,113	21.1%
Brookhaven	16,7187	12,9935	77.7%	3,7252	22.3%
Suffolk County	516,872	405,016	78.4%	111,856	21.6%

Table 3: Tenure in Riverhead, Neighboring Towns, and Suffolk County

Source: Town of Riverhead, as of February 14, 2024

	Riverhead	Brookhaven	Southampton	Southold	Suffolk County
Total Vacant Units	2,665	13,024	20,356	5,865	72,781
For rent	4.3%	9.3%	0.8%	2.2%	4.9%
Rented, not occupied	1.2%	3.1%	0.1%	0.5%	1.5%
For sale only	6.2%	9.0%	1.8%	3.1%	5.9%
Sold, not occupied	12.6%	9.4%	1.0%	3.0%	4.3%
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	60.8%	31.7%	93.3%	85.6%	63.5%
For migrant workers	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%
Other vacant	14.9%	36.9%	3.0%	5.5%	19.8%

Table 4: Distribution of Vacant Units, 2021

Source: US Census ACS 2017-2021

Tenure	# of Bedrooms	Town of Riverhead	Suffolk County
Homeowner	1	4.7%	3.3%
	2	25.7%	13.4%
	3	44.1%	41.3%
	4+	25.4%	41.9%
Renter	1	32.7%	37.7%
	2	30.4%	30.6%
	3	23.5%	21.2%
	4+	13.4%	10.5%

Table 5: Distribution of Homeowner and Renter Households by Number of Bedrooms, 2021

Source: Town of Riverhead, as of February 14, 2024

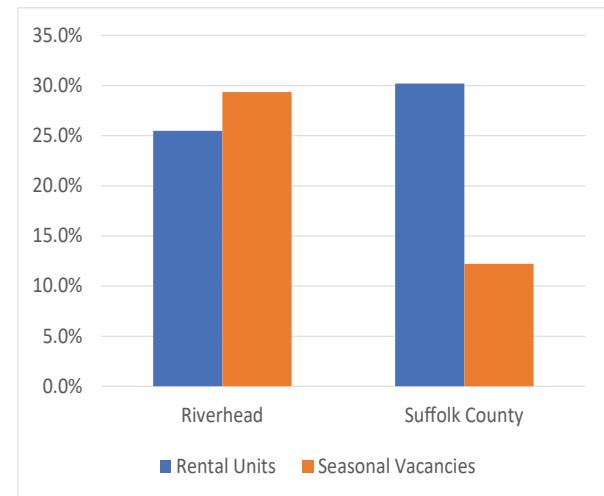


Chart 11: Percentage of Net New Units 2000-2021 (Riverhead and Suffolk County)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS, 2017-2021 5-Year Estimate

Riverhead also has a downtown area with smaller lots and apartments, which is denser than the County as a whole.

### Vacancy

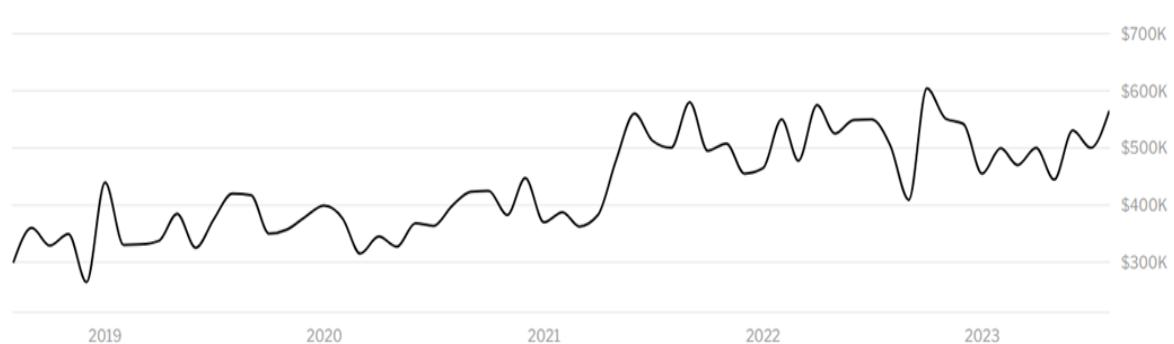
In 2021, the Town's housing vacancy rate was about 16% (2,665 vacant units out of 16,540 total units). This does not mean that all of these units are available for lease or sale; only about 11% of units in Riverhead are on the market as shown in the following table. The greatest share of vacant units (61%) is being held for seasonal or occasional use—a similar percentage to the County as a whole, but a smaller share than Southampton and Southold.

### Sales Market

In 2021, Riverhead's Median Housing Value for owner-occupied units was \$389,600, which is less than the County's value of \$436,300. Riverhead has substantially more housing valued below \$200,000 than the County (17% and 6.1% respectively), while the Town has a smaller share of housing valued at \$1 million or greater, at 3.7% and 5.9%, respectively.

### Home Prices

While Census data for housing value provides a consistent baseline of the values of all units, current realtor reports and real estate listings provide context in what has been a volatile market during the COVID pandemic. As shown in the following chart from Redfin real estate data, median sale prices for homes in Riverhead have grown from roughly \$300,000 in early 2019 to \$565,000 by year end 2023. These increasing costs have made it increasingly difficult for first-time homebuyers to enter the market.



**Chart 12: Home Prices in Riverhead, 2019-2023**

*Source: Based on Redfin calculations of home data from MLS and/or public records.*

	Town of Riverhead	Suffolk County	Southampton	Southold	Brookhaven
<\$200k	1,825	25,150	1,002	291	11,237
\$200k-\$399k	4,021	147,760	2,286	769	66,738
\$400k-\$749k	4,219	187,812	7,036	4,873	47,942
\$750k-\$999k	583	28,604	3,201	1,532	3,238
\$1.0m-\$1.4m	251	12,119	2,365	544	1,042
\$1.5m-\$1.9m	93	4,446	947	292	444
\$2.0m+	68	7,872	2,852	363	698
<b>Median Value</b>	<b>\$389,600</b>	<b>\$436,300</b>	<b>\$725,900</b>	<b>\$632,800</b>	<b>\$371,600</b>

**Table 6: Home Value**

*Source: U.S. Census ACS 2017-2021*

During the COVID pandemic, the real estate market on the East End, including Riverhead, experienced significant migration from urban centers like Manhattan and Brooklyn, as people sought more spacious living quarters. The number of sales and median home prices surged, with the median price on the North Fork jumping by 24% in 2020 to a record \$805,000. This trend has continued through 2022,

with sales on the North Fork peaking in number at 527. While the Hamptons saw dramatic increases in home sales and prices, with the total home sales volume skyrocketing by 34% from 2019 to 2020, the North Fork, including Riverhead, did not witness the same level of price increase. Through 2023, Riverhead's housing market remains more affordable than some of its more affluent neighboring areas.

## Rental Market

The rental market in Riverhead has experienced notable changes over the past two decades. From 2000 to 2020, there was a significant increase (20%) in the number of renter-occupied units. Despite this growth, the Town stands out for its rent affordability compared with its surrounding areas. The median gross rent in the Town was \$1,576 in 2021, noticeably lower than the \$1,895 median rent in Suffolk County.<sup>4</sup> Further emphasizing its relative affordability, Riverhead has the lowest median gross rent when compared with other towns in the East End, which include some of the most expensive zip codes in the country. This makes the Town an attractive option for those seeking more affordable rental options in the region.

Affordability challenges still exist for many Riverhead residents, however. More than half (56%) of the renters in the Town spend over 30% of their income on overall housing costs, a threshold commonly used to define housing affordability, while 20% spend more than half of their income on rent. These statistics indicate that despite lower median rents, the burden of housing costs remains a significant issue for a substantial portion of Riverhead's renting population.

## Short-Term Rentals

Regionally, short-term rentals have contributed to significant loss of year-round residential properties. As noted, 61% of Riverhead's vacant units are held for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. This is similar to the County as a whole, where 64% of vacant units are held for such purposes. However, in the towns of Southampton and Southold, a full 93% and 86%, respectively, of vacant units are for seasonal use. The implications are that the majority of potential new permanent residents on the East End will be competing for the limited amount of available housing--often in Riverhead and Brookhaven – which will likely drive up rents throughout the area.

New construction is not alleviating the pressure. Between 2000 and 2021, the number of housing units in Suffolk County increased by 56,000 units; of these, 30% were new renters while 12% were new units for seasonal use. In the same period in Riverhead, 1,396 net new units were constructed, of which 26% were new renters and 29% were for seasonal use.

Riverhead's 2016–2017 rental ordinance was amended to ban short-term rentals for 29 days or less. For rentals 30 days or more a rental permit from the Town is required. However, enforcement is difficult, with lesser stay rentals still occurring in Riverhead.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Riverhead has always been the workforce housing alternative for the East End, and this trend continues today. The number of affordable housing units in the Town is substantially higher than nearby communities; Riverhead has 884 designated income-restricted units, compared with about 504 such units for the four other East End towns combined. Riverhead's income-restricted units are a subset of the approximately 2,334 designated affordable rental units in the Town.<sup>5</sup>

"Affordable" is defined as meeting the adjusted monthly rent of a household making 130% or less of the area median income (AMI) and contributing less than 30% of their income to housing costs.<sup>6</sup> HUD provides thresholds for AMI and fair market rents (FMR) for the Nassau-Suffolk primary statistical area.

The Market Trends Analysis developed by AKRF (see Appendix A), found that the Town would need 1,600 – 3,200 affordable units to meet the needs of the community in 2040, in order to meet the Town's prior affordable housing goals set at 10% of total households.<sup>7</sup> The analysis found that the total existing and proposed affordable housing meets the forecasted 10% demand in both 2030 and 2040. Therefore, the Town has an adequate supply of affordable housing, including income-restricted units. In addition, the report found that all the Town's 3,133 rental units are considered "naturally affordable" --or market-rate housing that is affordable to workforce populations.

Despite the higher number of designated and naturally affordable homes in Riverhead, there are still residents who struggle to make their rent. HUD's level of affordability does not properly capture Riverhead's composition or needs; existing rents are relatively

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau, 2021

<sup>5</sup> Market Trends Analysis, AKRF, 2022

<sup>6</sup> 130% AMI is the affordability threshold set by the Long Island Workforce Housing Act.

<sup>7</sup> Hanley, R. Affordable Housing Demand Analysis Outline. January 11, 2007.

Town	Riverhead	Southampton	East Hampton	Southold	Shelter Island
Units	884	142	350	12	0

**Table 7: Designated Income-Restricted Units in East End Towns**

Source: *Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update Economic and Housing Trends Analysis – Appendix A: Affordable Housing Analysis Memorandum*. Conducted by AKRF, June 2022

high for the Town's income level. The Town's median household income is about 72% of Suffolk County's level. Thus, the maximum monthly rent considered affordable in Riverhead would be \$1,829; however, the report found that most market-rate listings exceeded that. Roughly half of rental units in the Town are occupied by families that pay more than half of their income on rent. These findings suggest that Riverhead would benefit from more affordable housing options.

## Housing Demand Forecast

As discussed above, Riverhead's existing and proposed market-rate apartments are anticipated to meet the existing and future housing demand for the average household on Long Island through 2040. However, more income-restricted affordable units are needed to meet the projections for lower-income and workforce populations through 2040.

Based on age data, average household size, and discussions with real estate brokers, it is envisioned that the residential market demand in Riverhead will be for 2- and 3-bedroom family units. However, housing is also needed for the 24% of the Town's population that is over 65 years of age, such as 1-bedroom condos and assisted-living facilities, as well as housing for persons with disabilities. There is a need for additional affordable home ownership units. It is anticipated that the Town's existing and projected future supply of affordable and Downtown apartments will meet the needs of the younger population age groups, work to attract young professionals, and retain students and

younger residents, but may also serve empty nesters. The Town's future residents are expected to come from the west, such as from Brookhaven, Smithtown, and Islip, as residential distribution on Long Island expands and affordable housing options move farther east.

Most of the current and forecasted demand for housing is in the Riverhead Hamlet area, due to the availability of public sewer infrastructure, higher-density zoning, and proximity to transit.

## Long Island Workforce Housing Act

The Long Island Workforce Housing Act requires housing developers who propose developments with 5 or more units at the maximum allowable residential density to set aside at least 10% of the units as affordable in exchange for a density bonus. Under the Act, "Affordable workforce housing" is defined as housing for individuals and families at or below 130% of the AMI for the Nassau-Suffolk primary statistical area. In 2022, the Area Median Income (AMI) for a family of four was \$146,400, with an average of \$128,720 from 2018-2022. Riverhead adopted a local law in August 2022, integrating the Long Island Workforce Housing Act into the Town Code. Under the local law, bonuses can include a 10% density increase or floor area ratio adjustment for certain residential developments. Different regulations apply to developments in the RA40 Zoning Use District, where the Planning Board or Town Board decides whether affordable housing

units should be provided within the development, elsewhere in the Town, or through a fee paid into a planned Affordable Housing Trust and Agency Fund administered by the Community Development Department, pending formal establishment by the Town.

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Continue to promote housing affordability and the availability of quality affordable and workforce housing in Riverhead and throughout the region.**

Riverhead has historically provided most of the East End's affordable and workforce housing, as development elsewhere on the East End has become significantly more expensive. Without intervention, the increased development pressure will continue to diminish the supply of attainable housing options. This issue also affects economic development, as housing affordability is a key factor linked to workforce growth.

Despite the higher number of designated and naturally affordable homes in Riverhead, some Town residents struggle to make their rent. Findings from the Market Trends Analysis suggest that Riverhead would benefit from more affordable housing options. A Town goal would be to add modest incremental new income-restricted affordable units over the planning period to meet the needs of workforce and lower income residents.

#### **1.1. Regularly monitor housing dynamics and review housing policies.**

The Town should continue to monitor housing values and rents and the ability of lower-income households to find housing in Riverhead and should also periodically review its own affordable housing initiatives to ensure that they are having the desired effect. The Town should attempt to determine what groups, if any, are having trouble finding appropriate local housing.

#### **1.2. Monitor short-term rentals for their impact on Riverhead's housing stock.**

Short-term rentals have an impact on the availability of year-round housing throughout the region. While not as pervasive in Riverhead, compared to other areas on the East End, there are hamlets in the community that have significant numbers of short-term rental listings. The Town should continue to enforce the 30-day minimum rental period to maintain the housing stock for full-time residents.

#### **1.3. Reach out to local financial institutions and nonprofit housing developers to identify sites and funding for the development or rehabilitation of workforce housing.**

Experienced and reputable nonprofit housing developers can leverage incentives from federal and State programs to provide affordable housing for a variety of users and income levels.

The Town's Department of Community Development has been working to diversify its funding sources to include a variety of State, federal, and foundation funds. Federal funds available from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have become scarcer; alternative funding sources are needed. Information on available funding sources should be shared on the Town's website and updated annually.

#### **1.4. Encourage other East End communities to provide their fair share of affordable and workforce housing, to expand housing opportunities for a range of populations.**

Affordable housing is a regional issue experienced by all the East End communities. The Town should continue to work with other municipalities to expand affordable housing options in eastern Long Island outside of Downtown Riverhead. In recent years, because of Riverhead's relatively affordable housing stock, it is attracting many people who are no longer able to afford homes in nearby towns. The Town has partially benefited from this spillover effect, as property values in some areas have increased. However, the trend also suggests that Riverhead may be providing more than its fair share of housing for lower-income residents. Other East End towns should work to increase workforce housing opportunities throughout eastern Long Island.

Another significant concern is the potential for significant housing development in the Flanders/Riverside hamlets of Southampton. If this area experiences significant population growth, it will have impacts on Riverhead's economy, traffic congestion, and regional infrastructure and services. Since the Flanders area is fully within the Riverhead Central School district, any development would also impact local schools. To address these concerns, Riverhead and Southampton must work together to ensure that development in one area considers the broader impacts on neighboring communities. Some potential options to discuss include the annexation of areas in Flanders or the modification of school district boundaries so that they more closely align with municipal boundaries. Both of these actions

are significantly complex changes that would require legislative approval and mutual agreement by all parties. A more realistic short-term option would be to establish a regional inter-municipal planning working group to develop the two areas in tandem.

### **1.5. Ensure that workforce housing is compatible in design and quality with market-rate housing and the surrounding neighborhood.**

New workforce housing projects should be designed such that they fit into their surroundings, and workforce units and market-rate units in the same development should be indistinguishable from each other. Features that can promote compatibility with the neighborhood include high-quality façade materials; architectural variety between adjacent units (i.e., building massing, fenestration, and façade treatments); and native landscaping that can be affordably maintained. Within developments, affordable and workforce units should be distributed throughout the building, offer the same mix (studios, one-bedroom, two-bedroom etc.), and feature the same materials and fixtures as market-rate units to promote economic integration.

### **1.6. Make the Long Island Workforce Housing Act mandatory for every subdivision and site plan, with no opt-out provision.**

The promotion of attainable housing options is a fundamental goal in this Plan. Currently, developers seeking approval for subdivisions and site plans can opt-out of density increases so they don't have to provide affordable units or pay into the workforce housing fund. The Town should consider removing this opt-out district to maximize the benefits of the Long Island Workforce Housing Act.

### **1.7. Ensure that workforce housing remains perpetually affordable.**

As a general policy, it is important to ensure that workforce housing remains affordable in perpetuity. This can be achieved through a combination of legal, financial, and regulatory measures. Community land trusts are another option to maintain the long-term affordability of housing units.

It is important to recognize that policies addressing affordable homeownership should be flexible in the long term to allow people to thrive within Riverhead. Allowing affordable homeownership to build equity promotes economic mobility, helping individuals and families move from renting to owning, which can significantly improve their financial stability. Provisions would need to be put in place (i.e., covenants/deed restrictions) to ensure that people don't take advantage and quickly cash out when homeownership subsidies are provided.

### **2. Encourage more diverse housing types to accommodate a wide range of income levels and to address evolving housing needs.**

Providing for a range of housing types is necessary to address overcrowded housing and issues of affordability. Demand for housing of all types at all levels continues to rise, while housing costs have grown exponentially. Eliminating burdensome restrictions in the Town Code allows for greater flexibility in housing design and facilitates the development of affordable housing options.

### **2.1. Eliminate minimum home size in residential districts.**

Some residential zones have a 1,200 square foot minimum size. Building code standards already ensure the safety, structural integrity, and habitability of residential structures, making additional minimum size requirements unnecessary. Eliminating such restrictions allows for greater flexibility in housing design, promotes innovation, and facilitates the development of diverse and affordable housing options that better meet the evolving needs of the community.

### **2.2. Utilize TDR to allow for slightly higher densities in designated areas.**

The Agriculture chapter outlines recommendations for a revised TDR program that will preserve farmland while incentivizing developers to build additional housing units in receiving zones. As proposed, TDR credits could be used to exceed the 500-unit cap in the downtown, but only for homeownership developments. The CRC and PRC zones could also allow for slightly increased housing density, provided infrastructure is in place. This would allow for the development of townhouses. The MRP district could be looked at as a comparable for allowable development types and densities for both districts. It is recommended that design guidance be put in place in PRC to push buildings away from the Peconic River and ensure that riparian areas are maintained. It is acknowledged that development in this district is further controlled by NYSDEC.

The Agriculture chapter also discusses how TDR ratios could be modified to make preservation credits more valuable. This would make the use of TDRs for non-single-family housing options more appealing to developers, helping to increase the variety of housing stock in receiving areas throughout Riverhead.

### 2.3. Evaluate the 500-unit cap for the DC-1 District.

The Plan recommends evaluation of the 500-unit cap in the DC-1 District and is not recommending an outright removal of the cap. The greatest density and housing growth has been focused, appropriately, in the downtown. In the next five years, a wave of new development is anticipated in this area, which is anticipated to exhaust the 500-unit cap on residential in the DC-1 district. It would be reasonable for the Town to reassess this cap on a regular basis, given the significant market demand and the continued need to meet other housing, economic, and community development goals. A 2021 Market Study for the Town Square by Streetsense recommends the removal of the 500-unit cap. With a strong push for development and a federal opportunity zone in play, investors and developers need predictability in the process and to know whether they can or cannot build.

This recommendation includes two actions. The first would be to conduct economic and fiscal cost-benefit analysis of impacts of new development on the downtown and Riverhead overall. This will provide a fiscal understanding of the benefit of any potential increases of the cap.

In addition, regulations for the cap should also be cleaned up. Currently, the conditions on when the cap threshold would be reached is based on certificate of occupancy, which creates issues of implementation and enforcement. There are several alternatives to consider. One option would be to not accept new applications after a building permit is issued for the 500<sup>th</sup> unit.

### 2.4. Allow adaptive reuse of buildings for residential uses in DC-1 District.

Buildings in the DC-1 district should be permitted to exceed the 500-unit cap when redeveloping existing upper floors of historic buildings for housing. TDRs would not be required in this instance, to promote the preservation and rehabilitation of existing historic buildings.

### 2.5. Revise standards for accessory dwelling units to reduce extraneous barriers for new housing.

Revise or remove the three-year certificate of occupancy provision. Within the Accessory Apartment code, there is a requirement that applicants have three years of a certificate of occupancy (CO) in an accessory building before an accessory unit can be approved. The intent of this provision was to allow accessory units in existing buildings but not to promote a wave of new development. The regulation is burdensome for applicants and could be remedied by changing the three-year CO period to apply to the principal building and not the accessory building or by eliminating the three-year period entirely.

Consider reopening the amnesty program to encourage illegal accessory apartments to become legal. When Chapter 105 Article I was adopted to the Town Code enabling Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), there was an amnesty period for the first 250 owners of preexisting ADUs to legalize their units with a waived fee. Reopening this amnesty provision could help legalize additional illegal units. Legalizing the units will benefit the Town and residents because owners of the properties will have to comply with the full provisions of the Town Code, including requiring the owner to occupy either the principal or accessory unit, and comply with building, fire, and health codes, making them safer for residents, while bringing in additional taxes.

Eliminate the restriction on the minimum floor area of the ADU and consider adjusting the maximum size. The code currently establishes a minimum area for the ADU of 300sf and a maximum area of 650 sf, not to exceed 40% of the principal building area. If the Accessory Dwelling Unit and Principal single-family use are compliant with fire and safety codes, a restriction on the lower limit does not need to be stated. Regarding the upper limit, The Town should consider eliminating the 650sf maximum and limit the size of the accessory unit to 40% of the principal dwelling. These adjustments may enable additional property owners to create accessory dwelling units more easily. ADUs are limited to one bedroom.

Reduce the off-street parking requirement from two to one off-street parking spaces for the accessory unit. Off-street parking requirements are a barrier to homeowners who want to add an ADU on their property because they are costly, take up space, and can add to impervious surfaces.

### 2.6. Promote high levels of construction quality and sustainability.

There is concern about the current building and construction codes and whether new housing construction is being built to last and meet sustainability goals. Green building is discussed further in the Sustainability and Resilience chapter.

### **3. Support creation and protection of homeownership workforce income households.**

Riverhead has sufficient rental opportunities but needs reasonably priced ownership options for young people to purchase and build wealth. Financial barriers and lack of knowledge can make buying a home difficult for first-timers with moderate incomes. Making homeownership more attainable for individuals and families encourages their accumulation of wealth and economic stability.

#### **3.1. Provide resources and incentives to assist first-time homebuyers.**

There are opportunities for condominium development in the downtown and/or hamlet centers that would be contextually compatible with neighborhood character while providing first-time homeownership opportunities.

The Town can work with the Riverhead Community Development Department, financial institutions, nonprofits, and New York State to identify financing options for homeowners and buyers. The Town could help connect these institutions with moderate-income households to obtain low-interest or reduced-down payments. This would be enormously helpful to households that want to become homeowners but do not have the resources to get started.

New York State Homes and Community Renewal (NYSHCR) offers funding to support affordable rental and homeownership opportunities in the State, including the Affordable Homeownership Development (AHOD) Program and State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA). Through the AHOD Program, grants are available for governmental agencies and nonprofits to assist families in accessing

affordable homeownership. In Suffolk County, this money goes to organizations including the Long Island Housing Partnership, Habitat for Humanity, Community Development Corporation of Long Island, and Nassau/Suffolk Partnership Hsg. Dev. Fund Co. SONYMA provides low-cost home mortgages and down payment assistance, and partners with nonprofit housing counseling agencies to support first-time homebuyers and others.

Another long-term option is to use CPF funds to offset costs for first-time homebuyers. This is a long-term option because CPF funds are not accessible until 2030 and the Town does not currently have the financial ability to modify the fund. This option would require a ballot referendum to add a 0.5% tax for the affordable housing fund when the CPF bond is paid off.

#### **3.2. Develop policies and procedures to utilize the Affordable Housing Fund to support first time homebuyers**

The Affordable Housing Fund can play a pivotal role in expanding access to affordable housing for those seeking to transition from renting to homeownership, ensuring a more balanced and diverse housing landscape. However, while the affordable housing fund has been provided for in the Town code, it was never formally established. The Town will need to create the fund; identify the eligibility criteria, such as income guidelines; and establish processes for applications and fund allocation. This may include offering down payment assistance, closing cost assistance, reduced-interest loans, or renovation assistance to eligible applicants. Additionally, the Town should prioritize providing information and resources on its website for first-time homebuyers, facilitating access to necessary support and guidance throughout the homebuying process.

#### **3.3. Revise the 500-unit cap to promote homeownership opportunities and other housing goals.**

Expanding the number of residential units for homeownership in the downtown district can attract new residents who are committed to investing in the community's long-term well-being. To achieve this, it is recommended that the 500-unit cap allowed to be exceeded, but with the stipulation that the additional units are dedicated exclusively to homeownership. These housing units would also require the use of TDR preservation credits. This policy aims to provide for some additional economic growth in the downtown area while helping to preserve other agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas.

#### **3.4. Change affordability thresholds for ownership and rentals.**

Homeownership and rental housing come with different financial responsibilities. Homeownership entails mortgage payments, property taxes, and maintenance costs, while renters typically have a more straightforward monthly rental payment. Long Island Housing Partnership recommends adjusting affordability thresholds for the Long Island Workforce Housing provision in the Town Code to distinguish between homeowner and rental developments, such as 50-80% AMI for rental units and 80-120% AMI for homeowner units. This will allow the Town to provide rentals that more closely match its rental market, while providing homeownership opportunities to moderate-income individuals and families.

#### **4. Promote inclusive housing policies and accessible design standards to ensure that housing is available to people of all ages and abilities.**

There is a special concern for the needs of Riverhead's aging population. With 24% of residents over 65 years of age, it is important to address the lack of senior housing, assisted-living, and medical services that could allow seniors to age in place in the Town and the East End more broadly.

This goal reflects the Town's commitment to addressing the growing demands of the aging population and ensuring that residents have access to appropriate care and support as they age. There may be opportunities to locate these facilities in areas with access to sewer infrastructure, such as along Route 58 near Peconic Bay Medical Center. They could also be located near the core downtown area. Riverhead will also continue to experience increasing need for affordable retirement housing beyond mobile home parks. Producing housing alternatives for seniors wishing to downsize has the additional benefit of freeing up single-family stock for younger families.

##### **4.1. Continue to support the Community Development Department's program to provide home improvement funding for low-income senior residents.**

This program has been successful in rehabilitating units occupied by lower-income senior residents, improving the quality of life for those households. Another added benefit is that—in case of resale—the unit may sell at a higher price because of rehabilitation. The Town may eventually see a positive impact in tax revenue from the property. Additional staffing of this element of the Community Development Department is recommended.

##### **4.2. Allow residential health care facilities, including "continuum of care" housing, to be developed in the proposed Assisted Living Overlay District and by Special Permit in other districts.**

Residential health care facilities include nursing homes, assisted-living, skilled nursing care, and similar facilities where seniors both live and receive daily health and personal care. "Continuum of care" facilities allow seniors to "age in place," by providing whatever services a senior citizen would need at their particular stage of life, ranging from minimal to intensive health and personal care. Thus, seniors could receive increased levels of care over time without having to move from place to place.

Senior housing generates a greater need for emergency response services than non-age restricted housing. Thus, it makes sense to locate senior housing in places where emergency response services and medical facilities are more concentrated, particularly in the downtown area. Ideal locations for senior housing are in downtown and hamlet centers and near the hospital.

As discussed in the TDR recommendations, an assisted-living overlay zone is proposed for parts of Route 58 near Peconic Bay Medical Center. There may be other locations in the Town where assisted living should be allowed by special permit, such as within HC or RLC districts. Assisted-living facilities should also be a defined use in the zoning code.

##### **4.3. Develop Accessible Design Standards for Inclusion in the Town Code.**

These standards would help to create an environment that accommodates the needs of individuals with disabilities, ensuring equal access and participation for everyone. These standards should cover a broad range of aspects, including physical infrastructure, signage, public transportation, and technology. The code would also address the application of standards for different uses and building types.

##### **4.4. Collaborate with Suffolk County and community partners to create and maintain safe and healthy neighborhoods that contribute to residents' well-being and security.**

The Town has at least 14 sober homes in the downtown area, including nine on Main Street. While these facilities provide a very important role by providing safe housing for those recovering from addiction, the homes have reportedly become a source of activity that is unwelcome in the downtown area. This recommendation encompasses a holistic approach to addressing housing issues, including the regulation and support of sober homes and group homes. It also addresses supportive care services, many of which are provided by Suffolk County. By working together, the Town, County, and organizations can create a supportive environment that ensures access to safe housing for all, while respecting the rights and dignity of those in recovery and individuals with disabilities. Collaborative efforts are needed with residents,

neighborhood associations, and stakeholders to address concerns, foster cooperation, and ensure that these housing options are seamlessly integrated into neighborhoods.

The Town should continue to address code enforcement issues such as occupancy standards, quality-of-life infringements, code-enforcement inspections when needed. Additionally, the Town should continue to be a resource of information and a first point of contact to address neighborhood related issues. The Town should work with Suffolk County to facilitate the even distribution of sober homes in the East End, rather than concentrating them in one neighborhood.

Chapter 10: Community facilities provides more information on public health care services.

#### **4.5. Expand and amend the Hospital zone to accommodate housing that meets the needs of hospital staff.**

The existing Hospital zone should be expanded to encompass adjacent properties owned by the Peconic Bay Medical Center and to permit a wider variety of wellness-related uses and allow housing for hospital staff. These recommendations align with the hospital's long-term plans and the Town's desire to support this essential institution and promote accessibility to quality healthcare services. Chapter 13: Future Land Use Plan, includes more information about these recommended zoning changes.

#### **4.6. Revisit housing standards to promote construction quality and sustainability**

The Town has sought to amend Chapter 217 and 263 of the Town Code, to bring housing standards into conformity with NYS building code and to create stricter requirements for renting out single-family dwelling units and ensure proper inspection for quality standards. This code would also apply a saturation number of sober homes to prevent the concentration of those facilities in the downtown area. There is also an opportunity to strengthen requirements for construction quality and sustainability. This would address about the current building and construction codes and whether new housing construction is being built to last and meet sustainability goals. Green building is discussed further in the Sustainability and Resilience chapter.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This chapter explores the economic and social dimensions of Riverhead, emphasizing the need to balance fostering prosperity and safeguarding the Town's agricultural legacy. It provides a comprehensive overview of current economic conditions, including employment trends, labor resources, and growth patterns at both local and regional levels.

Riverhead has a robust and diverse economic foundation, poised for significant growth. The primary avenue for expansion lies in tourism, with the North Fork emerging as a prominent destination in the 1990s. Attractions such as the Long Island wine country, historic downtown, outdoor recreational activities, the Long Island Aquarium, Splish Splash, the Suffolk Theater, and Tanger Mall have attracted a steady influx of day-trippers, weekenders, and vacationers. Riverhead can employ various strategies to maximize these opportunities, by encouraging longer stays and increased spending by visitors. There is also significant potential to draw more visitors to the downtown area, particularly with new development and other improvements to the public realm.

In the last 20 years, Route 58 has witnessed a surge in commercial development, attracting major retail players and transforming into a prime destination for shopping. Tanger Outlets is a significant draw, and other retail establishments have contributed to the corridor's emergence as a key commercial artery for the East End. However, the retail environment has evolved with the emergence of e-commerce and new strategies are needed to adapt.

Additionally, there is anticipated demand for more office and industrial development in Riverhead, with shifting development pressures from western Long Island to the more available lands in western Riverhead. The Town should maintain a resilient economic foundation by promoting diverse sectors such as office and industrial development, agriculture, retail expansion, and fostering entrepreneurial and small-business activities in appropriate locations.

Despite being the County's primary hub for agricultural activity, Riverhead grapples with the vulnerability of its agricultural industry due to land depletion from suburban sprawl. This chapter underscores the importance of aligning economic development initiatives with the conservation policies articulated in other sections of this Plan. The Agriculture chapter provides a comprehensive strategy for farmland preservation to ensure the continued viability of the agriculture industry.

## SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS

The analysis in this chapter includes data from a variety of sources. An Economic and Housing Trends Analysis was developed by AKRF in 2022 as an interim document during the formulation of this Plan. Data in that report was supplemented with more current data from other sources including ESRI Business Analyst, the U.S. Census Bureau's OnTheMap longitudinal employer household dataset (LEHD), the New York State Department of Labor's (NYDOL) Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), and the Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS data are estimates that rely on population samples and are thus susceptible to error. The data should be used as a general description of trends rather than precise counts. They should also be tempered with the community's observations of changing social and economic characteristics.

A snapshot of key trends and important takeaways are summarized below.

### Jobs

There are 17,160 jobs in the Town; most of which are in Calverton or the downtown. About 19% of jobs are held by Riverhead residents, while 81% commute into town. While most workers come from surrounding areas in Suffolk County, 6.5% of workers live in NYC.

Job growth in the past 20 years has been strong overall. Even with cyclical fluctuations in employment, there was 23% increase in jobs in Riverhead between 2002-2021, compared with only 4.5% growth in the County.

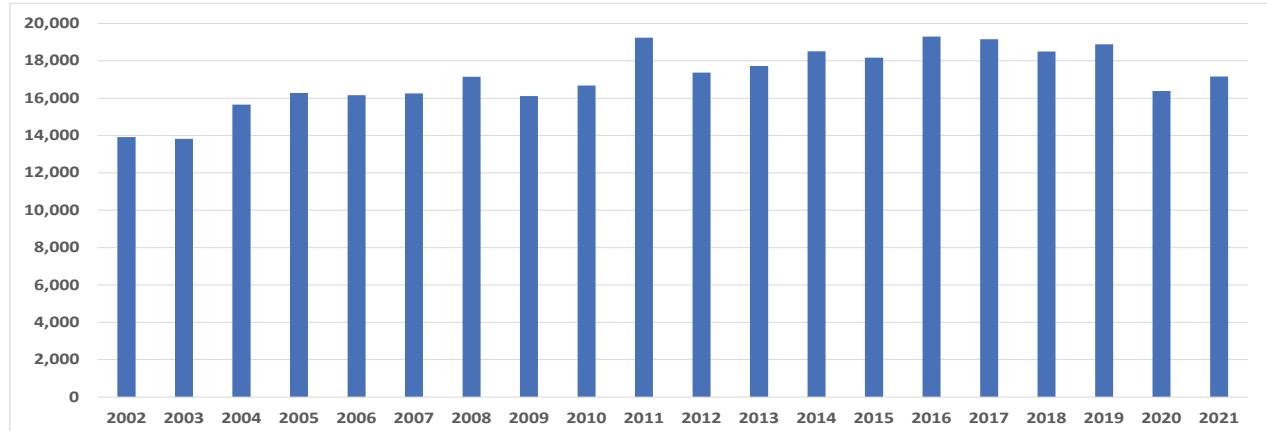


Chart 13: All Jobs in Riverhead

Source: U.S. Census OnTheMap LEHD

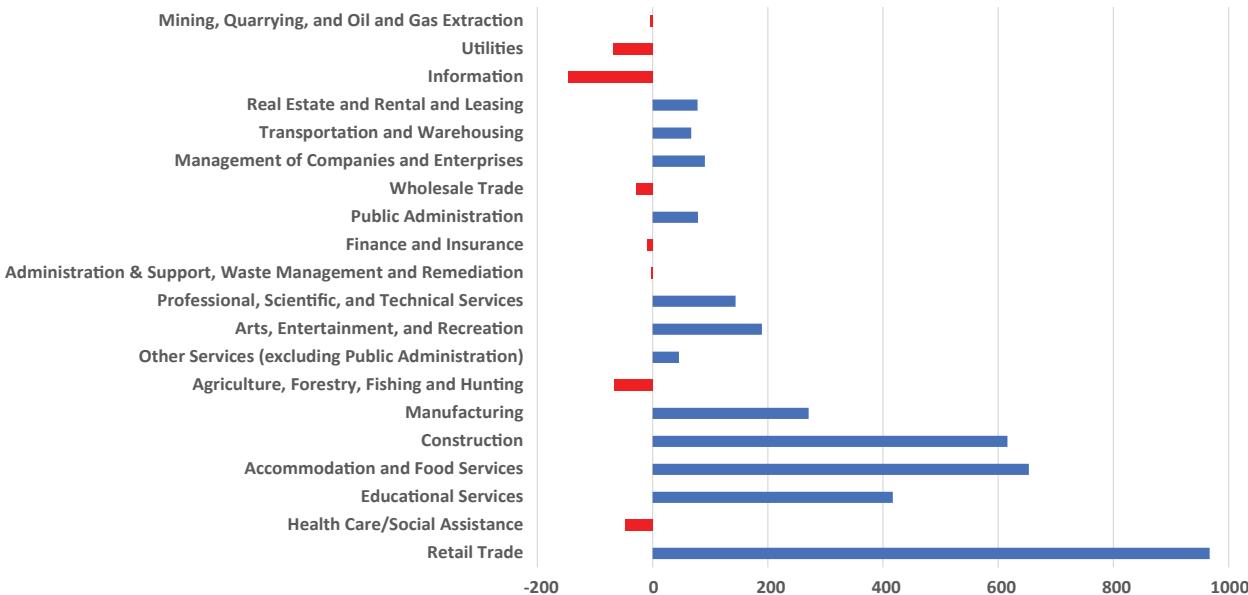


Chart 14: Change in Riverhead Jobs by Industry: 2002-2021

Source: U.S. Census OnTheMap LEHD

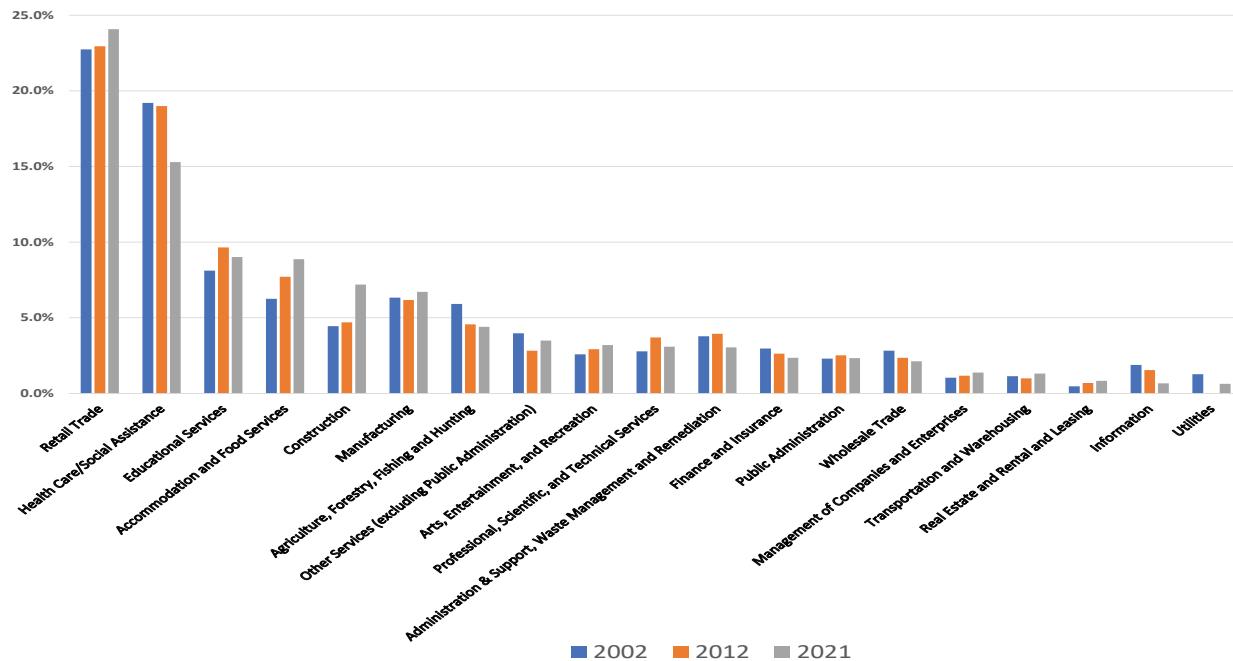


Chart 15: Riverhead Jobs by Industry as Share of Total: 2002, 2012, 2021

Source: U.S. Census OnTheMap LEHD

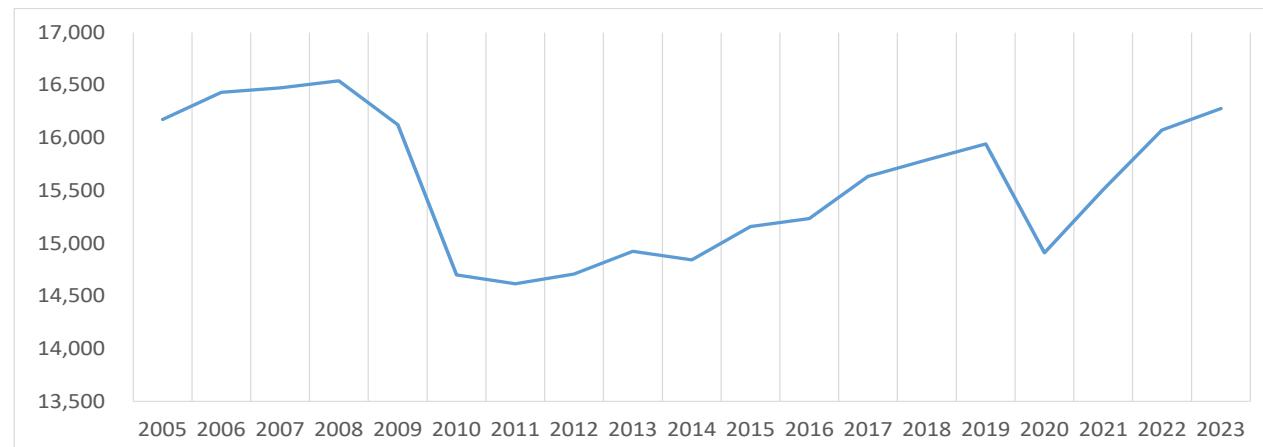


Chart 16: Annual Average Employment 2005-2023

Source: U.S. Census OnTheMap LEHD

Between 2002 and 2021, sectors that have shown the most growth are retail, accommodation/food services, construction, educational services, and manufacturing.

The most common jobs in Riverhead over the past 20 years have been retail, followed by health care and social assistance and educational services. However, the overall share of local employment by industry has shifted over time. The following industries make up greater shares of employment than 20 years ago: retail; accommodation and food services; construction; manufacturing; arts, entertainment & recreation; professional, scientific & technical services; and to a lesser extent, management of companies & enterprises and transportation & warehousing.

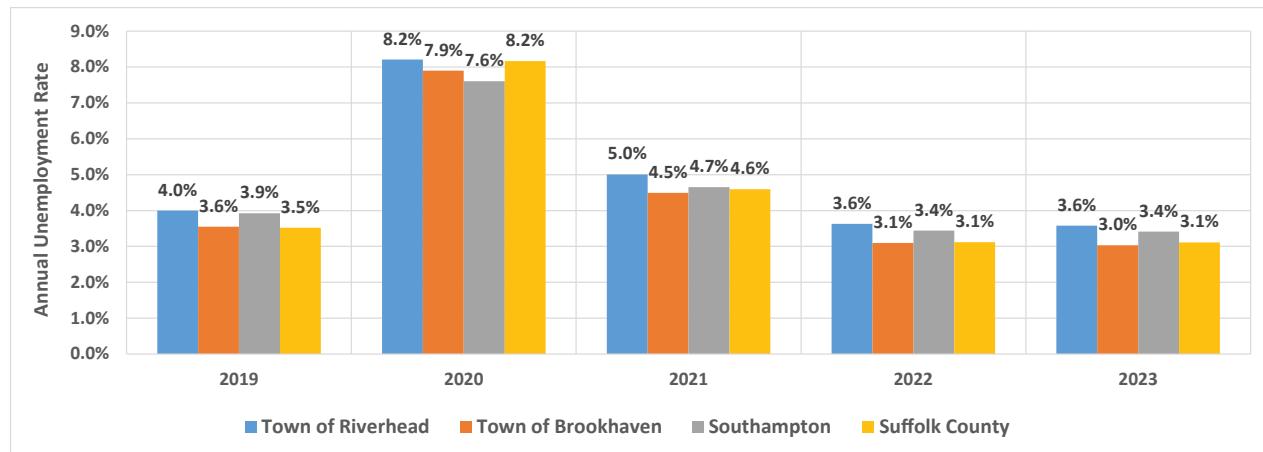
### Employed residents

The NYDOL estimated annual average resident employment in Riverhead at 16,278, the highest local employment has been since 2008. Some 21% of employed Riverhead residents work in the Town, 16% in Brookhaven, 15% in NYC, and 10% in Southampton.

After peaking in 2020, the unemployment rate throughout Suffolk County has decreased, as shown in Chart 16. As of 2022, the local area unemployment rates are lower than they were in 2019, the pre-pandemic economic peak of the last decade. At 3.6%, Riverhead's unemployment rate is, and consistently has been, slightly higher than the surrounding communities and Suffolk County as a whole. In addition to higher unemployment rates, the Town has a lower share of residents participating in the labor force.

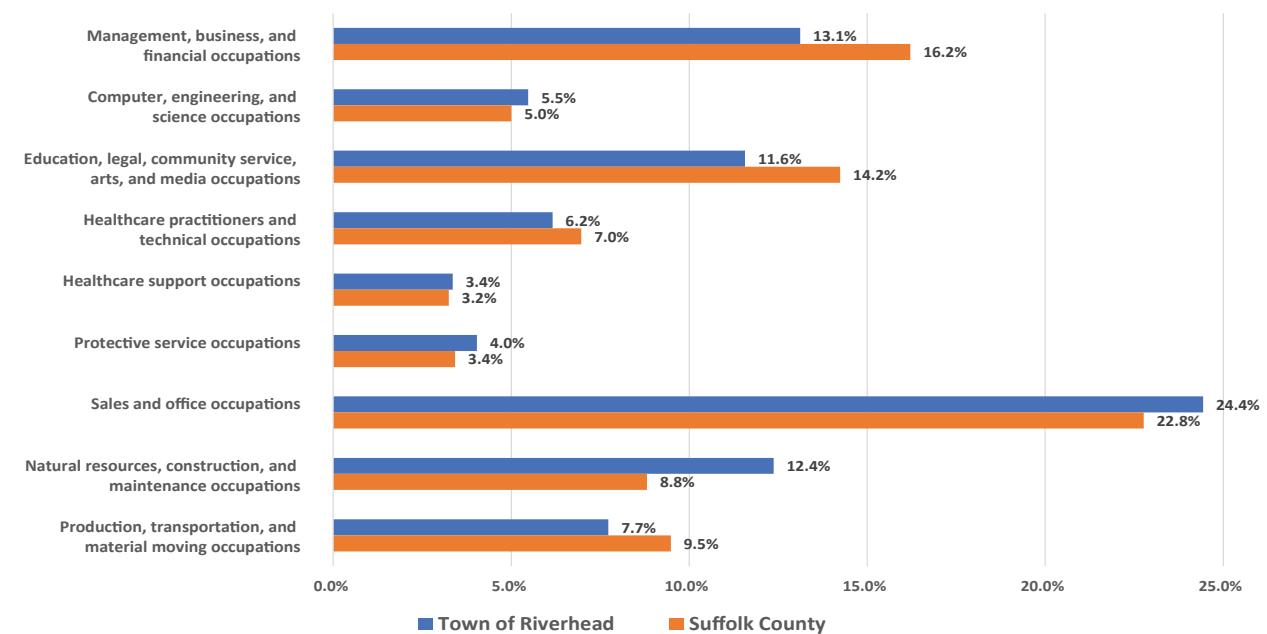
### Occupations

There are many different occupations within a single industry; for example, a person can work as a custodian within the financial industry. To better understand the types of jobs performed by Riverhead



**Chart 17: Annual Unemployment: Riverhead, Brookhaven, Southampton, Suffolk County: 2019-2023**

Source: U.S. Census OnTheMap LEHD



**Chart 18: Occupations of Riverhead and Suffolk County Resident Population, 2021**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS, 2017-2021 5-Year Estimate

residents, occupation data from the Census Bureau's ACS is shown in Chart 18. For both the Town and the County, sales and office occupations were most common, followed by management, business, and financial occupations. However, Riverhead residents were more likely than Suffolk County residents overall to work in sales, natural resources, construction & maintenance, protective services, and healthcare support occupations – all of which are typically lower-paying fields.

#### **Industry Clusters:**

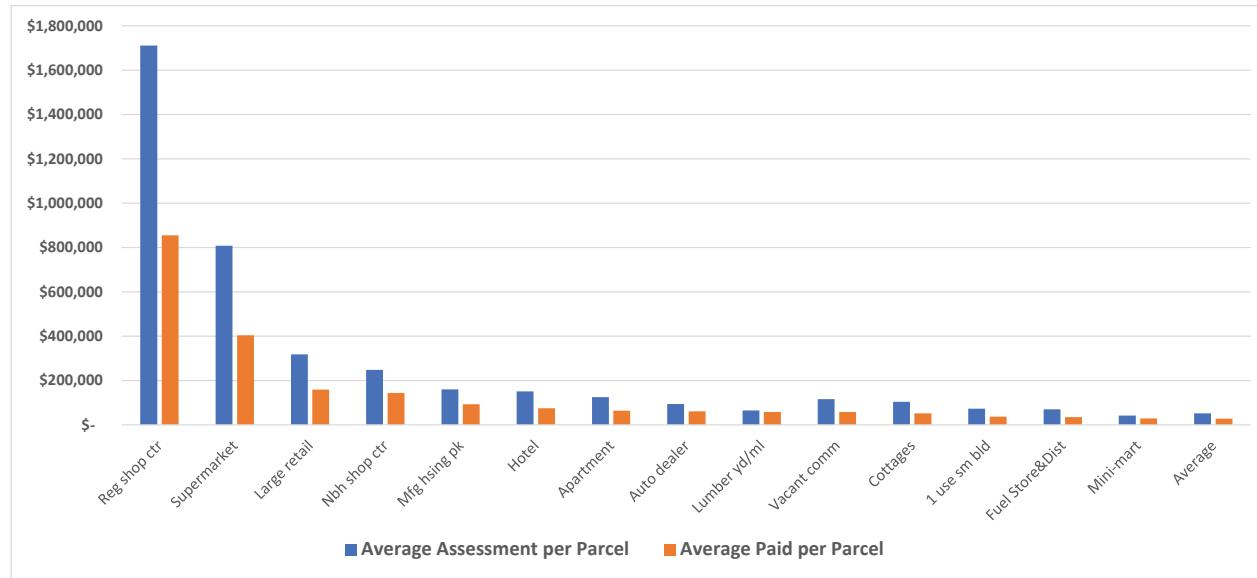
Employment in Riverhead is diverse. Key sectors include retail, health care, accommodation and food services, and education.

The commercial corridor along Route 58, featuring major retail establishments and Tanger Outlets, has been a significant source of jobs, drawing employees from within Riverhead and neighboring areas.

The hospitality sector plays a crucial role in Riverhead's employment, driven by the Town's appeal as a tourist destination. Hotels, restaurants, and other service-oriented businesses cater to the influx of visitors to attractions like the Long Island Aquarium and Exhibition Center. Additionally, the Town's position within the North Fork wine and craft beverage region has created employment opportunities in the flourishing local wineries and breweries, ranging from vineyard management to tasting room staff.

Healthcare is another prominent sector, with Peconic Bay Medical Center serving as a major regional healthcare provider and employer.

Empire State Development (ESD) has identified advanced manufacturing, biotech & life sciences, cleantech & renewable energy, craft beverage, tourism, and agribusiness as priority growth industries on Long Island. Riverhead already has a solid foundation in tourism and agribusiness as well as



**Chart 19: Above-Average Assessment and Tax Payments per Parcel by Land Use, 2023**

Source: Riverhead Assessor's office, 2023

a strengthened position in advanced manufacturing. By aligning with ESD's Office of Strategic Workforce Development, Riverhead can increase its regional share of expected growth.

### Fiscal Conditions and Tax Base

According to commercial tax data received from the assessor's office, the average commercial property in Riverhead is assessed at \$52,136 per parcel, with an average tax payment of \$28,021. As shown in the figure that follows, retail land uses are seven of the 14 above-average taxpayers, including the top four. Commercial residential properties are also above-average contributors to Riverhead's tax revenues, including manufactured housing parks, hotels, apartment buildings, and [vacation] cottages. Vacant commercial properties and small, single-use buildings round out the highest contributors to the tax base

on a per-parcel basis. Commercial properties, even those with residential uses, typically pay their share of municipal and school district taxes. However, in specific instances, tax benefits and subsidies may offset this imbalance to prioritize other economic development objectives.

### Federal Opportunity Zones:

Opportunity Zones are designated in census tracts in Calverton and Downtown Riverhead (see Figure 5 on page 27). This designation helps to encourage investment in low-income and rural communities defined as having a poverty rate of at least 20% and median family income no greater than 80% of area median income (AMI).

### Employment

According to AKRF's Market Trends Analysis report, Riverhead has a need for local job growth, particularly in high-paying professional and finance jobs that can retain young professionals who want to live/work on Long Island. There is a need to increase access to job training and vocational resources. Suffolk County has been focused on enhancing its capacity to encourage and support technology-related business. There is also an opportunity to coordinate with Riverhead IDA to attract and retain new employment and vocational opportunities at EPCAL.

### Tourism

As the gateway to the North and South Forks, Riverhead is uniquely situated to capture tourists who would otherwise go farther east. The offers a unique blend of attractions that appeal to a variety of interests. Tourists visit farmstands to buy local produce and local wineries to sample wines, enjoy scenic landscapes, and experience the charm of the countryside. For those interested in craft beverages, the Town's breweries and tasting rooms provide an authentic taste of the region.

The Town has several regional attractions, including Tanger Outlets, which attract shoppers from across Long Island and beyond. Route 58 hosts several major retail destinations, including big-box stores, furniture outlets, and automobile dealerships. Attractions like the Long Island Aquarium, Splish Splash, Island Water Park, and Scott's Pointe offer family-friendly fun, complementing the area's natural beauty. The Riverhead Raceway hosts regular racing events and draws crowds of spectators. The Suffolk Theater also hosts a diverse array of performances, including live music, theatrical productions, comedy shows, and special events.

Beyond its commercial appeal, Riverhead boasts a rich heritage showcased through its revitalized downtown area, scenic riverfront, and historical sites. Travelers can also discover the unique charm of the Town's hamlet centers, each with its own distinct character, offering visitors with a range of experiences.

## RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

Figure 10 illustrates the various commercial uses throughout Riverhead. The retail landscape in Riverhead has several strengths, including prominent retail destinations like Tanger Outlets and a high demand for retail in areas such as Wading River Hamlet. Additionally, the Town benefits from tourism, attracting visitors who contribute to the local economy. However, weaknesses persist, particularly in the downtown area, where retail offerings fail to adequately serve residents, potentially hindering local patronage.

Nevertheless, Riverhead has opportunities for growth and revitalization. These include redevelopment or adaptive reuse of vacant retail spaces along Route 58, introduction of new residential developments in the downtown area, and expansion of outdoor dining options to meet unmet retail demand. Furthermore, the Town is a gateway to both the North and South Forks, positioning it to capitalize on the trend of "close to home" tourism. Despite these opportunities, threats loom, such as the decline of brick-and-mortar retail due to growing online shopping, competition between Route 58 and downtown, and the presence of big box stores and shopping malls that may divert consumer spending from local businesses.

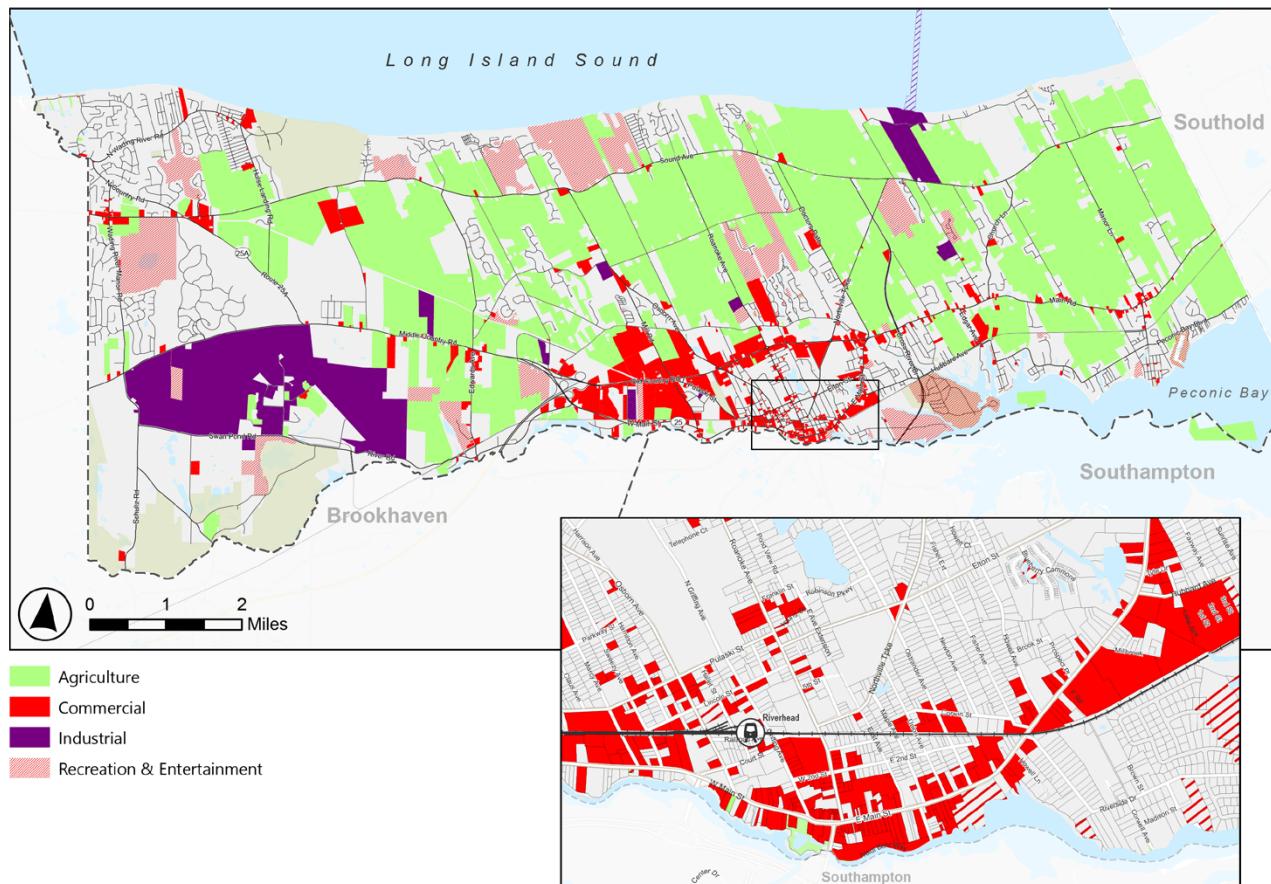


FIGURE 10: ECONOMIC LAND USE

Source: Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

### Retail Real Estate:

In February 2023, retail real estate listings in Riverhead were concentrated in the downtown on Main Street and on Route 58. Some 180,134 square feet of retail space in the Town was listed for lease on Loopnet.com. The largest of these listings was Serota Plaza, with 55,210 sf of retail space. The average listing price was \$25 per sf. The highest asking price was 20

W. Main Street, with a 2023 asking rent of \$42 per sf, significantly higher than other downtown listings that averaged \$19.50 per sf.

### Pandemic-Related Concerns

Some economic challenges were brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the vitality of small businesses, farm workforce reductions, and delayed capital improvements. Notably, downtown businesses faced vacancies, and the relocation

of employment centers to remote work settings presented uncertainties about the future of office spaces. The shift to online shopping, initially driven by the pandemic, has raised questions about sustained market demand. Moreover, the uncertain future of department stores, aging strip commercial malls, and large-scale retailers, became a crucial issue.

Outdoor dining emerged as a lifeline for many establishments during the pandemic, leading to the Town Board's authorization of a permanent waiver for downtown zoning limitations on outdoor dining. While this measure supported businesses, ongoing challenges such as litter, pedestrian safety, and noise necessitate vigilant monitoring. Retail industry leaders suggest that the pandemic fostered innovative solutions, including curbside pickup, providing more experiential retail experiences, and strategies ways to make the in-person retail experience more desirable.

### Downtown

Downtown Riverhead has many core assets, including an attractive waterfront, lively main street corridor, entertainment venues, and cultural institutions. Recent planning initiatives, investments, and programs have promoted downtown revitalization, including the Railroad Avenue URA TOD development (2021), the Pattern Book (2021), the Downtown Riverfront Activation Plan, and the DRI Strategic Investment Plan (2022). According to the Pattern Book, potential new development could effectively double the built square footage in Downtown Riverhead. In the past few years, over 900 new multifamily units have been built or proposed for Riverhead's downtown. See Chapter 3 for details on recent multifamily projects.

In addition, there are several planned public space improvements for the downtown area in various stages of development, including:

- Improved pedestrian and bicycle connections between the downtown and the train station.
- Creation of a new Town Square to connect the downtown to the waterfront.
- Development of new active recreation uses along the waterfront, like a playground, amphitheater, and boathouse. The Town received grant funding for design of these projects and has contracted firms to start the design process.
- Other traffic calming techniques on Main Street.

### Downtown Issues and Opportunities:

The Economic Market Trends Analysis found that Downtown Riverhead is a destination beyond the immediate area, for shopping and restaurants. There is limited unmet retail demand in the downtown besides a high demand for specialty food stores and services. Interviewed stakeholders stated that residents do not shop in local stores due to affordability, and prefer to shop on Route 58, which provides lower-cost big-box stores and national chains. Mixed-use, market rate housing developments in the downtown are expected to provide a built-in customer base and promote a vibrant downtown commercial market.

There has been a concern about the viability of downtown businesses. The pandemic and shifts to online shopping have seen a reduction in brick-and-mortar retail demand. It has been suggested that downtown businesses focus more on dining, entertainment, and boutique shops that will appeal to tourists and tenants of market-rate apartments in the downtown who have more disposable income. The Streetsense Market Study, completed in 2021, suggests there could be growth in retail with the implementation of a successful placemaking strategy, and that there is strong demand for hotels.

The Downtown Riverhead Business Improvement District (BID) is an association of over 75 businesses who contribute a special tax and their time to attract customers and visitors. The Town Board provides an annual budget for the BID Management Association, a nonprofit organization of members who own or rent property in the district. The BID has a limited budget, which has historically increased a nominal amount annually. Additional resources are needed to expand the BID's capacity to facilitate tenanting of smaller local businesses; market events; and address trends in food services, entertainment, and retail. Additional opportunities to partner with the BID to promote economic growth are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Public engagement participants pointed out issues of improper garbage disposal, traffic safety, and building vacancies in the downtown. Improper dumping has become more widespread with the closure of the last two landfills on Long Island. The Town works with the Police Department and the BID to address quality of life issues.



## Route 58

The Route 58 corridor is a major commercial thoroughfare for Riverhead. Also known as Old Country Road, this corridor serves as a primary retail district, hosting an array of businesses, shopping centers, and restaurants. In addition to Tanger Outlets, the Route 58 corridor features big-box retailers, auto dealerships, and dining options. Its strategic location and accessibility make it a hub for commercial activities. The corridor has undergone significant development and expansion over the years. However, this growth has created concerns about traffic management, infrastructure, and the overall impact on the surrounding community. Revitalization of Route 58, particularly improving its look and feel, was one of the top priorities identified by participants public survey for this Plan.

While vacancies have been an issue in the past 10 years, in the past two years, many underutilized buildings have been filled with new businesses including, including:

- Restaurant Depot (former Walmart Building)
- Sephora (in Riverhead Centre)
- Suffolk County Social Services, Ollie's, and Furniture 51 (former Kmart Building)
- Lidl Supermarket (former Toy's R'Us building)
- Barnes and Noble (former Pier 1)
- An approval to fill vacant space in the former Kmart building with an indoor pickleball facility, restaurant, retail, and offices.

The retail landscape has changed drastically with online shopping growing in market share. The Town will need to consider creative alternatives for reuse to compensate for future changes in the market. Existing zoning controls may not be flexible enough to provide room for growth and change to ensure the corridor's long-term vitality. Flexibility should be provided

to support a mix of uses including mixed senior/assisted living/medical complexes, medical and office space, personal care services, and recreation and entertainment uses. The addition of office workers and visitors would in turn provide a customer base for other retail uses.

Members of the public voiced some concerns about overdevelopment along Route 58 and how that may exacerbate sprawl and congestion. Residents also noted that there is little mature woodland remaining; clearcutting of trees for retail should be strongly discouraged. Strategies to improve the streetscape and minimize impacts the impacts on new development are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Most people who participated in the survey said that they shop along Route 58, rather than in Downtown Riverhead. There is an opportunity to encourage more visitors along the commercial corridor through wayfinding signage. Uses along Route 58 should not compete with those found Downtown. In contrast, the corridor's large lots can provide a different type and scale of businesses that meet other needs.

The Peconic Bay Medical Center on Route 58 is a trusted source of healthcare for the five East End towns, not just Riverhead residents. Its employees frequent the businesses on the corridor and provide demand for affordable housing in Riverhead. The Medical Center has expressed interest in expanding its footprint to provide a wellness-related district. There is also the potential to add assisted care facilities in the vicinity of the hospital.

## Route 25A (Wading River Corridor)

The commercial corridor along Route 25A in Wading River is characterized by a mix of small businesses, shops, and services catering to the local community and passing motorists. Commercial offerings include local restaurants, convenience stores, professional services, and small retail establishments.

The rezoning following the 2012 Route 25A-Wading River Planning and Zoning Report eliminated the potential for up to 142,877 sf of existing retail but allows for the capture of 200,000 sf for future retail growth. A Retail Gap Analysis conducted for this plan (see Appendix A) found that if the remaining allowable square footage were developed, this corridor could capture local resident spending with uses for which there is a demand. The retail gap is entirely in the retail trade sector. In particular, building materials/lawn and garden supplies stores and clothing stores are lacking. Food and drink businesses have a surplus, indicating that those businesses are drawing visitors from outside of the hamlet.



Route 25A at Sound Ave

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The economic development goals and strategies for Riverhead seek to support existing businesses, diversify local employment, increase the tax base, and maintain quality of life as guiding tenets.

### ***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.***

Riverhead's substantial industrially zoned areas offer great opportunities for economic development. Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL) is uniquely suited for office, industrial, and commercial recreation uses, given its central location and convenient access from the LIE and existing essential infrastructure. The Town's ownership of the property provides the ability to effectuate appropriate development in emerging industries and bring the property back onto the tax rolls through its sale or lease. This increased revenue stream can help ease the tax burden on existing residents and businesses, provide funds for essential public services, and support local infrastructure improvements.

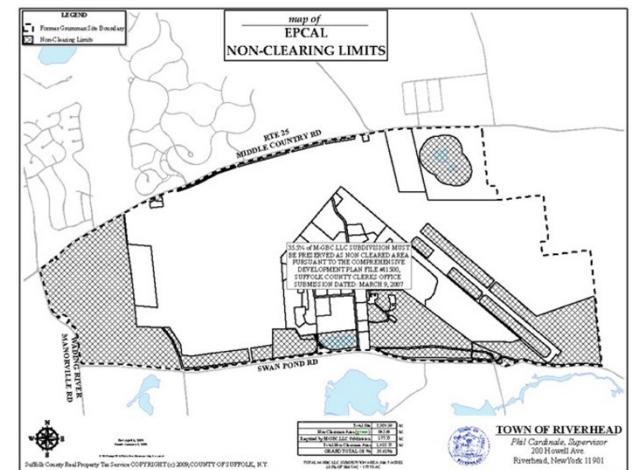
#### **1.1. Continue to promote economic development opportunities in the EPCAL area, while creating a framework to assure potential negative impacts are addressed.**

In light of the recent unsuccessful development proposal at the EPCAL, the Town should revisit zoning regulations for the Planned Development (PD) district. The existing district is fairly liberal on land uses, and it may be appropriate to limit some activities that the community did not support. Air cargo was recently eliminated through a Town code amendment. Carefully re-evaluating the potential impacts of other types of industrial development will help the Town make more informed decisions and take steps to address concerns.

Recognizing the community's desire for a collaborative planning approach, a comprehensive study involving residents, NYSDEC, and other stakeholders should be initiated. This study would formulate a collective vision, identify desirable economically viable uses, explore subdivision plans, and address environmental considerations. This approach would also enhance eligibility for grant funding.

The major community concern was the need to ensure that roads, utilities, and public services can accommodate the increased demand from the proposed development. A plan for roadway improvements needs to be proactively established. The Town should also explore public transportation options can serve industrial areas and reduce the need for additional road development. Chapter 5 discusses transportation issues in more detail, including the potential to activate the existing rail spur which could be used for freight and/or passenger service.

Environmental conservation considerations need to be balanced with the economic development strategy at EPCAL. The site is within the Pine Barrens Overlay District, which establishes clearing limits and other regulations for the Pine Barrens Compatible Growth and Core Areas. Section 301-197 (d) of the Town Code limits clearing to 35% of the overall EPCAL site. The map below shows designated areas where clearing is prohibited. The map may be modified by local law of the Town Board.



**Figure 11: EPCAL Non-Clearing Limits**

Source: Town of Riverhead, 2015, <https://ecode360.com/attachment/R10508/R10508-301j%20Map%20Non-clearing%20Limits.pdf>

## **2. Encourage appropriately scaled and designed development in industrial areas that better aligns with the character and needs of the surrounding areas.**

Many residents expressed the need to reduce potential impacts of industrially zoned properties, as they threaten to impact the surrounding rural and residential landscape. The Town must continue to promote economic development, while carefully managing and minimizing potential impacts to surrounding residential areas.

### **2.1. Continue to promote and encourage additional opportunities for private and public recreational opportunities in Calverton, along Route 58, and downtown.**

Expanding the presence of commercial recreational activities in Riverhead is an opportunity to energize the economy and enrich the leisure options available to residents and visitors. Indoor and outdoor commercial recreation activities, including theme parks, will not only enhance the vibrancy of the area but also create job opportunities, stimulate business growth, and establish Riverhead as a destination for entertainment and relaxation.

### **2.2. Reduce allowable density of industrial development to be more responsive to surrounding uses.**

It is essential to carefully manage the permitted density of development within industrial districts. This Comprehensive Plan recommends a reduction in the allowable density from 0.4 FAR to 0.25 FAR, with the potential to increase to 0.3 through the use of

TDR credits. Note that FAR and other industrial bulk standards for buildings do not apply to solar farms, which are regulated separately in the Town code. This measured approach addresses concerns about aesthetics, overcrowding, and environmental impacts. Lowering the FAR threshold can curtail excessive development while promoting thoughtful land use planning that ensures the long-term sustainability of industrial areas. Zoning strategies are further discussed in Chapter 13.

### **2.3. Provide flexibility for building heights in industrial districts, provided aesthetic impacts are mitigated.**

To accommodate the evolving needs of industrial districts while preserving the aesthetics of the Town, it is crucial to consider allowing slightly higher building heights (up to 40 feet), provided that buildings are appropriately set back from the street. This approach supports innovation and expansion within industrial areas, creating opportunities for businesses to thrive without compromising the overall character of the community. This zoning strategy is further discussed in Chapter 13.

### **2.4. Strengthen design standards for industrial development to promote aesthetics, green building practices, and architectural harmony with the town's rural character.**

The FAR adjustment discussed above is also aligned with other zoning strategies to preserve setbacks and manage heights. This approach will encourage developers to prioritize quality over quantity, focus on sustainable practices, and contribute to a community that values both economic prosperity and environmental stewardship. For example, the zoning for light industrial areas could include design guidance to use elements that harmonize with the

built environment, such as facades, materials, and landscaping to limit visual impact from roads. Zoning strategies are further discussed in Chapter 13.

### **2.5. Transition existing industrial districts in more sensitive areas into light industrial areas with specific design and landscaping requirements to minimize visual and environmental impacts.**

This recommendation acknowledges the need for zoning code revisions in industrial districts that will encourage a gradual shift from heavy industrial and other traditional industrial uses to those that are enclosed and more compatible with areas that are not well-suited to industrial development. This would apply to all industrially zoned properties outside of the core industrial area in Calverton (generally west of the LIE interchange and between Route 25 and River Road). Zoning standards could be strengthened to ensure that industrial activities are conducted in a manner that is safe, environmentally responsible, and compatible with surrounding land uses. By introducing specific design, performance (i.e., noise, emissions, effluent, glare), and landscaping standards, the Town can ensure that new developments integrate seamlessly into their surroundings, while still providing opportunities for economic expansion.

### 3. Emphasize Downtown Riverhead as the Town's civic, cultural, specialty shopping, and historic center.

Riverhead's downtown boasts many assets including its local businesses, mix of uses, regional attractions, historic built environment, and waterfront location. The recent 2022 DRI identified several issues and opportunities, including vacant properties, waterfront access, public realm improvements, diverse population needs, and an expanding tourism market. Goals and strategies from the DRI Plan are incorporated into this section. These goals were crafted through a collaborative effort with the community to help achieve the implementation of the DRI vision.

#### 3.1. Make the Peconic River a central feature of Downtown Riverhead's identity with new connections, activities, and development (DRI Goal #1).

Specific strategies include Improving pedestrian connections to the Riverfront, creating a new Town Square to connect Main Street to the River, and creating a shared mobility path along Heidi Behr Way.

#### 3.2. Capitalize on opportunities of underutilized and blighted properties to create new catalysts downtown (DRI Goal #2).

The vacant and blighted properties within Downtown Riverhead create a negative impression on residents and visitors and gives the perception that the downtown is unsafe. Activating or developing these properties will attract new businesses and residents and improve the downtown environment. Specific strategies include placemaking to improve the public realm and spur new development, exploring

development opportunities on Town-owned parking lots, and developing the Town Square and surrounding vacant sites into a mixed-use destination.

#### 3.3. Build on the previous outreach efforts and engage the diverse local community and organizations to address social and environmental justice needs (DRI Goal #3).

Riverhead is home to a very diverse population in terms of age, race, and socioeconomic status, and that population should be well served by the downtown. Some residents have expressed concerns that there aren't activities for younger people or families in the downtown, while others felt priced out of its attractions. Ensuring that Downtown Riverhead is welcoming to everyone will be critical to achieving the Town's vision. This includes the creation of new programs and activities for the Town Square and throughout the area that engage all populations

#### 3.4. Create opportunities for new business investment and increased tourism and economic activity (DRI Goal #4).

This goal addresses the need to bring in new investment and attract a larger tourist market. As the population in the downtown continues to grow, there will need to be more investment to provide the supporting uses for new residents. Additionally, public realm improvements will help existing business owners and residents. Specific streetscape strategies include beautification and pedestrian safety improvements that make strolling more inviting, creating multimodal linkages to connect key destinations, and improving the nighttime environment and public safety perception. Revitalization will also be achieved through the addition of mixed-use buildings.

#### 3.5. Create and expand existing transit and pedestrian connections, as well as environmental, public space, and recreational improvements (DRI Goal #5).

A significant number of new residents are expected to be downtown with the anticipated development on Main Street and in the TOD Area. The Town should advocate to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for increased LIRR service for residents, commuters, and visitors. Riverhead participated in MTA's First Mile/Last Mile pilot program, which generated a plan to improve bicycle access to the Riverhead station. Such pedestrian and bike improvements are needed to make the downtown more accessible. In addition, stronger connections between key anchors can bring more people downtown and induce them to linger among different destinations

#### 3.6. Implement flood mitigation strategies integrated with the Downtown plan and new projects (DRI Goal #6).

Climate change and the prospect of higher sea levels and stronger storms presents a significant threat to the future of Downtown Riverhead. Major improvements are needed to ensure that it can adapt to the risks of a changing climate. This topic is further discussed in Chapter 12.

#### 3.7. Codify design elements of the Downtown Riverhead Pattern Book and continue to advance its recommendations.

The Downtown Riverhead Pattern Book provides direction for policies and projects proposed in the Main Street (DC-1) Zoning Use District. The document addresses policies for the proper siting and massing of new buildings, the enhancement of the public realm, and resiliency and adaptability. There are some inconsistencies between the pattern book and the Town Code, such as lot coverage and building height,

however its design guidance has proven to result in favorable developments. Riverhead adopted the Pattern Book and should codify its design elements to give it more authority as a guiding document for developers, land use boards, the Town Board, and Town staff. To avoid confusion, other dimensional criteria in the Pattern Book (i.e. FAR, height, coverage) should be reviewed to ensure that it is consistent with DC-1 provisions.

#### 4. Enhance the Route 58

##### ***Corridor to create a more attractive destination, improve accessibility, and cultivate a hospitable environment for regional and local traffic.***

The Route 58 Corridor is a vital commercial hub for the Town and the east end region. It is also an unpleasant gateway to Riverhead, it generally lacks aesthetic appeal and is consistently congested. While vacancies are down in recent years, the long-term prospect for big box retail is uncertain. Zoning guidance is needed to ensure that future development supports strong aesthetics, adequate infrastructure, traffic flow, and stormwater reduction.

##### ***4.1. Promote business revitalization along Route 58 through placemaking, beautification, and transportation improvements.***

This recommendation can be achieved with design guidelines that would provide a clear and cohesive vision for the corridor's development. The guidelines would specify the use of landscaping to soften the built environment, enhance walkability, and contribute to a more inviting atmosphere. They would also encourage

site planning, building design, and parking lot design that is both viable for the marketplace, aesthetically attractive, and compatible with the Town's scale. Roadways and parking lots should be designed not just with automobile circulation in mind, but also pedestrian, bicycle, and bus circulation.

Chapter 5 discusses other concepts to improve the Route 58 roadway such as a landscaped median, improved bus pull-out areas, and necessary pedestrian infrastructure.

##### ***4.2. Provide a flexible zoning framework that allows for the repurposing of vacant and underutilized properties.***

The Route 58 commercial corridor is a key economic driver in Riverhead. Promoting infill development and adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized areas represent a sustainable and responsible approach to support economic development while minimizing sprawl. Zoning flexibility for infill development would provide opportunities for new businesses, housing, and amenities while maintaining a sense of place. Flexibility should also be provided to allow for adaptive reuse of existing structures. For example, vacant big box retail can be repurposed into office or mixed commercial/entertainment uses. The addition of office workers and visitors would in turn provide a customer base for other retail uses. Reuse of smaller vacant buildings on Route 58 may be suited for restaurant, entertainment, or commercial recreational uses. In addition, the increase in value of TDR credits in commercial areas will further incentivize redevelopment on Route 58.

##### ***4.3. Revisit commercial parking requirements to maximize the efficiency of land.***

Current parking requirements encourage vast parking surface, much of which is underutilized. Reducing these requirements and encouraging shared parking enhances pedestrian friendliness and allows for more green space. Reducing requirements can also provide opportunities for adaptive reuse or infill development with new uses, which would help to make the corridor a more dynamic commercial center.

#### 5. Guide responsible land use planning in hamlet centers.

The Town has several hamlet-oriented commercial areas where residents can access essential goods and services without needing to travel long distances. Each hamlet has its own unique history, scale, and community aspirations. The Town should coordinate economic development efforts with neighboring towns, local businesses, and nonprofit agencies.

##### ***5.1. Encourage the creation of hamlet studies for Aquebogue, Jamesport, Calverton, and Polish Town.***

The Town should work with residents in these hamlet areas to develop studies with design guidelines or a pattern book for new development. Each of these hamlet areas offers different opportunities for growth. The creation of tailored hamlet studies would allow for a detailed examination of the distinct needs and priorities of each area, ensuring that future development aligns with the local context. The hamlet studies would specify allowable land uses, building heights, parking requirements, landscaping requirements, building design, transportation

improvements, public space opportunities, and other factors that fit the specific requirements of each center.

## 5.2. Balance growth and greenery along the West Main Street gateway.

West Main Street is closely connected to the heart of Downtown Riverhead, making it a desirable location for residential and small-scaled commercial development. The area benefits from easy access to shops, restaurants, and cultural attractions. Nonetheless, the existing development pattern remains a patchwork of disparate uses, with non-conforming and industrial properties that clash with the surrounding built environment and are inconsistent with the intent of the WSRR overlay district.

Tailoring zoning provisions is an important strategy to ensure that future development provides a balanced blend of residential and small-scale commercial endeavors, including retail and dining. These zoning adjustments could also encompass the implementation of a greenbelt program, focusing on enhancing the Peconic River waterfront area. By embracing these zoning adaptations, prospective developments can play a pivotal role in creating a seamless green corridor or network, fostering wildlife habitats, presenting recreational opportunities, and contributing to air and water quality improvements. It is essential to recognize that this zone is subject to specific land use constraints, particularly in sections governed by the WSRR overlay, regulated by the NYSDEC.

The Town may also consider developing a pattern book or hamlet study for this area to develop more specific design guidance for new development. This would allow for the examination of how buildings should relate to the street as well as to the Peconic River, including where opportunities may exist to improve public access to the waterside.

## 6. *Balance fiscal and community benefits when considering new development and zoning decisions.*

Economic development initiatives play a vital role in expanding the tax base and financing essential public services, infrastructure improvements, and quality of life enhancements. Commercial and industrial developments contribute significantly to this effort by providing high ratables that help offset residential property taxes and generate funds for crucial services such as education and municipal operations. Additionally, multi-family developments can positively impact the community's fiscal health. However, attracting investment through incentives must be carefully balanced with community benefits that align with the Town's broader vision for sustainable growth, economic prosperity, and resident well-being.

Riverhead's scenic landscapes and agricultural lands are integral to its unique character, natural beauty, and economy. While the preservation of open land safeguards the environment, promotes a healthy living environment, and preserves historical and cultural assets, it often does not contribute as significantly to the tax base as developed properties. Therefore, achieving a sustainable balance between economic and industrial development and land preservation is essential. This balance encourages smart growth that respects the Town's natural resources, minimizes environmental impact, and supports a diverse local economy. By prioritizing initiatives that align with this balance, Riverhead can ensure long-term prosperity while preserving its cherished landscapes and heritage.

### 6.1. Establish a fiscal framework for the evaluation of development proposals and zoning decisions.

The financial implications of major zoning changes and development decisions are an important factor for the Town to consider. For projects of a certain scale, it would be helpful to have a well-defined and standardized framework to evaluate tax revenues, infrastructure costs, and other financial factors, to determine whether these impacts align with the Town's long-term fiscal health and sustainability goals. This will also help to identify alternative financial strategies, such as impact fees or public-private partnerships, to mitigate any adverse effects on the budget. Development of this framework would require close collaboration with the assessor's office.

The establishment of a fiscal framework can enhance transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. The Town can foster a more predictable environment for developers and the community by providing clear guidelines and standards for evaluating development proposals.

### 6.2. Work with IDA to maximize both fiscal and community benefits.

The IDA plays a pivotal role in promoting economic development, job creation, and investment in the Town. Collaboration between the Town and the IDA can be a powerful catalyst for achieving the community's long-term goals and objectives.

To maximize fiscal benefits, the Town must work closely with the IDA to strike a balance between incentivizing businesses and ensuring that the incentives provided result in substantial returns for the Town's treasury. This can be achieved through transparent negotiations, well-defined performance metrics, and regular assessments of the economic impact of approved projects. Simultaneously, the

Town must emphasize the importance of community benefits in its collaborations with the IDA; Riverhead's continued growth and evolution should also ensure maintenance of its quality of life. Collaboration with the IDA can be an opportunity to incorporate community-focused objectives into development projects, such as workforce housing, public spaces, and roadway or other infrastructure improvements.

## ***7. Continue to work with local partners on economic development initiatives.***

The Business Improvement District (BID) and Chamber of Commerce organizations are vital partners in economic development initiatives, working with the local government to enhance the Town's business environment. Riverhead is also uniquely situated as the gateway to the North and South Forks and can do more to capture tourists heading further east. As a result, the Town's economic well-being is intricately connected to neighboring East End Towns.

### ***7.1. Continue to work with the BID and the Chamber of Commerce on economic development opportunities.***

The BID plays a pivotal role in enhancing the physical and commercial aspects of downtown Riverhead, and the Chamber of Commerce is a dynamic force for local business advocacy and promotion. By continuing to build on partnerships with these organizations, Riverhead can leverage collective expertise, resources, and community engagement to drive growth and prosperity.

The BID has limited financial resources, and initiatives are often subsidized by the Town. The BID has its own funding mechanism which includes a 2% assessment

(as determined by the State) on commercial properties within the district. The Town should consider working with the BID to appeal to the State Assembly to increase the assessment rate. This initiative would first need support from local commercial property owners.

### ***7.2. Foster cross-jurisdictional coordination on economic development in the North Fork.***

Riverhead's economic well-being is intricately connected to the broader North Fork community. To harness the full potential of this connection, the Town should coordinate economic development efforts with neighboring towns, local businesses, and nonprofit agencies.

One approach could involve the participation in a North Fork Cooperative, a collaborative platform where joint strategies for sustainable economic growth can be designed and executed. Through this cooperative, the Town can explore initiatives, such as a "2-Day Fun Pass" to link various businesses and destinations, enticing visitors and residents to explore the full range of offerings in the region. This coordinated approach would not only boost tourism and consumer spending but also strengthen the economic resilience of local businesses and ensure a cohesive, memorable experience for visitors to the area.

### ***7.3. Actively market development/redevelopment sites aligned with the Town's vision.***

This recommendation includes a variety of strategies to proactively market development sites:

- Establish a Unique Riverhead Brand: A compelling and unique brand identity will help to distinguish Riverhead from other East End communities. This branding should encapsulate

the Town's essence, emphasizing its , heritage and aspirations, and making it stand out as a desirable place to invest, live, and visit.

- Develop Comprehensive Marketing Materials: This should include highlighting Riverhead's status as a Federal Opportunity Zone, existing businesses, pedestrian and traffic counts, and a snapshot of the community's socioeconomic profile. Materials can also note recent and anticipated development as well as other commercial trends such as the Town's emergence as the brewery capital of the East End.

## ***8. Promote sustainable economic growth and development and foster the creation of employment opportunities.***

Investing in workforce development is vital for Riverhead's economic growth and sustainability. Regional institutions such as Suffolk County Community College and Cornell Cooperative Extension, and local employers including Peconic Bay Medical Center, are partners in the growth and development of a diverse job market. The development of EPCAL also has the potential to diversify the job market in fields such as technology, sustainability, and other industries.

### ***8.1. Partner with local educational institutions and workforce development agencies to provide training programs and resources.***

Work with employers and institutions of higher learning, including the Suffolk County Community College and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), to develop continuing education and certificate programs that align with expected

job growth in emerging industries such as health care and senior services. These should include programs with achievement levels that correspond to industry qualification requirements, allowing the student to increase their earning power as they work their way up through the program.

The Town should partner with training institutes being developed on Long Island to leverage job opportunities for residents related to renewable energy.

#### **8.2. Promote apprenticeship programs and partnerships between local businesses and educational institutions to create a pipeline of skilled workers.**

The Town should partner with local businesses, such as PBMC, to establish apprenticeship programs that offer hands-on experience and training aligned with the needs of local industries. Partnerships between local businesses and educational institutions will ensure that training is aligned with the specific needs of local industries, creating a skilled labor force that's well-prepared to meet the demands of the job market.

#### **8.3. Enhance digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet access, to support the growth of employment and knowledge-based industries.**

Robust digital infrastructure is fundamental for economic development and the promotion of knowledge-based industries. By investing in high-speed internet access, Riverhead can create a more competitive and dynamic economic environment but also supports the creation of high-quality jobs.

#### **8.4. Carefully consider EPCAL development proposals to maximize living wage job creation and workforce training opportunities.**

The Town should take a meticulous approach in evaluating EPCAL development proposals, with a focus on job creation and workforce development. Giving priority to projects that create living wage jobs and training opportunities for Riverhead residents provides a pathway to economic stability and growth for community members.

### ***9. Achieve a harmonious blend of tourism and rural charm, making Riverhead an attractive destination while upholding residents' quality of life.***

Agritourism activities, including tastings at wineries and pick-your-own fruits and vegetables, have grown popular in Riverhead, especially during the fall. The Town should support agrotourism as a source of alternative income for farms, while ensuring that regulations prevent negative impacts such as traffic and noise. Clear definitions of agritourism activities should be established in regulations to differentiate genuine agricultural experiences from commercial events with limited agricultural relevance. Private events, such as weddings, and short-term rentals bring visitors to Riverhead, but can present noise, light, and safety concerns.

#### **9.1. Continue to promote agriculture and agrotourism but strengthen monitoring to minimize impacts.**

The Town should develop a permitting process and transparent regulations that address private event space and size to mitigate traffic and safety issues. This strategy is discussed more extensively in Chapter 6.

#### **9.2. Regulate short-term rentals to balance the benefits of tourism with the impacts on residential areas.**

The code currently has a minimum rental period of 30 days to limit the impacts of short-term rentals on the housing market and the associated noise and neighborhood impacts that can occur with these rentals. Balancing the economic benefits of tourism with the needs and concerns of permanent residents requires careful consideration and community engagement. Regulations for short-term rentals should also be regularly reviewed and adjusted as necessary to address changing market conditions and community priorities.

## **10. Promote more environmentally friendly business.**

Aligning economic growth with environmental stewardship creates a sustainable and balanced framework that benefits businesses, residents, and the environment.

### **10.1. Encourage industries to adopt environmentally friendly practices, such as recycling, waste reduction, and energy efficiency measures.**

Encouraging the adoption of eco-friendly practices, such as recycling, waste reduction, and energy efficiency measures, can help protect the local environment, conserve resources, and enhance the long-term resilience of the community. This recommendation is discussed more extensively in Chapter 12.

### **10.2. Promote more sustainable design.**

Sustainable design practices in industrial and business zones reduces the environmental footprint of commercial areas. This includes the incorporation of natural and native vegetation, permeable surfaces, and effective stormwater management systems, which collectively enhance water quality, reduce flooding risks, and preserve the community's ecological health.

Furthermore, the Town should push developments to incorporate more sustainable and energy-efficient construction practices. Green buildings are designed to minimize environmental impact, promote resource conservation, and can help the Town meet its sustainability goals. One example is the encouragement of rooftop solar panels, which is an effective way to generate renewable energy on developed land. Promoting rooftop solar facilities will

also help to improve the efficiency of the electricity grid and support the State and Long Island's clean energy initiatives. This recommendation is discussed more extensively in Chapter 12.

# 5

# TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

This chapter examines the existing transportation system in Riverhead, which includes state, county, and local roadways, sidewalks, bikeways, and public transit modes. The analysis includes an inventory of current circulation conditions to assess the location and types of facilities for all transportation modes. Stakeholder engagement, encompassing the public, agency representatives, Town staff, and officials, was integral to the update process through various meetings, including those with the project-specific Steering Committee and interviews with government agencies at Town, County, and State levels. The Plan's goals and recommendations are also informed by a review of recommendations from the 2003 Comprehensive Plan and other relevant studies.

The data and discussions in this chapter highlight key transportation trends in Riverhead, emphasizing the need to prioritize safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation options connecting residents and visitors to vital destinations. Roadway improvements are essential to alleviate congestion and enhance safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and individuals of all ages and abilities. The Town should approach road enhancements with sensitivity to its residential neighborhoods and preservation of historic, scenic, and natural resources, while addressing the need to expand and improve existing infrastructure, including the road network, and to accommodate future growth demand.

Furthermore, Riverhead should actively promote alternative transportation modes, such as walking, biking, and public transit, especially in and to downtown and hamlet centers. This initiative could involve developing new bike and pedestrian paths and encouraging the use of public transit options. Emphasizing cleaner transportation alternatives will further Riverhead's sustainability goals by reducing the environmental impact of automobiles, including greenhouse gas emissions.



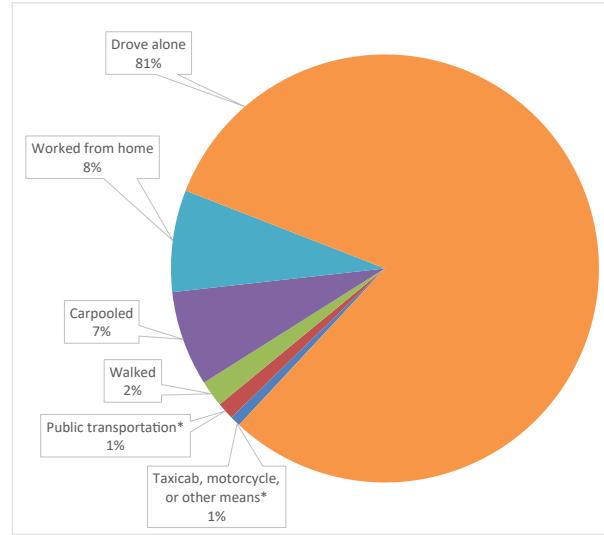
## TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS

The U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) provides estimates on means of transportation to work for employed residents over 16 years of age. In 2022, for the estimated 15,860 employed residents, driving alone (81%) was the dominant form of transportation to work (see Chart 20). Working from home was the second largest category (8%), followed by carpooling (7%). Only 2% of workers are estimated to walk to work, with about 1% using public transportation, and another 1% using other means.

The 2022 ACS 5-year estimates determined the mean travel time to work was about 27 minutes. Table 8 shows the travel times distribution for residents who work outside the house (approximately 14,641 workers).

As part of this planning process, an online survey gathered public input on various planning subjects, including Riverhead's transportation. The survey responses were from a small percentage of the population and may not be as reliable as Census data. However, the results somewhat mirror the data, with the largest portion, 83%, reporting that they drive their car alone to work. The survey focused on transportation mode use, trip length, and purpose, revealing that, akin to many communities, most household trips are work-related. Respondents mainly reported short trips under 15 miles, predominantly using single passenger cars, consistent with the Town's low-density development and the absence of a robust public transportation system. Despite some transportation system improvements, travel characteristics have remained largely unchanged since 2003, presenting challenges for future planning.

This Comprehensive Plan update began just before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, significantly impacting transportation demand across



**Chart 20: Means of Transportation to Work, 2022**

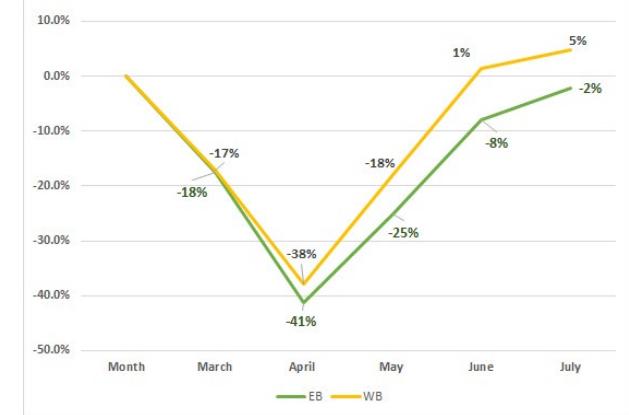
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-year estimates

all sectors. However, as of this document's writing, New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and Suffolk County Department of Public Works (SCDPW) indicate stabilized traffic volumes, no longer necessitating adjustments to traffic counts due to the pandemic's influence. Transit ridership, though on a path to recovery, remains below pre-pandemic levels. Work-from-home policies reduced commuter traffic, and some second homeowners opted to relocate permanently after the pandemic's impact diminished.

Travel Time to Work	Percent of Workers
Less than 10 minutes	15%
10 to 14 minutes	16%
15 to 19 minutes	12%
20 to 24 minutes	9%
25 to 29 minutes	6%
30 to 34 minutes	18%
35 to 44 minutes	5%
45 to 59 minutes	11%
60 or more minutes	8%

**Table 8: Travel Time to Work, 2022**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 ACS 5-year estimates



**Chart 21: Change in Traffic Counts from 2019 to 2020**

Source: NYSDOT, SCDPW Traffic Data at NY 27 Continuous Count Station east of Shinnecock Canal

## Streets and Highways

Riverhead has a comprehensive road network exceeding 200 miles, encompassing a segment of I-495 (the Long Island Expressway (LIE)), two New York State highways, several Suffolk County roads, and extensive Town roadways. Noteworthy State highways include NY25, spanning the Town's entire length, and NY25A in western Riverhead. Key County roads are CR43 (Northville Turnpike), CR105 (Cross River Drive), and CR58 (Old Country Road); along with a portion of CR54 (Hulse Landing Road) north of Sound Avenue, and a portion of CR73 (Roanoke Avenue) between East Main Street and Middle Road. Additionally, Peconic Avenue, a short stretch of CR63 between Main Street and the Town line at the Peconic River, holds significance just south of downtown. Prominent Town roads such as Sound Avenue, Middle Road, Edwards Avenue, Doctors Path, and Peconic Bay Boulevard contribute to the extensive network. The following section provides an overview of major roadway facilities, incorporating available recent and historic traffic volume information. Figure 12 shows major roads in Riverhead classified by jurisdiction, as well as information regarding traffic flows on each facility.

A description of the roadways shown in Figure 12 is provided below, with information on the growth in traffic volumes over the last decade. It is noted that, as part of the long-term transportation planning study conducted by NYSDOT in the early 2000s, traffic volumes in Riverhead were generally estimated to increase by 47%, or approximately 2.3% per year, from 2000 to 2020. However, as discussed below, while some roadways experienced traffic growth approaching the predicted rate, most did not. Note that the comparison for each area is based on the year DOT collected the data, which may vary slightly.

### I-495 Long Island Expressway (LIE)

The LIE is a six-lane east-west interstate highway that traverses most of Long Island and terminates in Riverhead. Interchange 72 (NY25), and Interchange 73 (CR58), are within the Town's borders. Travelers from the west use the LIE to reach Riverhead and Southold. The LIE was originally planned to terminate at CR48, a concept which has long since been abandoned. Since 2003, traffic volumes on the LIE in Riverhead have increased by 1.5% per year.

### New York State Route 25 (NY25)

NY 25 spans from the Edward M. Koch Bridge in Queens to Orient Point, covering the entire length of Riverhead with two lanes—one in each direction. This road, connecting the western border to the LIE, provides access to Calverton National Cemetery in the west and Splish-Splash Water Park in the east. West of the LIE, development is relatively sparse on NY25, but it offers entry to the former Grumman Naval Weapons Research facility, now known as Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL). Since 2013, traffic volumes on this NY25 section have increased by less than 0.5% per year.

From the LIE to CR105, the road provides access to more developed areas such as the Tanger Factory Outlet Center, running parallel to the Peconic River, and passing through Downtown Riverhead as Main Street. Traffic volumes have been relatively steady since 2013, with signs of increased demands post-Covid-19 disruptions. Just west of the downtown, traffic uses CR94 to cross the Peconic River, heading east and south via NY24 and CR51, where the Suffolk County Courts and County Center are situated.

East of downtown, NY25 connects CR58 to CR105, experiencing congestion seasonally, especially in summer, due to traffic to and from the eastern North Fork. With additional traffic from CR58, Annual Average Daily Trips (AADT) significantly rises to

22,600 vehicles per day (vpd) as of 2022. Beyond CR105 to the eastern Southold border, NY25 passes through agricultural land interspersed with residences, the Jamesport hamlet center, farmstands, and some commercial development. Traffic volumes decrease to 13,000 vpd at the Southold town line.

### New York State Route 25A (NY25A)

NY25A is a two-lane State highway stretching from the western border of Riverhead (shared with Brookhaven) to NY25, primarily passing through agricultural landscapes with the entrance to Calverton National Cemetery along its route. Bike lanes are incorporated into the facility. The East Wind Hotel and spa complex, including the Shoppes at East Wind, are at the intersection of NY25A at Sound Avenue. Traffic volumes decreased slightly between 2022, and 2023, although the intersection of 25A and Wading River-Manor Road continues to experience significant congestion.

### Suffolk County Route 58 (CR58)

Route 58, an east-west Suffolk County roadway, spans from the eastern terminus of the LIE to NY25, east of Downtown Riverhead. This densely developed corridor features various commercial properties and experiences congestion during peak hours, with the western part carrying higher traffic volumes than the LIE. In 2022, AADT exceeded 34,000 vpd near Roanoke Avenue, while volumes to the east were somewhat lower.

SCDPW expanded and enhanced CR58 in the early 2000s, but due to limited right-of-way and to avoid property acquisition, the design omitted provisions for bicycles or bus turnouts, and compromises were made for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. The resulting configuration includes two lanes in each direction, turning lanes, and sections of a center two-way left-turn lane, but lacks shoulders, deceleration



FIGURE 12: ROAD JURISDICTION AND TRAFFIC VOLUMES

Source: NYS DOT, Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, LKMA Engineering

lanes, or bus turnouts. Design compromises also led to utility poles being placed in sidewalks, often violating the ADA accessibility guidelines.

### ***County Road 105 (CR105, Cross River Drive)***

CR105 is a major north-south, limited-access Suffolk County highway that extends from the Southampton town line to Sound Avenue. The portion of the road in Riverhead provides four lanes, two in each direction. Development is agricultural in nature, and traffic volumes are low, except during the peak summer season, when tourist traffic causes delays on CR105 at its intersections with NY25 and Sound Avenue. Speeds tend to be high. Between 2013 and 2022, traffic volumes increased by approximately 1.5% per year.

### ***Sound Avenue***

Sound Avenue is a two-lane east-west Town roadway that extends the length of Riverhead, parallel to the Long Island Sound. East of the Southold town line, the roadway becomes CR48 (Middle Road) under the jurisdiction of SCDPW and continues to the east until it terminates in Greenport, where it joins NY25 as the only major roadway to Orient Point. Since 2014, traffic volumes have been increasing on Sound Avenue by approximately 2% per year, based on NYSDOT data. This is a higher rate of growth than shown on other roadways within the Town. Sound Avenue experiences significant congestion during seasonal periods (typically late September through October), due in part to tourism to the East End, as well as travel to and from points east.

Although the existing right-of-way is 66 feet wide, the pavement is between 28 and 30 feet wide for most of its length. Few sidewalks and shoulder areas are provided. In some cases, landscape features of the homes, such as fences and plantings, encroach on the

Town right-of-way. The road has significant horizontal and vertical curvature, which limits stopping sight distances.

In 1975, Sound Avenue, from its junction with NY25A to its eastern end at the Town boundary with Southold, was designated as a "Scenic and Historic Corridor" in Suffolk County by the New York State Assembly. Although the designation states that Sound Avenue and "its natural beauty shall be preserved and protected for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the state," this did not result in any specific or concrete protections for the roadway or surrounding lands.

### ***Roanoke Avenue (CR73 & Town of Riverhead Jurisdiction)***

CR73 Roanoke Avenue is a two-lane north-south Town roadway that extends from Main Street to Sound Avenue. Roanoke Avenue intersects with CR58 at an intersection that was converted to a two-lane roundabout by Suffolk County since the time of the 2003 Master Plan. The Roanoke Avenue right-of-way is under the jurisdiction of the SCDPW from its intersection with East Main Street to the intersection with Middle Road. North of Middle Road, the roadway is under the jurisdiction of the Town. The crash rate at the roundabout is among the highest in Riverhead, although crash severity is low, as is common at roundabouts.

### ***Middle Road***

Middle Road is a two-lane east-west Town roadway that extends about 4.75 miles between its dead-end western terminus north of Old County Road to its eastern terminus at Doctor's Path, just north of NY25. Middle Road can be accessed from NY25 via Manor Road. Existing traffic volumes are relatively low. Drivers familiar with the area use Middle Road as a

bypass route to CR58. Depending on location, Middle Road experienced between 3,000 and 5,000 vpd in 2022, a slight increase since 2013.

### ***Wading River-Manorville Road***

This two-lane, north-south roadway in the western portion of the Town provides access to the LIE and points south from the north shore of Riverhead, the hamlet of Wading River, and the residential development along its length. Access to EPCAL from the LIE can also be made via NY25 and Grumman Boulevard. Traffic volumes have increased approximately 2% per year since 2014.

### ***Edwards Avenue***

Edwards Avenue extends from the LIE to points north in the western portion of the Town (Calverton). It has intersections with the LIE, NY25 and Sound Avenue, Riley Avenue, and several residential neighborhoods. Edwards Avenue becomes CR94 (Nugent Drive) at the intersection with River Road. Many vehicles use Edwards Avenue to access Sound Avenue during tourist season, to avoid congestion further east. Edwards Avenue experienced growth in traffic volumes of approximately 1% per year since 2013. For NY25 at Edwards Avenue, NYSDOT has a design-stage improvement project to add left turn lanes at all approaches, widen the intersection, and align the roadway's north-south orientation as it crosses NY25 (NYSDOT Statewide Traffic Improvement Plan PIN 0810.01). Improvements at this intersection are anticipated to be completed during the 2024 construction season, per a May 2023 correspondence with NYSDOT. In that same memo, the NYSDOT stated this intersection is being prioritized over safety enhancement projects at other intersections in the Towns of Southold and East Hampton

### Doctor's Path

Doctor's Path is a two-lane north-south roadway that extends from NY25 to Sound Avenue. Doctor's Path intersects with NY25, CR58, and Middle Road at one of the more complex intersections in the Town. NYSDOT last made improvements to the intersection more than 20 years ago. The 2022 AADT was approximately 2,800 vpd, basically unchanged since 2014.

### Roadway Capacity

Traffic data from State and County roadways in Riverhead, including Sound Avenue and other heavily traveled roads, was collected and analyzed to determine whether the roadway capacity supports current and future needs. The data, sourced from transportation agencies and studies, was normalized for seasonality. Planning-level capacity analyses were conducted for multiple Town roadways, revealing that, in almost all cases, the existing facilities are adequately sized to handle forecasted traffic demand. Generally, large-scale roadway widening is unnecessary for the foreseeable future. Instead, a strategy involving spot improvements, travel demand management, and facility management techniques is deemed sufficient for most Town roadways. This assessment relates specifically to vehicular traffic only, as many roads lack pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.

The determination that roadways have ample capacity pertains to planning-level analyses focused on determining whether there is adequate lane capacity to meet average annual traffic demand. These analyses do not account for daily peak hours or seasonal variations in demand. Consequently, positive results from the analyses do not rule out the potential need for local improvements in intersection capacity, traffic control adjustments, or safety enhancements. However, they do provide assurance that extensive

roadway widenings are not considered likely. Localized improvements are addressed on a case-by-case basis in appropriate sections of the report.

Exceptions to this generalization exist, such as the section of NY25 between Wading River Road and Manor Lane, which will come under considerable demand pressure as the EPCAL property is built out. There is also recurring congestion on CR58 from I-495 to the Roanoke Avenue traffic circle, which is due to the level of development in the surrounding area, the number of access points, and its role as one of three routes to the North Fork, including the Cross Sound Ferry terminal.

Long Island's North Fork, including Riverhead's agricultural district mostly associated with Sound Avenue, is an increasingly popular and continually evolving attraction for large numbers of tourists and visitors. Wineries, vineyards, and conventional agricultural and agritourism uses continue to thrive, while breweries and distillers of spirits have also become popular. These attractions draw large numbers of visitors, beginning in springtime during the strawberry season and extending well into the fall and early Christmas season. This activity is not limited to Riverhead, as the Town's roadways serve as the critical access to similar tourist attractions to the east.

### Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL)

The 2003 Plan recognized the necessity of widening NY25 due to the impact of EPCAL's development, a need confirmed in an FGEIS completed in connection with the most recent proposal for the property. While the exact nature of the development is unknown, extensive roadway mitigation, including facility widening, intersection approach widenings, and traffic signal updates, will be required. According to the NYSDOT, an increase in peak-hour traffic volumes of only 1,000 vehicles would trigger the need to widen

NY 25. Depending on the project that is proposed, it is possible that this threshold would be reached well before EPCAL is built out to its full potential.

The FGEIS prepared for the 2016 EPCAL Reuse and Revitalization Plan identified substantial specific transportation improvements that would be necessitated by phased build-out of the EPCAL parcel. The improvements were based on assumed trip generation levels from phased development of the property under the adopted Planned Development District (PDD) that was the subject of the FGEIS. A summary of the system improvements and the estimated time when they would be triggered is as follows:

#### 2025

- Widen NY25 to five Lanes (two lanes in each direction with center turn lane)
- Widen approaches to 12 intersections
- Upgrade five existing traffic signals
- Install six new traffic signals

#### 2035

- Additional widenings at eight intersections
- Upgrade 10 signals
- Install one additional signal

These mitigation measures are likely needed regardless of the ultimate development and basing the need on the levels of traffic generated remains a valid strategy that the Town should maintain. Coordination with NYSDOT and other agencies will also be required.

### CR58 Corridor Improvements

The 2003 Plan recommended that the Town work with Suffolk County to develop a plan to convert the entire length of CR58 (including the portion of Route 25 that links CR58 to CR105) into a four-lane roadway, with a raised, landscaped median, and turn pockets at major intersections and entrances to major shopping centers. This proposal, which included shoulders and sidewalks on both sides and turn-outs for bus stops, required property acquisition for full implementation, and was among several alternatives that were investigated in the SCDPW's Corridor Study for CR58, Old Country Road performed in the late 1990s.

The CR58 commercial corridor experienced intense commercial development prior to and in the years following the completion of the 2003 Plan, and traffic congestion became a major impediment to continued growth. At the time, CR58 provided a single lane in each direction, which, combined with the obsolete design of the traffic circle at Roanoke Avenue, meant the facility lacked adequate capacity to accommodate the growing traffic demand, resulting in persistent recurring congestion, long delays, and increasing congestion-related crashes. In 2010, CR58 was reconstructed by the SCDPW to provide two lanes in each direction, with a center two-way left-turn lane in some areas and separate left-turn lanes in other areas. However, due to the lack of available right-of-way, the design excluded accommodations for bicycles or bus turnouts, and design compromises were made with respect to compliance with ADA requirements.

The SCDPW is conducting a study on CR58 to develop a new operating plan for the traffic signals located along the corridor. The signals are interconnected, and the signal timing and phasing are coordinated, but changes in development along the corridor itself and elsewhere in the Town have created a need for the update of the signal operations. The results of this study are due in 2024-2025. The County anticipates

that some improvement to the operating conditions along the corridor will be achieved. However, SCDPW has no plans for any other improvements to CR58.

### Sound Avenue

Despite tourist- and agriculture-related congestion on Sound Avenue and NY25, public sentiment strongly emphasized maintaining the rural, scenic character of these roadways. Consistent with the 2003 Plan, sentiments expressed the nature of the roadway facilities as part of the district's attraction. A concept to address Sound Avenue congestion, proposing a center two-way left-turn lane, faced public disapproval. Consequently, a strategy of spot improvements, access management restrictions, and traffic control for seasonal and localized issues is recommended, along with access management and a review of parking regulations and restrictions to reduce the impact of off-site parking on sight distance and roadway capacity.

### Traffic Safety

Roadways on Long Island experience higher crash rates than other areas in New York State, and this trend extends to Riverhead. Utilizing NYSDOT's newly implemented Crash Location and Engineering Analysis Repository (CLEAR) system, locations with the highest number of crashes in the Town were identified (see Figure 13). Crash data was analyzed from for 5 years from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2022. These locations primarily consist of intersections where at least one, if not both, approach roadways are either Suffolk County or New York State roadways. This aligns with expectations, as the County and State facilities, known for their substantial traffic volumes, play a prominent role in the Town. Locations of note include the following:

- CR58/Old Country Road at CR73/Roanoke Avenue (Roundabout) – 323 crashes. This is a high total number of crashes (average of nearly 65 per year); however, as expected at roundabouts, most crashes are low-severity, i.e. merging or lane-changing types of crashes which result in minimal personal injuries, as opposed to conventional intersections, where right-angle crashes with potentially serious injuries can be the most dominant crash severity. Crash severity analysis indicates that only 15% of crashes resulted in injury.

- CR58 at Mill Road – 142 crashes. Nearly 40% of the crashes are rear-end collisions, typically the most dominant crash type at signalized intersections. Injury rate was 27%.
- CR58 at Kroemer Avenue – 107 crashes. Right-angle collisions are the most frequent type, which could indicate insufficient traffic signal clearance (yellow and all-red) intervals.
- NY25 at CR105 – 101 crashes. As noted, this intersection has insufficient traffic capacity. Injury rate was 27%.
- CR58 and CR43/Northville Turnpike – 98 crashes. Crash totals have increased the last two years; however, they are not high when the total intersection volume is considered. Injury rate was 36%.

Other locations where Town roads intersect and have the highest crash totals, are on Sound Avenue:

- Sound Avenue at CR 43/Northville Turnpike – 64 crashes. This intersection saw 13 crashes per year, including 25% injury crashes, and one fatality. Rear end crashes were most frequent.
- Sound Avenue at NY 25A – 39 crashes. This location saw eight crashes per year, including 31% injury crashes. Rear end crashes were most frequent.

These locations were considered in the recommendations developed for this Plan to improve safety for all transportation system users.

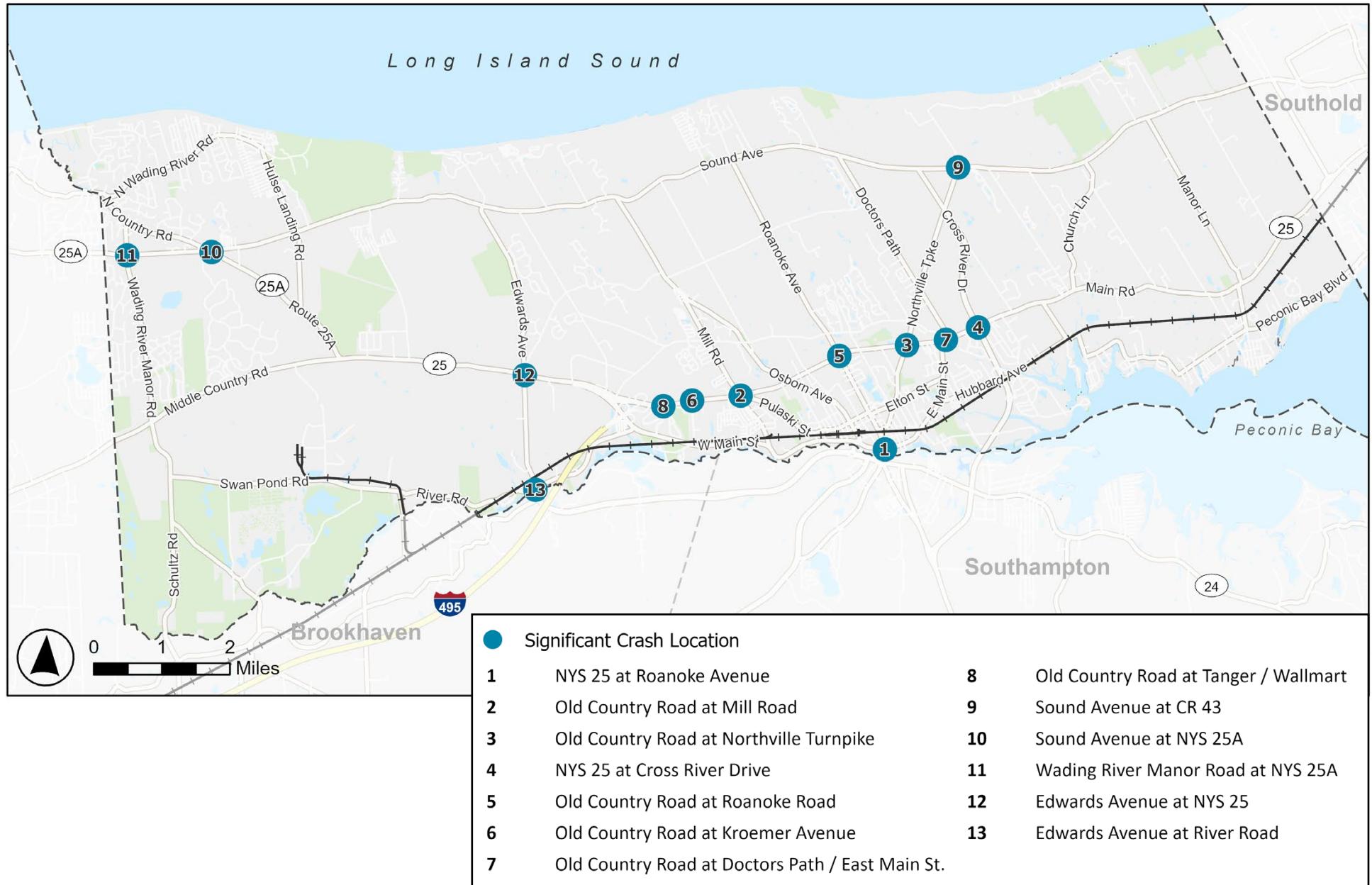


FIGURE 13: SIGNIFICANT CRASH LOCATIONS

Source: Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, NYSDOT CLEAR, LKMA Engineering

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The two major elements of the public transportation system serving Riverhead are commuter rail service provided by the MTA's Long Island Railroad (LIRR), and bus service provided by Suffolk County Transit (SCT). The LIRR has been providing commuter rail service to the North Fork for more than 150 years and is the only commuter rail service on Long Island. Due to system constraints and lack of demand, service has been traditionally sparse in Riverhead. At one point, service to the North Fork was completely discontinued, although it has been since restored.

Though technically not considered public transportation, the Town is also served by the Hampton Jitney, a private luxury bus service, and by various ride-sharing services including Uber and Lyft, and private taxi services. The Hampton Jitney provides bus service between Orient Point and Manhattan, as well as service to JFK and LaGuardia International Airports in New York City, and to MacArthur Airport in Islip. Ride-sharing services and taxis provide alternative means of transportation for travelers in Riverhead, although their impact on the transportation system is difficult to assess, and as private entities, the Town has little influence over the services provided.

### Long Island Railroad

The Main Line of the LIRR runs from Long Island City in the west to Greenport in the east, passing through Riverhead. It is electrified west of Ronkonkoma, with 24-hour service to Penn and Grand Central Stations. East of Ronkonkoma, the segment is served by diesel-electric trains, most of which terminate at Ronkonkoma, requiring customers traveling west of Ronkonkoma to transfer there. Three eastbound and four westbound trains travel each weekday between Ronkonkoma and Greenport, and one additional

round trip is scheduled between Ronkonkoma and Riverhead (formerly Yaphank) each weekday. Weekend service consists of four round-trips each day between Ronkonkoma and Greenport. On Fridays during the summer, the eastbound trip to Riverhead is extended to Greenport, and one additional evening trip runs from Greenport to Jamaica, running express between Ronkonkoma and Jamaica.

The Greenport Branch has by far the lowest ridership among LIRR services for which data are available. In 2018, the LIRR's second-least-used service (the West Hempstead Branch) had more than 14 times as many riders as the Greenport Branch. That year, Greenport Branch riders accounted for 0.08% of LIRR ridership overall. A study conducted by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) indicated that the most common means of access to the Riverhead station is by shared ride, with 64% of passengers being dropped off, carpooling, or using a rideshare (taxi/TNC) service (2012-2014 data). Some 21% of riders walked to the station, and 9% drove alone. The high percentage of shared rides suggest that most riders are generally vehicle-dependent; however, the high percentage of walkers also suggests that the station area is walkable. Just 4% of all passengers accessed the station via public transit and 2% took a bike.

The LIRR finished 2022 with ridership growth, rebounding from previous declining trends due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Total ridership in 2022 was 52.5 million customers, 50% above 2021's 35 million ridership. Commutation ridership increased nearly 118 to% with 21.1 million passengers, while non-commutation ridership grew 24% to 31.5 million passengers. However, total ridership remains well below pre-pandemic levels. Table 9 shows changes in ridership by branch from 2021 to 2022. As indicated, ridership on the Greenport branch, which serves Riverhead, experienced the slowest growth of all branches. This is in keeping with the slower rate of growth in non-commuters than in commuters, since



Source: Long Island Press

Branch	ANNUAL RIDERSHIP		
	2022	2021	% Change
Babylon	10,514,026	7,034,569	49.5% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
City Zone	5,672,913	4,010,110	41.5% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Far Rockaway	4,095,562	2,794,801	46.5% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Greenport	66,287	50,365	31.6% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Hempstead	2,778,998	1,751,358	58.7% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Long Beach	2,749,871	1,848,569	48.8% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Montauk	1,662,936	1,128,803	47.3% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Oyster Bay	854,728	514,605	66.1% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Port Jefferson	9,428,532	6,271,150	50.3% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Port Washington	8,321,271	5,229,282	59.1% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
Ronkonkoma	5,783,041	4,024,559	43.7% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
West Hempstead	612,358	378,577	61.8% <span style="color: green;">▲</span>
<b>Total</b>	<b>52,540,522</b>	<b>35,036,746</b>	<b>50.0%</b>

▲ Increase

▼ Decrease

● No Change

\* Ridership data is based on ticket sales.

\*\* Port Jefferson branch includes ridership from Huntington Branch.

Table 9: Ridership by Branch

Source: LIRR 2022 Annual Ridership Report

the Greenport branch likely serves a larger proportion of recreational riders than the other commuter-oriented branches.

The LIRR has previously cited these ridership trends in attempts to end service east of Ronkonkoma. In 2010, the MTA proposed eliminating all service on the Greenport branch except for the popular summer weekend service. Ultimately, weekday service remained, but weekend service outside of the summer season (defined as Memorial Day-Columbus Day) was discontinued. In 2013, the span of weekend service was extended to operate from the first weekend in May to the last weekend in November and in 2016, the LIRR restored year-long weekend service between Ronkonkoma and Greenport.

Additional significant changes to the LIRR system since 2003 include:

- In 2010, Riverhead obtained federal funding for the rehabilitation of the industrial rail spur that served the former Naval Weapons Research facility in Calverton (EPCAL). Limited freight service is provided to several manufacturing companies located at EPCAL.
- In 2012, the LIRR started adding a second track along the formerly single-tracked section of the Main Line between Farmingdale and Ronkonkoma stations to increase track capacity and allow for enhanced service options. The project was completed in September 2018.
- In January 2023, MTA/LIRR completed the East Side Access project, which extended the LIRR tracks from Sunnyside in Queens to Grand Central Terminal on the east side of Manhattan.
- To accommodate a projected increase in LIRR ridership following completion of the East Side Access project, and to expand local and reverse-peak service, a third track

was built on the Main Line between Floral Park and Hicksville. In addition to eliminating each of the grade crossings and rebuilding all of the stations along this stretch of the Main Line Begun in 2016, the entirety of the third track was complete by October 2022

### ***Freight Rail***

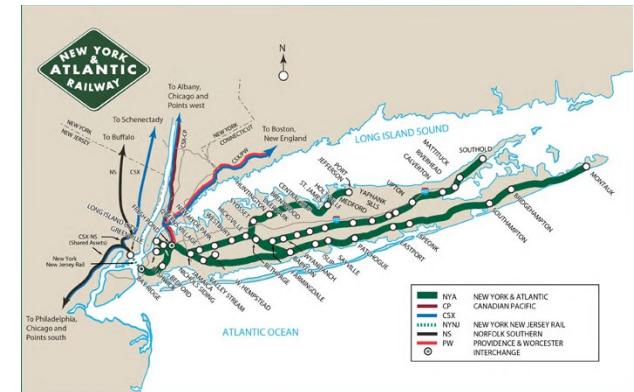
In 1997, freight service was franchised on a 20-year term to the New York and Atlantic Railway (NYA), a short-line railroad owned by the Anacostia and Pacific Co. It has its own equipment and crews but uses the rail facilities of the LIRR. NYA connects with numerous other rail freight operators, as shown on the map to the right.

### ***Riverhead Transit-Oriented Development Project***

The Town is working with selected developers to build a mixed-use development on two parcels near the Riverhead LIRR station. This development is intended to foster increased use of the LIRR by residents of the developments. The developers propose constructing a four- and five-story building with 243 apartments, ground-floor, and at-grade commercial use on the Town-owned parking lot between Court Street and Railroad Avenue. Additionally, a multi-level building with 36 workforce apartments, 332 public parking spaces, and retail shops is planned for a County-owned parking lot on Griffing Avenue. To facilitate this, the Town would sell the Railroad Avenue property to the developer and obtain the Griffing Avenue property from the County (retaining a portion for a Town-owned parking structure) for ultimate transfer to the developer.

### ***First Mile/Last Mile MTA Pilot Project***

In 2022, the Town was selected to participate in the MTA's First Mile/Last Mile Pilot project, which looked at ways to make biking safer and more efficient to



Source: New York and Atlantic Railways

Riverhead Station and downtown. The study yielded recommendations, identified funding and resources for implementation, and a toolbox for exploring additional measures enhancing LIRR usage.

Bike Routes 24 and 25, intersecting Riverhead, provide wide shoulders. An interconnected bike lane network is proposed, categorized by priority, considering the phased construction of lanes. Prioritization is based on connectivity, trails, and LIRR access, subject to factors like cost and community feedback. Bike enhancements, including parking, aim to divert more resources to the station area and encourage biking for station access. With DRI grant funds, planned pedestrian improvements, Mobility Hub Project, and the bike pilot, these initiatives become catalysts for TOD investment in the downtown area, supported by robust multi-modal improvements.

## Suffolk County Transit

Suffolk County Transit (SCT) is the provider of public bus services in the County, including in Riverhead. Prior to 2023, SCT operated four routes in the Town: the S-58, S-62, S-66, and S-92, as well as the S-8A feeder, which served as a circulator to connect communities to the main bus routes. Some SCT bus routes have been running the same paths since SCT took over management of transit services in 1980, and many of these routes were run for decades before that by private operators. Suffolk County Accessible Transportation (SCAT) provides permanently or temporarily disabled passengers (and their companions) curb-to-curb public bus service to any location within 0.75 miles of a Suffolk County public bus route. Reservations must be made one to seven days in advance of the trip.

Most U.S. transit agencies have seen declining transit ridership over the past decade, and in the 10 years prior to 2021, ridership on SCT's fixed route services had declined by about 25%. However, from 2003 through 2019, most major routes serving Riverhead saw growth in ridership, as shown in Table 10. In addition, the Covid 19 pandemic had devastating impact on ridership on all public transportation systems, although due to demographic factors, commuter rail systems were more severely affected than bus transit systems in general.

Trip lengths were long on the major routes, with service largely provided on an hourly basis with limited or no service on Sundays. The S92, with service extending from Montauk Point to Orient Point, was the most heavily used Suffolk Transit route on eastern Long Island, with nearly 373,000 riders using the route in 2019.

Suffolk Transit Ridership			
Route	2003	2019	Change
S-58	169,130	197,997	28,867
S-62	115,067	104,533	-10,534
S-66	166,954	216,051	49,097
S-92	280,717	372,846	92,129
8A	38,753	33,291	-5,462
Total	770,621	924,718	154,097

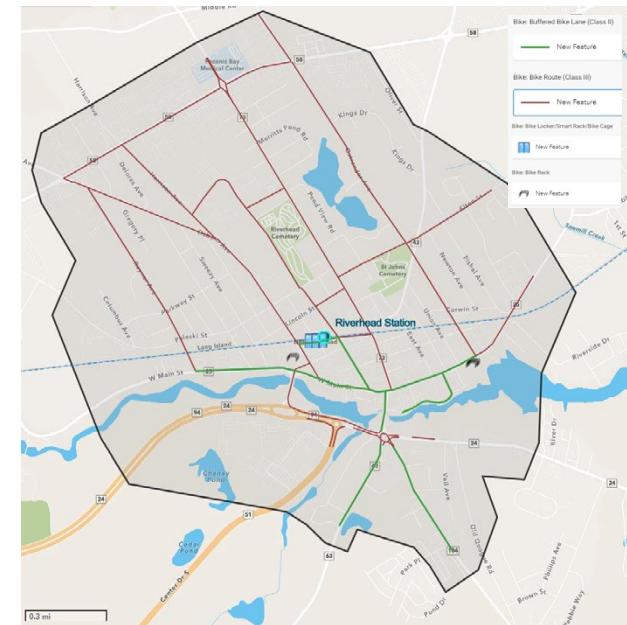
**Table 10: Change in Ridership 2003 to 2019 Suffolk Transit Routes Serving Riverhead, NY**

*Note: several of the routes in the table extend beyond Riverhead, and riders outside the Town are included in the totals*

Notwithstanding the growth in ridership in general, daily boardings and alightings at nearly all stops in Riverhead were low, with the most popular stops being the County Center, Peconic Avenue, and the LIRR station.

In response to low and decreasing ridership on the system as a whole, and the changing needs of the travelling public on Long Island, as recommended in the 2012 Connect Long Island, the Suffolk County Department of Economic Development and Planning (SCEDP) undertook the Reimagine Transit initiative, which builds on the Connect LI regional transportation and development plan to redesign the County's fixed-route bus network and on-demand mobility services, and identify opportunities for new mobility tools like on-demand transit services. Under this initiative, the County developed several new concepts and a draft service map, the intent of which is to change the focus of bus service from a coverage-oriented system to a ridership-oriented system.

The draft plan was released to the public in 2022 for comment, underwent refinement based on public comment, and the new schedule was implemented in



### Proposed Bike Route Network for Riverhead LIRR

*Source: MTA First- and Last-Mile Access Mobility Study & Toolkit Development Riverhead, NY Pilot Report (VHB/KFH Group) November 2022*



*Source: Suffolk County Transit*

the Fall of 2023. Table 10 shows the anticipated impact of the service changes on access to employment for transit users. As can be seen, the service changes have the potential to significantly improve employment access for segments of the population usually considered more inclined to use transit for their work trips. It is anticipated that SCT will conduct ridership surveys to assess the effectiveness of the new network once the service changes have been in effect for a reasonable period.

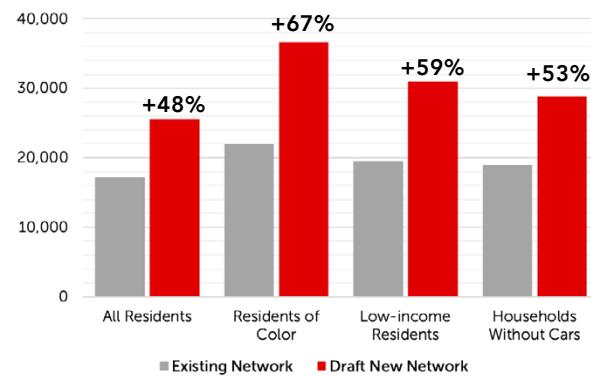
A draft new bus network was released by SCT, which included changes to route alignments, although system changes are not limited to new route alignments. Under the new system, the entire network will operate seven days a week, while weekday hours of operation will be extended systemwide. Compared with the existing network, there are many more routes that run every 30 minutes. The new system will offer timed connections at seven locations across the County to reduce wait times, strengthen connections to the LIRR, and get people to their destinations faster. This includes Riverhead at the Suffolk County Center where Routes 58, 66, and 92 would be timed to meet.



#### Suffolk Transit Final New Network, Riverhead NY

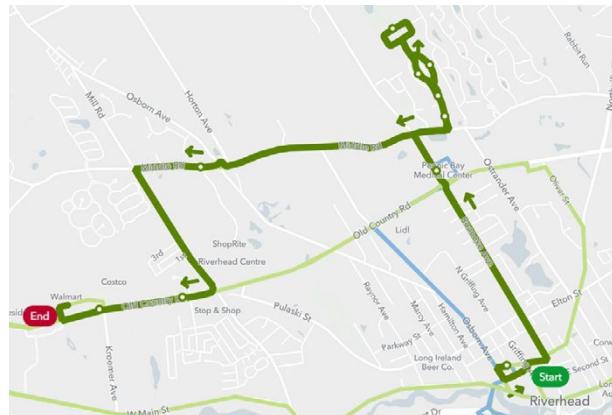
Source: Reimagine Transit – Suffolk County Mobility by Jarrett Walker and Associates February 2022

Route 92 undergoes a minor realignment, simplifying deviations for Routes 92 and 8A. The proposed schedule offers increased service frequency for Peconic Bay Medical Center, and timed connections between Routes 58, 66, and 92 at the County Center.



#### Average Number of Jobs Accessible within 60 Minutes

Source: Reimagine Transit – Suffolk County Mobility by Jarrett Walker and Associates February 2022



#### Proposed addition of modified #8A (Renamed #8o)

Source: Reimagine Transit – Suffolk County Mobility by Jarrett Walker and Associates February 2022

Initially eliminating the 8A feeder route, public feedback during the rollout led to the introduction of a modified 8A, now named Route 8o, providing circulator service in Riverhead. Sunday service is available on all routes, and more frequent nighttime service is offered. The implementation of the new network is expected to increase by 2,000 the number of jobs in Riverhead reachable by bus within 60 minutes. The network also envisions creating seven new transit hubs at LIRR stations, facilitating timed connections between bus routes and LIRR trains. Additionally, a flexible service is being piloted in the Southampton area to cover areas with low ridership.

## PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLES

### Pedestrians

Pedestrian facilities in the Town vary based on location, adjacent development, and responsible agencies. Downtown, commercial centers, and hamlet areas, especially on State and County road, typically have sidewalks. Less built-up and agricultural regions may lack pedestrian facilities, reflecting a common condition in communities across the country.

The major agencies, SCDPW and NYSDOT, prioritize pedestrian and bicycle travel when improving facilities, requiring compliant sidewalks for developed properties along their roadways. However, current conditions vary. For instance, CR58 generally has continuous sidewalks on one side or the other, as does Peconic Avenue from the Peconic River to Main Street. North of CR58, little sidewalk is provided on Roanoke Avenue, where roadside development is residential in nature, and would clearly benefit from improved pedestrian facilities. On NY25 and NY25A, similar conditions prevail. Built-up areas see some pedestrian accommodations, and less intensely developed areas



**Sidewalk and Pedestrian Crossing on NY25 in Downtown Riverhead**

Source: Google Image

see little or none. In addition, while a detailed inventory of these facilities was not conducted, field observations indicate that a substantial amount of the existing pedestrian facilities do not appear to comply with current accessibility guidelines, including lack of compliant pedestrian ramps, non-standard sidewalk widths, the presence of obstructions that are not appropriately treated, lack of turning areas, and the lack of pedestrian accommodation on traffic signal equipment.

Pedestrian facilities on Town roads generally follow the same patterns, although with a much greater degree of non-compliance with current standards. Town standards do not include a requirement for sidewalks, and sidewalks on Town roads are somewhat less robust than on roadways under the jurisdiction of the two major agencies.

The Town does not have a formal Safety Action Plan (formerly referred to as a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan) based on FHWA guidelines to identify locations where pedestrian safety improvements are needed. Having a such a plan in place can help leverage access to federal infrastructure funds for implementation of improvements where deficiencies have been identified.



**Discontinuous Sidewalk on NY25 West of Downtown**



Source: SCDPW Bike Ped Master Plan

## Bicycles

Bicycle facilities within Riverhead include two New York State Bicycle Routes, 24 and 25, which provide wide shoulders for cyclists. Bike Route 25 extends from Orient Point on the eastern tip of the North Fork westward through Riverhead, to Smithtown. This route primarily travels along State Route 25 east of Riverhead and on smaller/local roads to the west. Bike Route 24 connects Bike Route 25 to Old Riverhead Road, just north of State Route 25. In addition, there are numerous connecting routes and the recently opened Vietnam Veterans Memorial Recreation Trail at the EPCAL, a continuous 10-mile loop using the security road around the perimeter of the site. Bike racks are provided at numerous Town beach, park, marina, and community center locations.

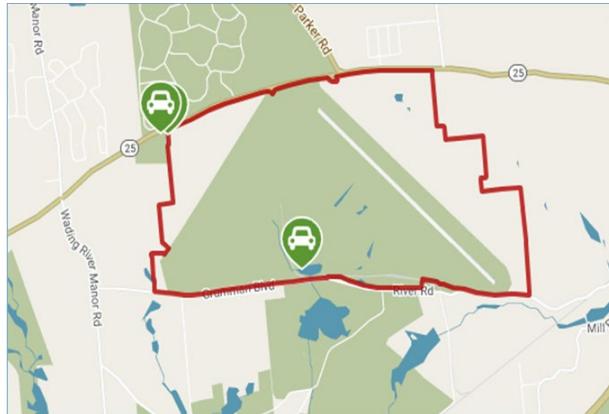
The North Shore Rail Trail, formerly known as the Rails to Trails Recreational Path, is a 10-mile multi-use recreational path completed in 2022. It runs along the former Wading River railway corridor in Brookhaven. From its eastern endpoint on Wading River Manor Road, the trail runs west from the hamlet of Wading River to the border between the hamlets of Mount Sinai and Port Jefferson Station. Paralleling Route 25A, the North Shore Rail Trail connects local

recreational areas, schools, businesses, residential areas, and athletic fields. There are trail kiosks at both endpoints and quarter-mile markers along the route. The North Shore Rail Trail is part of Suffolk County's Hike + Bike Master Plan.

With the exception of the NYS bike routes, much of this bicycle infrastructure has been implemented since the 2003 Master Plan, largely through the efforts of the Town's ad-hoc Alternative Transportation Committee.

While Town roadway standards currently require 14-foot-wide curb lanes, which is sufficient to accommodate bicyclists riding in mixed traffic, the Town Code and development standards do not include any requirements for accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists on private development applications.

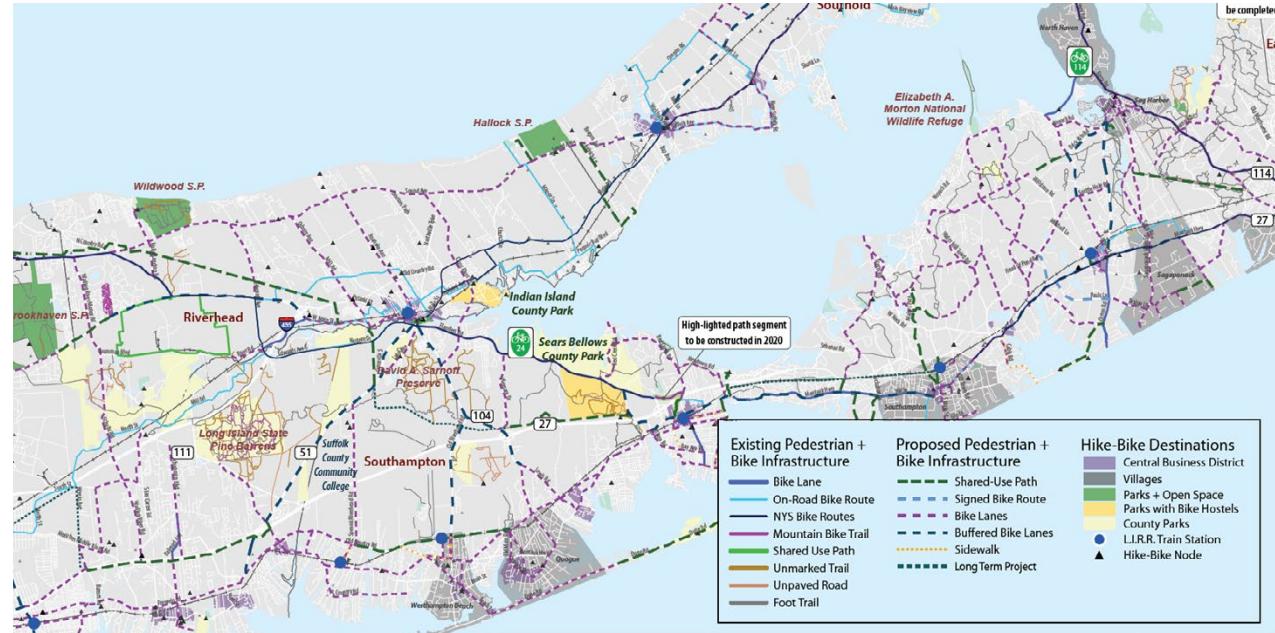
In 2019, the Town completed the EPCAL Alternative Transportation Path, which loops around the 2,900-acre EPCAL site and links to the 65-acre recreational facility on the western portion of the park. The trail utilizes the perimeter road that was once used by Grumman Corporation personnel for security during its more than 40 years of operation.



**EPCAL Alternative Transportation Path** Source: TrailLink by the Rails to Trails Conservancy

In 2019, Suffolk County launched a regional Bike Share system, owned and operated by Zagster, with the aim of contributing to the local economy by increasing access to bicycles for tourists and making critical last-mile connections between transportation hubs and other destinations. Riverhead had planned to participate, but Zagster went out of business shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

In 2021, Bethpage Ride, a bike-sharing program operated by Pedal Share, began operating in four communities on Long Island, including Riverhead. The system includes 22 stations with a total of 100 bicycles. Bikes are available for rental during warm weather months. Bike racks are located at the EPCAL recreational trail, as well as at the former Town Hall (200 Howell Avenue), the train station, and in Downtown Riverhead.



**Existing and Proposed Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure**

Source: Suffolk County Hike + Bike Master Plan

### Suffolk County Hike + Bike Master Plan

In 2020, the Suffolk County Department of Economic Development and Planning (SCEDP) issued the comprehensive Suffolk County Hike + Bike Master Plan. The plan's focus is to identify both point projects and linear network improvements to improve the comfort and connectivity of the active transportation network. It primarily includes the development of a proposed network of on- and off-road bike facilities, shared-use paths, and sidewalks. Several of the plan's recommendations are for bike facility improvements in Riverhead, including a shared-use path in Calverton and bike lanes and signing on NY25 west of downtown to the Tanger Outlet Center.

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Alleviate congestion, elevate safety, and improve mobility on current infrastructure without excessive expansion.**

Traffic congestion does not appear to be a widespread, Town-wide issue. Public input for this Plan supports a focus on enhancing traffic conditions during the increasingly popular tourist season on the North Fork. Critical transportation goals include improving seasonal/tourist-related traffic flow on NY25, Sound Avenue, and CR58. Specific locations identified through public input also highlighted capacity and safety concerns at the NY25/Edwards Avenue intersection, congestion on CR58 between I-495 and the Roanoke Avenue Traffic Circle, and long queues on the eastbound NY25 approach to CR105. Safety concerns at the intersections of Harrison Avenue/Middle Road and Osborne Avenue/Sound Avenue were raised, with public support for considering traffic signal or roundabout installations. For NY25 at Edwards Avenue, NYSDOT has a design-stage improvement project, and SCDPW is advancing a project to study and enhance traffic signal coordination along CR58 for recurring congestion.

The objective is to optimize the efficiency of existing facilities, ensuring a balanced approach that meets the community's transportation needs without unnecessary expansion. Recommended implementation measures are described below.

#### **1.1. Develop capacity and safety improvements through management strategies.**

Planning-level capacity analyses conducted along major roadways in the Town indicate that for the most part, roadways in Riverhead can provide adequate capacity to accommodate anticipated growth. While areas of local congestion exist, large-scale capacity improvements are not necessary. One exception is NY25 (see Goal 2).

Some specific intersection improvements identified include:

- NY25/Middle Country Road and County Road 105/Cross River Drive: Consider extension of the eastbound right-turn lane on NY25 and the installation of a second northbound-to-westbound left-turn lane. The right-of-way required at East End Food Institute in the southwest quadrant intersection would be of significant size, possibly requiring a service road on its west side, along with a driveway access to CR 105 consisting of right turns in/right turns out only. This issue has been referred to SCDPW for short-term solutions, likely involving increased queue storage at the intersection approaches.
- Sound Avenue at Edwards Avenue: Consider a dedicated westbound-to-southbound left-turn lane to prevent westbound traffic queues. These occur when left-turning motorists need to stop in traffic to wait for gaps in oncoming traffic to make their turns (after the left turn arrow disappears).

#### **1.2. Develop/Implement Town-wide access management and Complete Streets policies**

Access management can increase capacity on existing facilities by limiting the number of vehicular conflict points where vehicles enter and exit roadside development. By combining access points, restricting access points to side streets, and limiting allowable turning movements, access management strategies reduce delay-causing crashes, as well as increase safety for pedestrians.

Complete Streets are streets designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users: people of all ages and abilities, regardless of whether they are travelling as drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, or public transportation riders. Complete Streets approaches vary based on community context. They may address a wide range of elements, such as sidewalks, bicycle lanes, bus lanes, public transportation stops, roadway crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, modified vehicle travel lanes, streetscape, and landscape treatments. Complete Streets reduce motor vehicle-related crashes and pedestrian risk, as well as bicyclist risk when well-designed bicycle-specific infrastructure is included.

#### **1.3. Use roundabouts to increase capacity while reducing crashes.**

Roundabouts more efficiently distribute capacity to intersection approaches while reducing speeds and lowering the number of high-severity crashes. Rather than installing new traffic signals, the Town should consider roundabouts first, as NYSDOT already does. The Osborn Road/Middle Road/Horton Avenue

intersection is an example of a constructed roundabout serving Town roads. A roundabout might also serve to address traffic issues at the Sound Avenue/Edwards Avenue intersection discussed above. In addition, the intersections of Reeves Avenue with Roanoke Avenue and Horton Avenue have been identified by Town staff as potential locations for safety improvements, which should include consideration of roundabouts.

#### 1.4. Work with Suffolk County to improve CR58.

The \$8 Million improvement to CR58 in 2010 by SCDPW, which included an additional travel lane throughout much of its length, lacks continuous ADA compliant sidewalks, has no bus shelters or turnouts, and lacks sufficient shoulders. The Town should work with SCDPW to revisit this design and improve the corridor for all users. A “boulevard” design like NY347 could be considered. In addition, intersection geometry should be reviewed to ensure that pavement markings, turning radii, lane widths, and traffic control devices comply with current standards.

The long-term transportation strategy for the CR58 corridor should include at a minimum, shoulders, sidewalks, bus stops and shelters, and turning lanes where needed. These improvements would require the pursuit of cross-access agreements with private owners as additional right-of-way width is needed. The 2003 CMP recommended that private developers be engaged to ensure participation in the process, through property dedications, internal cross-access arrangements, and site plan design that enhances access and mobility for all users. This opportunity continues to exist during the redevelopment process.

#### 1.5. Investigate high crash locations and develop mitigation.

Based on a 5-year accident history (2018-2022)



**Photo of completed section of NY 347 in Hauppauge, Smithtown.**

NYSDOT had developed this Complete Streets concept for the entire length of NY 347, from Hauppauge to Mt. Sinai in the Towns of Smithtown and Brookhaven. The noise walls are constructed in residential areas that abut NY 347. Improvements include a shared-use path along the south side of the roadway and bus stop shelters. Source: Google Earth

using NYSDOT's Crash Location and Engineering Analysis Repository (CLEAR), intersections with the highest number of crashes on major (County or State) roadways, along with the total number of crashes, include the following:

- CR58/Old Country Road at CR73/Roanoke Avenue (Roundabout).
- CR58 at Mill Road.
- CR58 at Kroemer Avenue.
- NY25 at CR105.
- CR58 and CR43/Northville Turnpike.

Recommendations at these intersections should be discussed with NYSDOT and Suffolk County representatives. SCDPW should be contacted to ensure that high crash locations on County roads,

including CR58, are included in its upcoming Strategic Highway Safety Action Plan (SHSAP). The SHSAP will identify high-risk locations and collision patterns and develop a prioritized list of systemic short-, medium-, and long-term strategies and countermeasures.

Two locations where Town roads intersect and have high crash totals, when overall traffic volumes are considered, are on Sound Avenue:

- Sound Avenue at CR 43/Northville Turnpike.
- Sound Avenue at NY 25A.

The Town should initiate safety studies at these locations in the near term. Mitigation measures should include consideration of the installation of roundabouts. Preliminary examination of the traffic volumes at these locations indicates that single-lane roundabouts would be sufficient to accommodate the demand. However, long-term traffic projections should be developed during the preliminary design phase of any improvement projects at these locations, to ensure that future traffic demand is considered in the design.

#### 2. Preserve and enhance historic and scenic corridors while improving traffic flow and safety.

The Scenic and Historic Resources chapter focuses on safeguarding Riverhead's scenic views. Zoning recommendations aim to maintain corridor character through adjustments in allowable density and setbacks. Simultaneously, the Plan advocates for roadways that provide accessibility to these areas without compromising their unique features or community context. The goal is to protect significant

views and scenic viewsheds, ensuring they remain unaffected by transportation changes while enhancing mobility and access for the community.

### 2.1. Conduct corridor studies to identify context-sensitive short- and long-term improvement strategies.

Along identified or designated corridors, studies should be conducted to determine the appropriate balance between mobility and preservation of the historic features of the corridors. These studies should reflect the public's desires for the future of the corridors, and not simply accommodate projected increased demand. Potential subject areas include rural corridors along Sound Avenue, as well downtown hamlet centers with potentially significant features, such as buildings with period architecture, etc. The proliferation of signage, both private and public, should be avoided, and capacity and traffic control improvements should be considered in context. Traffic signals can have negative visual impact and should be carefully considered.

Potential candidate corridors for analysis representing three different corridor types include: a rural, agricultural / agritourism corridor (Sound Avenue), a "Hamlet Main Street" type corridor (Main Road east of CR105), and an open agricultural corridor that has adjacent industrial zoned property under pressure for development with renewable energy uses (Edwards Avenue).

### 2.2. Develop design criteria for designated corridors.

Design criteria, essentially a style book for transportation improvements, should be developed for scenic corridors, with Sound Avenue as a priority. The design criteria would address signage, striping, materials, lighting, landscaping, and other elements

in the right-of-way. Recommendations include the following process for preservation and enhancement of the historic and scenic corridors:

- Review and update land use policies along historic and scenic corridors
- Develop criteria for designation of corridors
- Identify candidate corridors, apply criteria, designate corridors
- Conduct corridor studies to identify context-sensitive short- and long-term improvement strategies
- Develop implementation strategy, including funding sources

### 2.3. Continue to coordinate with the North Fork Transportation and Traffic Task Force

The Suffolk County EDP established the North Fork Transportation and Traffic Task Force (NFTTF), covering the entire North Fork, including Riverhead, Southold, and Greenport. This Task Force aims to identify and develop specific action items to alleviate vehicular traffic congestion and pedestrian safety concerns in Riverhead and Southold, especially during summer and autumn. The Task Force has pinpointed areas of concern, including some in Riverhead, and proposed cost-effective measures. Ongoing meetings are anticipated to discuss pilot improvements and plan next steps.

This Plan advocates ongoing close coordination with the Task Force to identify improvement projects and funding sources that address cross-boundary issues. This collaboration involves the municipalities, Suffolk County, and NYDOT. Riverhead should actively participate in this long-term planning effort.

### 3. Goal: Support economic growth at EPCAL through a well-defined transportation plan.

The future of EPCAL development presents new economic development opportunities. Regardless of the nature of the ultimate development, improvements to the transportation system will be required to accommodate the additional traffic expected to be generated.

#### 3.1. Review and update off-site improvements needed to mitigate EPCAL traffic.

The FGEIS prepared for the 2016 EPCAL Reuse and Revitalization Plan identified substantial improvements to the transportation system that would be required by phased build-out of the 2,324-acre EPCAL parcel. The improvements were based on assumed levels of trip generation that would occur from phased development of the property under the adopted Planned Development District (PDD) that was the subject of the FGEIS. A similar process should be undertaken for any new proposals considered by the Town.

#### 3.2. Identify parties responsible for mitigation.

While the ultimate outcome for the property remains in flux, a plan should be put in place that identifies parties responsible for traffic mitigation, explores potential funding sources, and has a realistic implementation schedule. Most of the responsibility for implementing the mitigation should be borne by the developer, which should be documented at the outset of development. Mitigation should be implemented prior to the onset of operations of the new development.

### 3.3. Initiate needed roadway improvements by other agencies.

The 2016 traffic mitigation plan identified the need for widening NY25 from William Floyd Parkway in the west to I-495/LI Expressway in the east to provide two travel lanes in each direction, regardless of the ultimate development of EPCAL. NYSDOT's five-year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) contains no plans to implement this improvement. The Town should engage with NYSDOT to initiate the planning and design process; in the past, NYSDOT has expressed a willingness to work with the Town on a long-term solution for NY25.

An alternative to some of the improvements needed on NY25 could be the construction of an access road to the south from EPCAL, generally following Connecticut Avenue and Halsey Manor Road to the LIE, and extension of service roads to the west to CR111/Eastport Manor Road (Exit 70). That alternative would need to address the presence of Long Island Pine Barrens lands, freshwater wetlands, and residences, primarily along the north-south portion of its route, and would also require coordination with the Town of Brookhaven.

### 3.4. Explore expanded use of rail transportation for EPCAL, for both people and freight.

The existing rail spur connecting the LIRR main branch track to the EPCAL property should be an integral part of the transportation solution for the property. The spur currently carries freight only. Development plans should include use of the spur, and consideration should be given to using the spur for passengers as well as freight. Passenger service could be provided from the Ronkonkoma LIRR Station east to Riverhead, with a transfer at Riverhead to a shuttle service to EPCAL. Any required upgrades to the spur should be included in the solution.

#### *Freight*

Movement of freight by rail has the potential to remove many truck trips from local roadways and to minimize the transportation impacts of development at EPCAL. Given public concern regarding recent applications for significant new warehouse space in the Town, rail freight service could help catalyze industrial development at EPCAL. The freight option would help to mitigate impacts of truck traffic, which has been expressed as a significant concern by residents.

#### *Passenger Rail*

The rail spur serving the EPCAL property was rehabilitated in 2010 to industrial rail standards. Providing passenger rail service via this link would require determining that the facility is adequate for safe passenger rail service. The Town should consider contracting for services to initiate the process for this determination.

### **4. Foster increased use of public transportation.**

Residents, stakeholders, and the Steering Committee members generally supported enhancements that would increase the use of public transportation in Riverhead. The goal includes recommendations to enhance accessibility, awareness, and overall adoption of public transportation options. The aim is to create a community environment that fosters the convenience and benefits of utilizing public transit, contributing to a more sustainable and efficient transportation system. These recommendations will help to provide continued improved service for existing transit users, as well as to attract new users to the system.

### 4.1. Install bus turnouts on CR58 and other major bus routes.

Increased rider comfort and ease of boarding and alighting encourages bus ridership. SCDPW did not include bus facilities when CR58 was last improved, nor are shelters provided in most other areas in Town on County roads. If the new transit network recently implemented by SCT is to be successful in significantly improving access to employment by SCT, impediments to ridership should be minimized or eliminated wherever possible.

### 4.2. Work with LIRR for increased service.

LIRR has indicated a willingness to provide improved services, including added trains/service and schedule improvements and modifications, in communities that commit to pursuing locally driven Last Mile First Mile initiatives. As the Town has demonstrated its willingness to do so by participation in the MTA pilot program, improved services should be sought.

### 4.3. Work with Suffolk County Transit to improve and implement a new bus plan.

SCT has recently completed the Reimagine Transit initiative, which redesigned its bus system to improve access to employment, rather than the prior focus on geographical coverage. The Town should work with SCT to determine the appropriate location for the transit hub, which was proposed for Downtown Riverhead.

### 4.4. Continue to Pursue First Mile Last Mile Strategies for the LIRR Station

The First Mile Last Mile pilot project discussed above will help advance the Town's goals of improving access to the LIRR station, and funding for its implementation should be pursued. The MTA report

provided important next steps for the Town to pursue in implementing the program and identified potential funding sources.

In addition, other potential First Mile Last Mile measures should be investigated, and MTA/LIRR participation sought. Circulator service within the downtown area and shuttle service to outlying areas are two strategies that could foster the increased use of LIRR service and encourage LIRR to provide additional service.

#### 4.5. Amend site plan requirements in the Town code to facilitate and encourage bus use

Bus shelters and turnouts on major developments with frontage on roadways where transit is provided should be required. If needed, property dedications should be obtained during site plan approval process. Improved connectivity between the existing pedestrian facilities and internal site features should be incorporated into site plan requirements, including continuous ADA-compliant pedestrian ramps and sidewalks.

#### 4.6. Consider Circulator Buses / Trolleys in downtown and hamlet centers and between major destinations

Rather than relying on County or regional public transportation efforts, local public transportation solutions can reduce traffic and increase use by providing small-scale service among local destinations. These could include the County Center, Downtown Riverhead, Sound Avenue (seasonal), and the LIRR station. The Town should consider partnering with a large institution/commercial use to help with funding, perhaps through permitting advertising on the vehicles. Circulator bus service has been successfully implemented in recent years in the towns of Southampton and East Hampton. The route depicted

here could provide circulator bus service between and among major trip generators in the downtown area on a route that is less than 3 miles long.

### 5. Encourage safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle transportation

Public input during this planning process indicated general support for continuing to improve pedestrian safety and bicycle access in Riverhead. Public commentary regarding the pedestrian experience in Riverhead focused primarily on the lack of sidewalks in specific locations. Specific areas of concern include:

- Need for improved pedestrian and bike facilities on CR58, and connections between sidewalks.
- Bicycle safety - most roads are not welcoming, particularly those that are unlit.
- Sound Avenue was noted as particularly problematic for bicyclists.



**Potential Downtown Circulator Service**

Sources: Google Earth and LKMA files

- Need for improved sidewalks in the vicinity of schools, especially Riverhead High School. For example, while there is an existing sidewalk on the east side of Harrison Avenue to the High School, no sidewalk or shoulder exists on the west side. Sidewalks are also lacking along North Griffing Avenue, which runs along Pulaski Street, athletic fields, Riverhead Middle School, and BOCES.
- General concerns about the safety and usability of existing marked bike paths.

The Town recognizes the importance of fostering a safe and accessible environment for non-motorized travel, contributing to both the well-being of residents and the overall sustainability of the community. By creating infrastructure, policies, and awareness campaigns that prioritize pedestrian walkability and bicycle-friendly pathways, Riverhead aims to enhance the quality of life for its residents while reducing environmental impact and promoting a healthier lifestyle. This goal aligns with the Town's vision for a more inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant community.

#### 5.1. Develop a Safety Action Plan (SAP)

A Safety Action Plan (formerly referred to as a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan) identifies areas in need of pedestrian safety improvements, develops solutions, prioritizes locations and provides a schedule for implementation. By having an SAP in place, municipalities can leverage funding from State and federal sources to make needed improvements. Assistance in developing an SAP is also available at the federal level. SAP funding has been replaced by SS4 (Safe Streets for All Road Users) funding.



## 5.2. Conduct Walkability Audits in Hamlet Centers

Walkability audits identify gaps in accessible pedestrian paths, examine connectivity between land uses and public pedestrian facilities, and identify impediments to pedestrian use. Walkability audits can also assist in identifying needed improvements to the pedestrian system, such as sidewalk and crosswalk construction and installation of pedestrian “Walk/Don’t Walk” signals, installation of mid-block pedestrian crossings, and other pedestrian safety strategies. These audits can facilitate procurement of grant-funded improvements, like those in low- and middle-income communities funded by the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

## 5.3. Review / Update Site Plan Requirements for Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Town development standards do not specifically reference or require pedestrian or bicycle accommodations for private development. Multi-unit residential and commercial properties should provide accessible internal pedestrian paths among site features, including building access points and parking

areas, and connections to external pedestrian features should also be required. Bike racks should be provided on commercial and multi-unit residential site plans.

Installation of sidewalks along site frontages of all newly developed and redeveloped properties should be included in site plan requirements. In some cases, sidewalks, or easements for them, could be procured when development rights are purchased by the County, and later extinguished to permanently preserve the property. Sidewalks should be extended beyond individual sites to nearby street crossings, to avoid sidewalk “dead ends” where feasible.

An accessible pedestrian path should be provided between the external sidewalk and internal site features. Bike racks should be provided near the entrances of multifamily and commercial buildings. Residential subdivisions should provide bike-friendly internal roadways. Parking requirements included in the building code should be revisited to reduce excess parking, which will allow for additional pedestrian amenities on-site, as well as reducing impermeable surfaces.

## 5.4. Coordinate and Implement Bike Route / Bike Lane Improvements

A project to implement bike facilities on NY 25/West Main Street from Mill Road to Peconic Avenue (1.4 miles) is underway. The Town should investigate a connection to the Port Jefferson – Wading River “Rails to Trails” shared-use path which avoids farmlands impacts. That path connects via approximately 1 mile of bike lanes along NY25A in Port Jefferson Station to the Setauket-Port Jefferson Station Greenway Trail. Collaboration with organizations is essential, such as Trust for Public Land to implement completion of Empire State Trail/LI extension, and with Suffolk County Planning for the newly funded LI Greenway east extension, from Riverhead to Montauk Point

In addition, connections to the Suffolk County Blueway Trail should be provided as the trail is implemented. The Blueway Trail provides suggested routes depending upon skill level and the locations of features such as rest stops, scenic locations, good birdwatching and amenities such as restrooms, concessions, nearby businesses and parking. The Peconic River in Downtown has been identified as one of the 20 Priority Locations in the Plan.

The Town should continue to work with Suffolk County and NYSDOT toward build out of the bike network identified in Suffolk County's Hike/Bike Master Plan. Roadways identified within the Town include bike lanes on north-south roads such as Edwards Avenue (north of NY25), Mill Road/Osborn Avenue, Roanoke Avenue and CR105.

### 5.5. Explore opportunities to expand the offroad trail network.

There may be several opportunities to expand upon and create new offroad trails to allow for recreation and offroad transportation for pedestrians and cyclists.

Examples of locations that the Town should investigate include along powerlines, the railroad tracks, and the waterfront, and connections to existing bike paths (see above). There may be an opportunity for a recreational path that parallels the railroad tracks on the south side, running from where the tracks cross East Main Street to Edgar Avenue in Aquebogue. It could connect parks, natural features, and historic sites with the existing bicycle route along Peconic Bay Boulevard and the downtown.

### 5.6. Review / Update Town Roadway Standards for Compatibility with Bike Use

On newly constructed or reconstructed Town roads, consideration should be given to bike lanes (a minimum 4 feet in width, 5 feet where curbed), bike bypass lanes at traffic signals, bike-friendly drainage basin grates, and other features to encourage bicycle use. Appropriate warning signs for motorists and bike route signs for bicyclists should be provided.

Town roadway standards currently require 14-foot wide curb lanes, which, according to FHWA standards, is sufficient to accommodate bicyclists riding in mixed traffic. However, to foster increased comfort for bike

users, bike Lane standards should be developed for use on roadways where appropriate. Drainage grates should be bike friendly, cross-slopes on shoulders should be modified, in accordance with FHWA standards.

### 5.7. Review Town-owned facilities for Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

Town office buildings should be reviewed, and bike racks installed near entrances. The Town should consider bike repair kiosks in downtown areas and near municipal buildings.

## 6. Coordinate transportation improvements with adjacent towns and other agencies

Recognizing the interconnected nature of regional transportation networks, the objective is to coordinate efforts to enhance infrastructure, optimize traffic flow, and address shared challenges. By working in tandem with neighboring municipalities and relevant agencies, Riverhead aims to create a more seamless and integrated transportation system that benefits the broader community, improves connectivity, and ensures a cohesive approach to addressing regional transportation needs.

The recommendations of this Plan will require input and support from various entities that have jurisdiction over roads or operate public transportation in Riverhead.

### Town Committees:

Engage the Alternative Transportation Committee to refine recommendations and provide insights and recommendations for non-motorized and alternative transportation options, including biking, walking,

and public transit. Collaborate with the Traffic Safety Committee to address road safety concerns, identify problem areas, and suggest measures to enhance traffic safety.

### Adjacent Towns:

Liaise with neighboring towns, including Brookhaven, Southampton, and Southold, to share information and collaborate on transportation planning efforts. This collaborative approach will lead to a more integrated regional transportation network. The Town should work with the North Fork Transportation and Traffic Task force to assist in this collaboration to address regional transportation challenges specific to the North Fork area, fostering synergy between Riverhead and neighboring communities.

### Suffolk County and NYSDOT

The Town should work closely with Suffolk County and NYSDOT, as many arterial roads are within their jurisdiction. Collaboration efforts should ensure that transportation improvements align with land use goals and economic development strategies, ensuring that transportation supports local businesses and residents. The Town should also advocate for regular maintenance and strategic upgrades to maximize efficiency, safety, and minimize disruptions. NYSDOT can also assist aligning transportation improvements with State-level initiatives, promoting regional connectivity and funding opportunities.

### Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)/Long Island Rail Road (LIRR):

Collaborate with the MTA and LIRR to enhance connectivity with regional rail systems, improving access to and from Riverhead, and promoting sustainable commuter options.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 6 AGRICULTURAL LANDS

This chapter, in conjunction with Chapter 3 (Land Use and Zoning) and Chapter 4 (Economic Development), lays out strategies for preserving farmland and supporting the local agricultural industry. Recommendations identify opportunities to do this in a manner that respects private property rights, protects landowner equity, and ensures flexibility and choice in the use of farm property.

Riverhead is known for its abundant farmland, agricultural activity, and attractive rural landscapes. A wide variety of agricultural products are grown and raised in Riverhead. Duck, fruit, bison, and vegetable production provide foodstuffs for residents living throughout the region. Vineyards and wineries contribute to the reputable Long Island wine industry. Farm stands, pumpkin-picking, wine-tasting, and other activities provide agritourism opportunities for visitors.

Riverhead's agricultural industry will continue to play a role in the Town's economy and shape its character and way of life. Riverhead is home to multigenerational farm families. Agriculture supports approximately 4% of the Town's employment and provides direct and indirect economic benefits by enhancing the local character and promoting tourism. The draw of tourism supports many other businesses including hotels, restaurants, retail shops, downtowns and equipment dealers and local businesses.

Recently, regulations, minimum wage increases, changes to labor laws, increase costs of inputs, competition from other states and countries with lower costs of production have put a financial stress on farmers.

Many farmers have turned to additional avenues of creating revenue such as agritourism, value added products, or events to supplement farm income.

At the same time, new development is depleting Riverhead's farmland resources. Long Island's intense housing demand and limited land supply are creating pressure for conversion of farmland into new residential and commercial uses. The COVID pandemic has further exacerbated the housing shortage. Development is moving eastward from Brookhaven, leapfrogging over the Pine Barrens preservation area, and northward from Southampton, where land shortages and high prices are forcing prospective home-buyers to look elsewhere.

Preserving Riverhead's agricultural and rural character and landscape is a priority issue expressed by both farmers and residents. However, the community has different interpretations of what it means to preserve agricultural character. Farmers who voluntarily choose to preserve their lands through the various preservation programs described in this chapter often want to do so to maintain these lands for working agricultural uses. On the other hand, residents and visitors appreciate the views of agricultural land that are integral to Riverhead's rural identity. But the importance of preserving bucolic open space and agricultural vistas doesn't always align with needs of the agricultural industry. Frequent topics of conflict have been the construction of greenhouses or the hosting of events that help to subsidize the challenging economics of running a farm.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

Agriculture remains an important economic industry in Riverhead. As discussed in the Economic Development chapter, Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting has declined by job share in the Town from 5.9% in 2002 to 4.4% in 2021, a decrease representing about 67 jobs.<sup>1</sup> Agribusiness has become a growth industry on the North Fork, as farmers have increasingly diversified their crops and business activities on their parcels in response to economic challenges.

### AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

Agricultural lands in Riverhead have rich prime agricultural soil compositions, as discussed further in the Natural Features and Environmental Resources chapter. Approximately 15,145 acres of land in Riverhead, 36.5% of the Town's total land area, is used for agricultural purposes. About 8,900 of those acres are in the Agriculture Protection Zone (APZ), which was created in 2003 following the Comprehensive Plan. The APZ extends from Sound Avenue to Route 25.

One of the first farmland preservation programs in the Country was started in Suffolk County in 1974, with farmland in Riverhead being some of the earliest examples of preservation in the United States. Approximately 8,800 acres of land used for agriculture in Riverhead has been protected through various voluntary means, primarily Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) by the Town and County, the Town's Transfer of Development Rights Program, and cluster development. A smaller portion of agricultural

Primary Protection Type	Acres	Percentage of Total Lands Used for Agriculture
County PDR	5,980	39.5%
Town PDR	1,126	7.4%
County/Town PDR	374	2.5%
TDR	338	2.2%
State Easement	259	1.7%
Town Ownership	148	1.0%
Cluster Open Space	147	1.0%
Trust Easement	107	0.7%
Other	101	0.7%
County Ownership	100	0.7%
Nonprofit Easement (Unknown)	76	0.5%
Trust Ownership	27	0.2%
Homeowner Associations	20	0.1%
Pine Barrens Easement	2	0.0%
<b>Total Protected Lands Used for Agriculture</b>	<b>8,804</b>	<b>58.1%</b>
<b>Unprotected Lands Used for Agriculture</b>	<b>6,342</b>	<b>41.9%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,145</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 11: Protected and Unprotected Land Used for Agriculture**

*Source: The data used to calculate the acreage of agricultural land preserved by protection type is derived primarily from the Peconic Land Trust Interactive map and supplemented by the Town of Riverhead and Suffolk County. The Peconic Land Trust gathered data on land protection, including farmland and open space protection, in cooperation with the Town of Riverhead, the Farmland Advisory Committee, and the Open Space Advisory Committee when preparing the Community Preservation Fund Comprehensive Plan in 2021. This data is supplemented with information provided by the Town on parcels that have issued TDR credits and data from Suffolk County's Farmland PDR Parcel Viewer. The Town of Riverhead provided Land Use data.*

<sup>1</sup> US Census OnTheMap LEHD

lands have been protected by public or non-profit ownership, easements, or other means. Figure 14 shows lands used for agricultural purposes in Riverhead categorized by protection type. Agricultural lands that have not been protected are shown in dark green. The acreage of such lands is provided in Table 11, following the figure.

### **Community Preservation Fund and Project Plan**

The Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Fund (CPF) is a public program established by a referendum in 1998 for the protection of farmland, open space and community character. Each of the five East End towns manages its own funds. The CPF revenues come from a 2% real estate transfer tax, other Town sources, and gifts. Funds can be used for preservation of agricultural lands, open space, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, undeveloped beaches and shorelands, streams and riverine areas; and water quality improvement projects, including wastewater treatment, aquatic habitat restoration, and pollution prevention; and the establishment of parks, nature preserves, wildlife refuges, recreational areas, greenbelts, and waterway access. The Town maintains a Community Preservation Plan identifying priority properties that should be protected.

Through legislative actions in 2015, the initial 2010 expiration date on the transfer tax was extended through 2050. Riverhead set up a \$72 million bond against future revenues to enable the Town to preserve key properties; the bond is expected to be paid off by 2030. The Town's opportunity to purchase development rights, acquire land, or invest in other eligible projects is limited by the repayment of the bond indebtedness.

As of 2021, the Town has invested \$52 million in the purchase of development rights for properties in active agricultural production, preserving over 1,500 acres of farmland. The Community Preservation Plan identifies priority farmland for protection and recommends the use of the Town's TDR program, PDR programs, and cluster development provisions as the primary methods for preserving farmland in Riverhead.

### **Community Preservation Project Plan (2021)**

The Town, and the Farmland Committee, and the Open Space Committee worked closely with the Peconic Land Trust to update the Community Preservation Fund Project Plan, originally created in 1998-2001.<sup>2</sup> The update was supported by a New York State Land Trust Alliance Conservation Partnership Program grant and adopted in 2021.

As part of the plan development, Peconic Land Trust mapped eligible parcels and identified priorities for preservation in 2001. Updated information was used in the 2021 plan to evaluate remaining farmland and open space to be protected and recommend the best methods.

The Farmland Committee identified priority farmland for preservation by ranking parcels based on soil suitability for agriculture, presence of or potential for agricultural production, proximity or contiguity to existing farmland, and development pressures.

The Open Space Committee also established a parcel ranking system to evaluate open space for preservation, as discussed in more detail in the Parks and Open Space chapter.

In total, the unprotected farmland and open space recommended for preservation totaled 8,259 acres.<sup>3</sup> The primary preservation tools recommended by the Plan, in order of most to least acreage, are PDR, TDR, cluster development, and fee acquisition.

### **Town of Riverhead Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)**

Over 1,100 acres have been preserved by the Town's PDR program (see Table 11). Public funds are used to purchase the development rights of a property, extinguishing development potential beyond the intended agricultural use. The property owner voluntarily enters into the agreement. For example, farmland in a residentially zoned area of town could be developed into residential uses as-of-right. By purchasing development rights, the Town eliminates the potential of residential development. The owner of the property remains the owner, the property can remain in agricultural production, and structures required for the primary agricultural use may be permitted. In the Town's PDR Program, development rights are not transferred elsewhere, as they are in the TDR program. The majority of the Town's CPF funds have been used to purchase development rights.

### **Suffolk County Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program**

About 6,000 acres of farmland in Riverhead have been preserved by the Suffolk County PDR Program (see Table 11). This represents 57% of the County's total PDR program, which is the oldest of its kind in the nation.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the County holds the development rights to extinguish them when needed to support the increased sewage flow capacity of a particular workforce housing project (elsewhere).

<sup>2</sup> Town of Riverhead, Community Preservation Project Plan, Adopted 2021

<sup>3</sup> Town of Riverhead, Community Preservation Project Plan, Adopted 2021

<sup>4</sup> Suffolk County Purchase of Development Rights Program, Distribution of County of Suffolk Purchased Development Rights by Town, Updated 6/10/2021, [https://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/o/formsdocs/planning/Farmland\\_Comm/2021/Distribution%20of%20SCPDR%20by%20Town%206-10-2021.pdf](https://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/o/formsdocs/planning/Farmland_Comm/2021/Distribution%20of%20SCPDR%20by%20Town%206-10-2021.pdf)

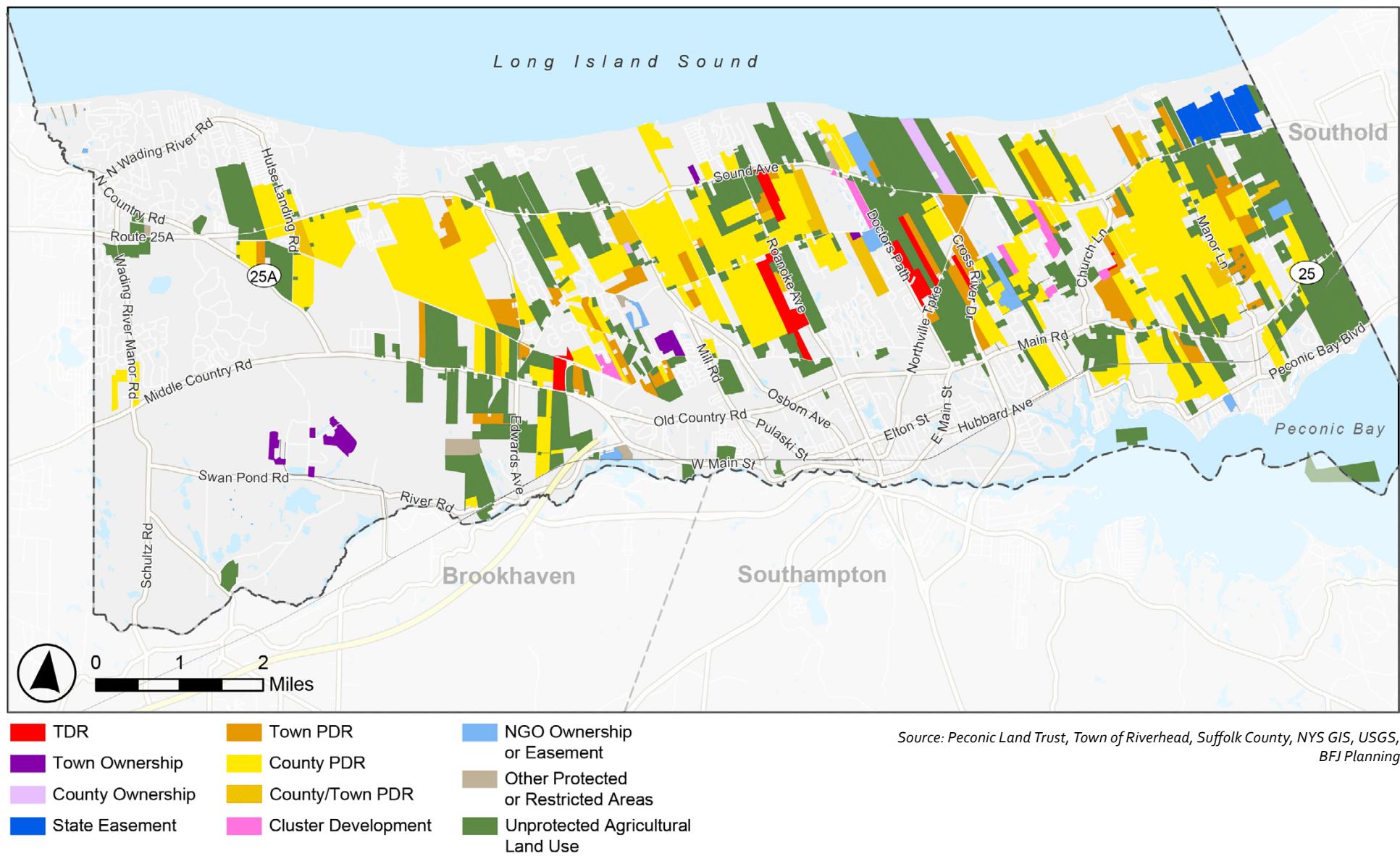


FIGURE 14: PROTECTED AND UNPROTECTED AGRICULTURAL LANDS

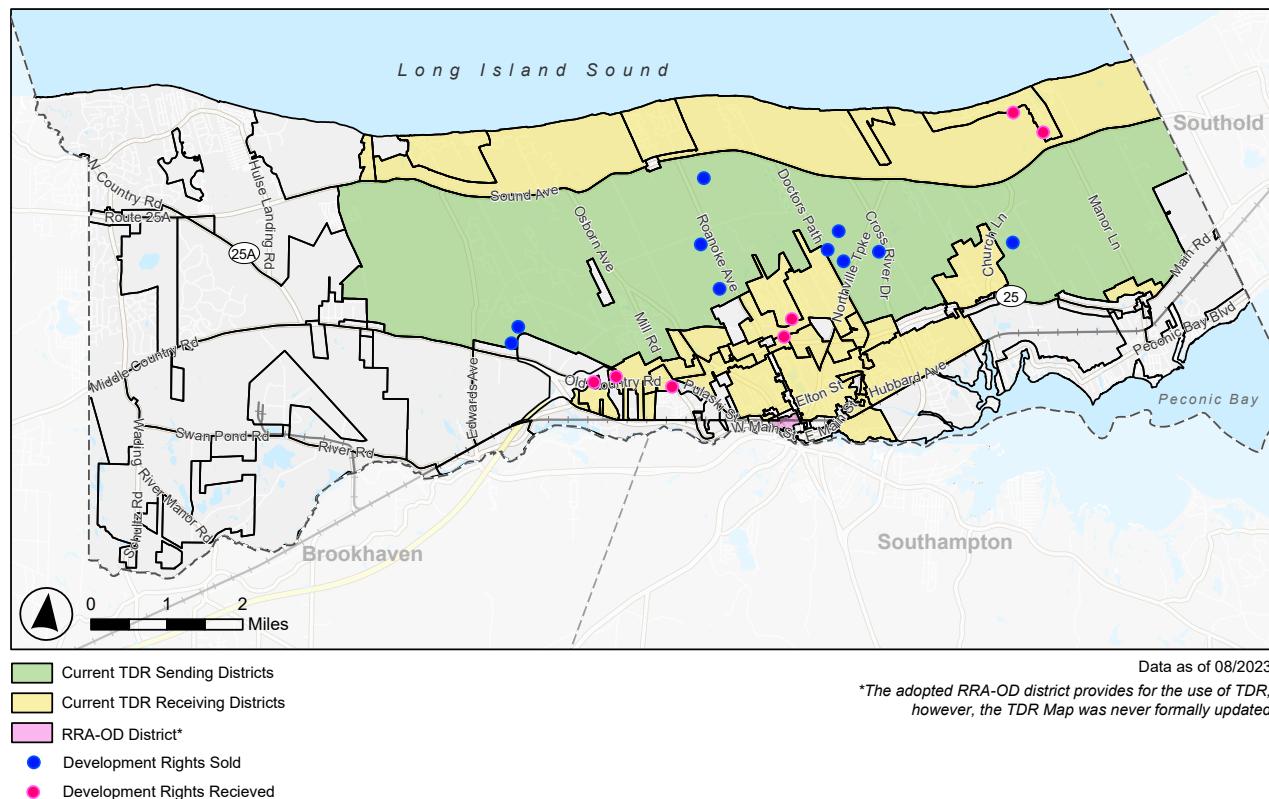
## Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

TDR refers to the practice of severing development rights from a property in a sending area, allowing preservation of the land in perpetuity, and selling those development rights to the owner of a property in a receiving area, allowing them to develop additional units or square footage. When a property owner sells their development rights, an easement is recorded restricting the use of the property to agricultural use or open space and strictly limiting development on a property, generally to renovations of pre-existing farm structures and structures necessary for the agricultural use. Most agricultural lands in Riverhead fall within residential zoning use districts, meaning the property can develop a former farm with homes as-of-right. By severing the development rights, no property owner will ever be able to develop the agricultural land for other uses. The land can still be developed for agricultural purposes (i.e. barns, greenhouses, etc.) and be kept in agricultural production, or left fallow to return to its natural state.

The Riverhead TDR Program has been in effect since 2003. Over 300 acres have been preserved through the program, and about 265 TDR credits have been redeemed, including 171 credits for residential development and 94 credits for commercial development. About 43 credits have not yet been redeemed.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 15 shows existing sending and receiving areas in Riverhead. Properties that have sold development rights are marked with blue dots, and properties that have redeemed TDR credits are marked with red dots.

Sending areas are within the Town's Agricultural Protection Zone (APZ). Receiving areas are within Residence A-80 (RA-80), Residence A-40 (RA-40), Hamlet Residential (HR), Retirement Community



**FIGURE 15: EXISTING TDR SENDING AND RECEIVING DISTRICTS**

(RC), Business Center (BC), Shopping Center (SC), Destination Retail Center (DRC), Commercial Residential Campus (CRC), Business F, and Planned Recreational Park (PRP) zoning districts.

## Cluster Development

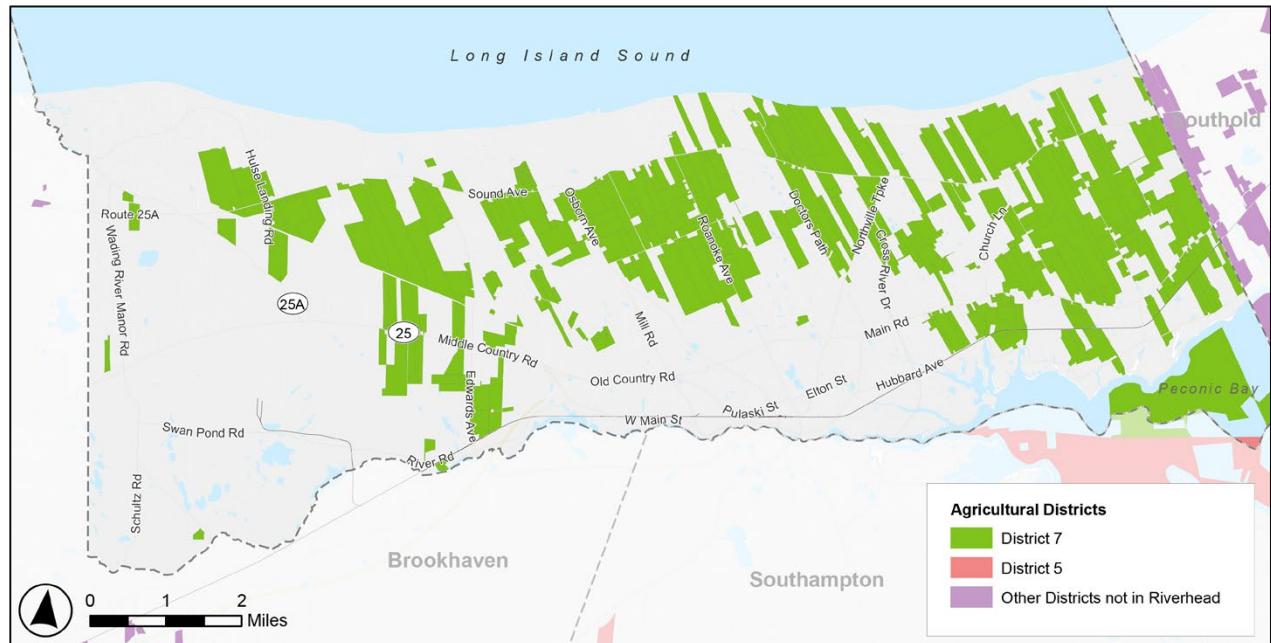
Cluster development has preserved approximately 365 acres of land, of which about 150 acres are used for agriculture (see Table 11). The purpose of cluster development is to allow for maximum flexibility in achieving a compatible arrangement of agricultural and residential land uses and to protect prime agricultural soils, scenic vistas, and significant natural features.



**Aerial of farms and other land uses along Sound Avenue**

In a cluster development, or cluster subdivision, an applicant concentrates residential lots in a portion of the plat while preserving the remainder of the land. In Riverhead, cluster development is mandated in the APZ, RA-80, and RB-80 zoning districts. The cluster development requires 70% of prime agricultural soils to be preserved through the creation of farm lots or the preservation of 70% of the land as farmland or open space. The Planning Board may approve a cluster subdivision with a lower percentage, no less than 50%, and provide reasoning for its decision in the resolution approving the preliminary plat.

The Town's current cluster development policies could also be called "conservation subdivisions" because they aim to preserve over 50% of the land. A conservation subdivision is a cluster subdivision in which the conservation of the natural environment or cultural resources is prioritized. More than half of the plat is set aside for open space.<sup>6</sup> In New York statutes,



**FIGURE 16: AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS**

Source: Suffolk County, Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFI Planning

conservation subdivision is not specifically mentioned and is achieved through the State's enabling legislation for cluster subdivision, which Riverhead has codified.

Easements on the preserved agricultural and open space lands are recorded to ensure protection from development in perpetuity. If the open space is not dedicated to the Town or similar authority, the developer must create a property owners' association or provide a maintenance plan approved by the Planning Board to ensure the ongoing upkeep of the land.

The same number of residential lots calculated for a conventional subdivision is allowed in the cluster subdivision, which therefore reduces some of the dimensional restrictions of the zoning district. The

result is the same net density on the plat as in a conventional subdivision, with the added benefits of preserved farmland, open space, scenic vistas, and more compact neighborhoods.

## Suffolk County Farmland Preservation

### Purchase of Development Rights Program

The first such program in the United States, the Suffolk County Farmland PDR program was created in the early 1970s for the purpose of acquiring development rights to working farms. The program evaluates parcels based on soil quality, farmland contiguity, potential to preserve scenic vistas, property values,

and development pressure in the community. Farmers agree to sell their development rights to Suffolk County and retain ownership of the land. The land is restricted to agricultural uses only.

### Suffolk County Agricultural Protection Plan (2015)

An important cornerstone of the regional effort to preserve farmland is the Suffolk County Agricultural Protection Plan. The plan documents the state of farming in the county and identifies challenges faced by the agricultural community and courses of action to address them. Some of these challenges include high production costs, excessive regulations, farm labor availability, and protection of ground and surface waters.

### Suffolk County Agricultural District Program

Article 25-AA of the Agriculture and Markets Law of New York established the Agricultural District Program and gives counties authority to create districts and administer enrollment of farmlands in the program, to protect and promote the availability of farmland for agricultural uses. Suffolk County has four Agricultural Districts.

Approximately 14,420 acres of Riverhead's land, and 258 acres of water, are included in the 7th Agricultural District (see Figure 16). A very small portion of Riverhead's waters are included in District 5. Inclusion in an Agricultural District provides farmers with the right-to-farm law and protects farm properties from nuisance complaints related to standard agricultural practices and protection from over-restrictive local regulations. Land within the Agricultural District

includes active agricultural lands and lands that have potential for agricultural use but may not be in current production.

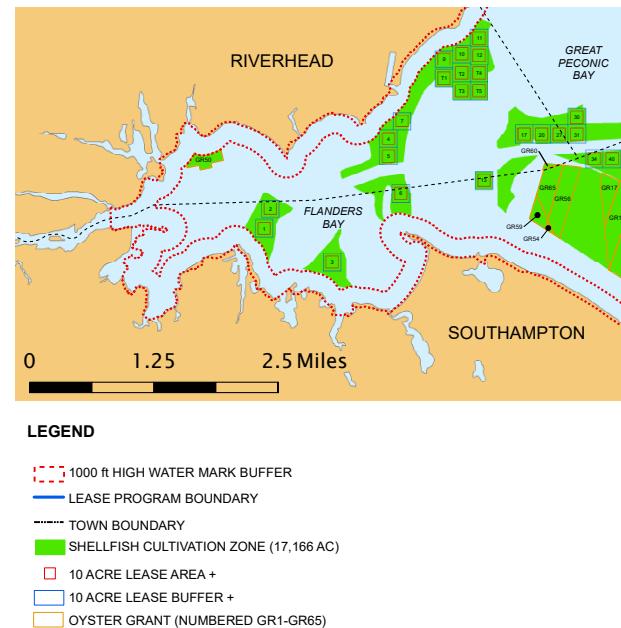
### New York State Farmland Protection Program

This program directly supports preservation of farmland by providing funds for purchase of development rights. Grants are awarded to town or county farmland boards for 75% of the funds needed to purchase development rights; the municipality provides the remaining 25%. Selection criteria include whether there is significant development pressure on a particular piece of property, whether the farm is economically viable, and whether the farm is close to an ecological resource or an adjacent protected farm. From 2004 to 2008, the NYS Farmland Protection Program provided matching funds for preservation of several active farms in Riverhead.

### Suffolk County Shellfish Aquaculture Lease Program (ALP)

Shellfish cultivation has been conducted in the Peconic Estuary for centuries. Most underwater lands in Suffolk County are owned by the County or State, with few exceptions. The County created and offered private land grants for oyster cultivation between 1885 and 1914.<sup>7</sup> While most of these deeds have reverted to County or State ownership, a few have remained in private ownership.

In 2004, the State transferred 110,000 acres of underwater lands in the Bays to the County to implement an aquaculture lease program. Adopted in 2009, ALP authorized the County to lease underwater



### Shellfish Aquaculture in Riverhead

Source: Adapted from Aquaculture Lease Sites Map Suffolk County, New York, 2021

lands for the cultivation of shellfish within the designated Shellfish Cultivation Zone located in the Peconic and Gardiners Bays.

Through ALP, the County determines the location and extent of shellfish farms through limits on the size and number of leases. The State and Federal agencies (i.e., NYS DEC, USACE, and US Coast Guard) regulate the species and number of shellfish allowed to be farmed and the methods for their cultivation, harvesting, and handling.

During the first 10 years of ALP, Phase I, a lease acreage cap was set at 600 acres, allowing up to 60 acres to be leased annually through an application

<sup>7</sup> Suffolk County, Lease Program Overview and Program History, 2024, <https://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/Economic-Development-and-Planning/Planning-and-Environment/Environmental-Planning-and-Aquaculture/Shellfish-Aquaculture-Lease-Program/Program-Overview>

cycle. The Shellfish Cultivation Zone included historic, private oyster grants and NYS DEC Temporary Marine Area Use Assignments (TMAUAs) issued before implementation of the lease program began. These established shellfish farms were given priority to lease underwater lands through the program. Oyster grants allow for the cultivation of oysters only and do not count toward the cap. However, if an oyster grant owner wishes to expand their production to other types of shellfish, they are required to apply for a lease.

ALP was reviewed and amended in 2021, Phase II, which applies through 2030. The allowable Shellfish Cultivation Zone was reduced to about 17,000 acres. Within the zone are 61 private oyster grants and 601 10-acre lease sites. Phase II capped the lease acreage program to 600 acres and continues to allow only 60 acres for "new" leases by application each year. Preexisting oyster grants do not count toward the cap.

Within Riverhead are 14 total and three partial (boundary crosses Town line) 10-acre lease sites. Of these, five are leased, and one is pending lease as of 2023.<sup>8</sup> There is also one private oyster grant property owned by Eastern Bays Company Inc.

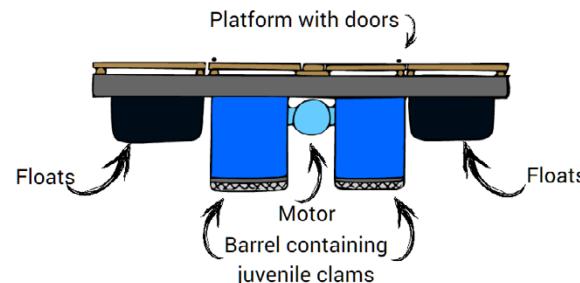
#### How does a FLUPSY WORK?

As shown by the diagram, the FLUPSY motor pulls water up through the bottom of the barrels since the opposite end of the trunk line is sealed. Shellfish grow in a layer on the mesh at the bottom of the barrels. As water is pulled up through the bottom of the barrel, algae (food for the shellfish) in the water travels up through the layer of shellfish providing a continuous food supply.<sup>9</sup>

Source: Long Island Shellfish Restoration Project  
<https://lischellfishrestorationproject.org/flupsy-specs>

#### Floating Upweller Systems (FLUPSY)

Since approximately 2005, the Town of Riverhead has entered into license agreements with various local aquaculturists to locate Floating Upweller Systems (FLUPSY) at the northern terminus of East Creek in Jamesport for the purpose of culturing seed hard clams, Peconic Bay Scallops and Oysters. A FLUPSY is a floating platform, similar in scope to a small floating dock. Per the Long Island Shellfish Restoration Project, "inside the FLUPSY platform is a central trunk line containing a motor to pull water up through 12 connected mesh bottom barrels. Shellfish grow in a layer on the mesh at the bottom of the barrels. As water is pulled up through the bottom of the barrel, algae (food for the shellfish) in the water travels up through the layer of shellfish providing a continuous food supply."<sup>9</sup> There are currently four FLUPSY platforms in East Creek. The operator of the system is required to provide educational tours of the facility and hold a minimum of two informational, educational, or recreational classes, courses, or seminars during their license period regarding the FLUPSY process, oyster cultivation, and other relevant topics, free of charge to Riverhead residents.



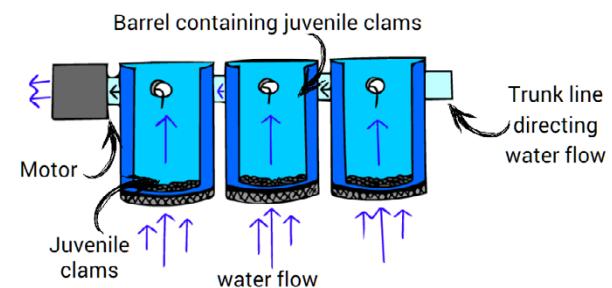
#### Other Regulations and Resources

##### Right-to-Farm Provisions

Chapter 201 of the Riverhead Town Code addresses Agricultural Land Preservation. It targets the conservation and preservation of prime agricultural lands used in bona fide agricultural production because of their vital role in both the character of the Town and its economy. The code addresses a farmer's right to partake in activities related to farming practice.

##### Agricultural Advisory Committee

The Agricultural Advisory Committee is comprised of Riverhead residents from the agricultural community appointed by the Town Board, who meet at least eight times yearly. The Committee serves as a conduit between the agricultural community and the Town Board, Planning Board, and other relevant boards/committees. Their task is to advise the Town Board on agricultural issues and code recommendations and review Planning Board proposals affecting agriculture in Riverhead. Some of the Committee's specific responsibilities, outlined in Article XVII of the Town Code, include:



8 Suffolk County ALP Lease Mapper, Accessed 1/26/2024, <https://gis.suffolkcountyny.gov/portal/apps/View/index.html?appid=6ae708a346f340ada850544fe25ce0fb>  
 9 Long Island Restoration Project, "Floating Upweller System (FLUPSY), FLUPSY Specs — Long Island Shellfish Restoration Project (lischellfishrestorationproject.org)

- Review agriculture-related site plan and subdivision applications related to agricultural activities or contemplating the use of TDR for land located in an agricultural zoning district or land currently used for agriculture.
- Review proposed zoning changes in agricultural zoning districts.
- Review local, county, state, and federal legislation affecting agricultural issues and communicate the effect to the appropriate board and the Town Board.
- Submit to the Town Board an annual summary of the activities of the Agricultural Advisory Committee.

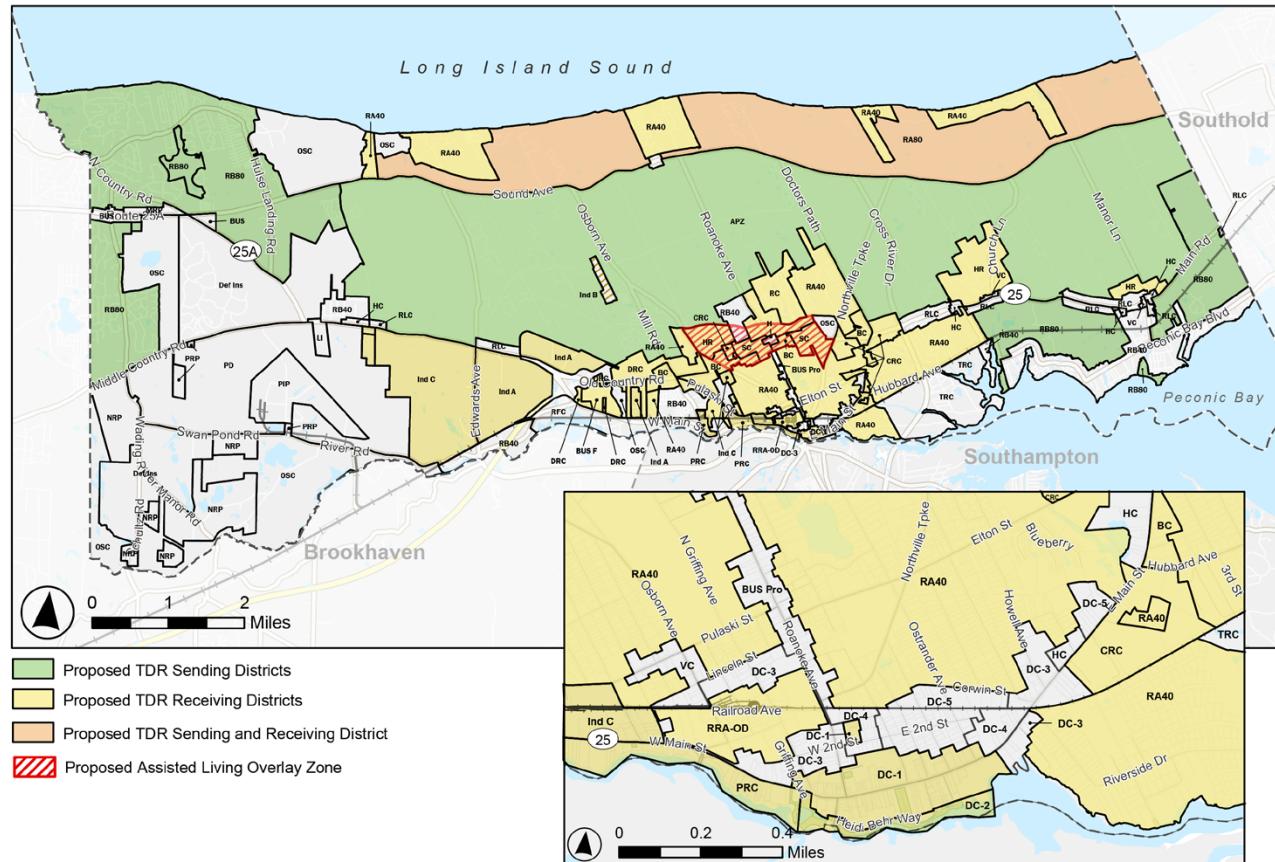
### Transfer of Development Rights Committee

The TDR Committee is a subcommittee of the Agricultural Advisory Committee and was originally formed in 2017 and reconstituted in 2023. The Committee meets monthly to review the TDR plan developed and implemented after the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, discuss mechanisms for preserving farmland and creating a TDR certificate, and review sending and receiving areas to ensure there is a good balance.

### Farmland Preservation Committee

The Farmland Preservation Committee comprises seven members appointed by the Town Board. Committee members must include four members of the Town's agricultural community who are actively engaged in the ownership and/or operation of a farm located on the agricultural lands within Riverhead, a member of the Planning Board, and two at-large members as appointed by the Town Board.

The Farmland Preservation Committee oversees the assessment and prioritization of agricultural land for preservation or acquisition, recommending



### Proposed TDR

*Note: A larger map of proposed new TDR districts can be found in Chapter 13.*

lands for the purchase of development rights by the Town or County. Additionally, the committee reviews construction permit applications for structures on agricultural lands after the development rights have been acquired, proposing rules and regulations for its activities, subject to Town Board approval. The committee plays a crucial role in addressing development issues concerning agricultural lands,

develops an annual report on development rights acquisition, permit reviews, major decisions, and acts as a clearinghouse advisory board.

### Suffolk County Farmland Committee

The Suffolk County Farmland Committee evaluates and approves agricultural development and special event permits on preserved Suffolk County farmland and recommends properties for preservation acquisitions. Out of 20 members of the board, one is appointed by Riverhead's Town Board.

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Improve the marketplace for the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.**

This goal addresses the need to bolster the effectiveness of Riverhead's TDR program, focusing on creating a more robust marketplace to encourage TDR participation. To achieve this, the Town should designate additional receiving areas where responsible and sustainable development can be accommodated. Another key strategy is to explore options to increase the value of TDR credits, which will stimulate greater interest and participation. This multifaceted approach aligns with the Town's commitment to promoting balanced growth while preserving the unique character, agricultural heritage, and natural resources that define the community.

#### **1.1. Designate additional receiving areas where some increased development can be accommodated.**

During the planning process, several areas were identified which can support increased residential or commercial growth, to effectively create new demand for preservation credits where it does not currently exist. The proposed areas were vetted with the community and the TDR committee to help ensure that growth occurs in a planned and controlled manner, preventing sprawl and preserving open space. The map on the top right shows the proposed changes, which aim to direct growth away from areas with unique natural value to areas that can better manage growth and density. Areas proposed to be

included as new sending and receiving districts are summarized below and discussed in further detail (with a larger map) in Chapter 13: Future Land Use.

#### **Single Family Districts**

Consider sending areas in all RB-80 and RA-80 districts. Areas in RA-80 north of Sound Avenue are currently only a receiving district and are proposed to be both a sending and receiving district. A larger map of proposed new TDR districts can be found in Chapter 13.

Areas in RA-80 north of Sound Avenue are currently only designated as receiving districts; meaning that property owners can buy additional development rights from the APZ sending area to develop their property with bonuses. Currently, property owners in RA-80 north of Sound Avenue cannot sell development rights through the TDR program to protect their farmland or open space. Because the area north of Sound Avenue has many agricultural properties, this Plan proposes to also designate the area as a sending area, allowing owners of these properties to sell their development rights through the TDR program and preserve their lands. While these areas would also remain receiving districts, the sending district designation will provide the opportunity to preserve some land while allowing reasonable development on other lands. Cluster regulations still apply to the RA-80 Zone which requires any new development to preserve 70% of farmland or open space. Industrial areas throughout Riverhead (IND A, IND B, and IND C)

The plan envisions a modest decrease in Floor Area Ratio, accompanied by the option to regain a portion of the reduced FAR through the utilization of TDR credits. TDR Credits would also be required to achieve

heights over 30 feet to a maximum of 40 feet. Buildings over 30 feet would need to be set back further from the property line.

#### **Downtown Area**

Consider allowing buildings to exceed the 500-unit cap only if TDR credits are provided for additional housing units. The housing units achieved with TDR must be for homeownership opportunities or for age-restricted living.

#### **Assisted Living Overlay Zone**

Consider permitting assisted living in a new overlay zone bounded by CR58, Middle Road, Northville Turnpike, and Osborn Avenue, excluding the Hospital District. The overlay zone could allow assisted living with an as-of-right base density (potentially the FAR of the underlying zoning district), with the potential for more density with the use of TDR credits. Concepts for this overlay zone are discussed further in Chapter 13.

#### **CRC and Peconic River Community (PRC) Districts**

The CRC Zone is intended to allow for a variety of housing types; however, the existing zoning standards only permit 1 dwelling unit per acre (single-family). It would be reasonable to accommodate slightly higher densities in this area (potentially 4 units per acre) with the ability to increase with the use of TDR (potentially up to 12 units per acre) if infrastructure is in place. This would allow for the development of "missing middle" housing typologies such as townhouses. The MRP district could be looked at as a comparable for recommended development types and densities.

The PRC Zone is intended to allow for “an array of residential, commercial and recreational uses.” However, no residential uses are specifically provided for in the zoning. This Plan proposes to allow residential uses at 4 units per acre, bonusable to 8 units per acre with the use of TDR, provided infrastructure is in place. This would allow for the development of “missing” middle-housing typologies such as townhouses. The district also needs to strengthen dimensional criteria to push buildings towards the road and away from the Peconic River. Other design guidance should be provided to ensure that riparian areas are maintained and enhanced. Riparian areas are further protected by DEC through the Wild, Scenic And Recreational Rivers Permit Program.

It is important to note that housing density is constrained by access to wastewater infrastructure. None of the existing PRC zones have access to sewers, therefore, it is unlikely that any existing districts could achieve densities higher than 4 units per acre given the density standards for non-sewered areas established by SCDHS.

### ***Agritourism Resort***

Agritourism resort uses could be supported in appropriate locations, subject to design, development, and environmental standards, to balance support for agritourism, conservation, and the active preservation of agricultural lands. The Town could leverage demand for these facilities to preserve farmland and/or capture TDR credits. For example, an agritourism hotel should only be allowed where a substantial portion of land (70% minimum) is preserved in perpetuity for agricultural production. Any provisions to allow for an agritourism resort should require a substantial redemption of TDR credits, for example, utilizing TDR to achieve floor area or number of rooms. This proposed use of TDR is described in further detail in Chapter 13.

### ***Planned Industrial Park (PIP)***

Many property owners in the PIP district have expressed interest in expanding their businesses within the existing district. As discussed in Chapter 13, the Town should revisit regulations within the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP) for PIP to determine whether that district could become a receiving district. The Town would need to work with NYSDEC to determine whether the existing CDP, filed subdivision map, covenants, and restrictions can be modified

#### ***1.2. Ensure the success of the TDR program through revisions of the transfer formulas.***

The transfer formula quantifies how development units in the sending district are realized in the receiving district. The current transfer formula is a one-to-one basis, meaning that 1 TDR credit is equal to 1 residential unit in a receiving district regardless of unit size or type. A TDR credit is equal to one acre of land preserved. The TDR Toolbox developed by New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) recommends a more dynamic approach. If the transfer occurs from a low-density area to a higher-density area, there may be a need to establish a transfer formula that equates the development right from one single-family home to more than one multifamily unit because the proportional infrastructure cost impacts of a multifamily unit are lower than for a single-family dwelling in a low-density area.

Market conditions play a significant role in the success of TDR programs. If there is not enough demand for TDR credits, the existing TDR ratio may need to be adjusted to maintain to make the TDR financially feasible and to adequately compensate the property owner in the sending district for selling their development rights. The TDR Toolbox suggests that the transfer formula could be based on the

average sizes of single-family homes compared with the average sizes of apartment units or comparative traffic generation rates. Sanitary sewer demand is also another metric to consider for calculating TDR ratios.

Chapter 13 provides a revised transfer formula that considers wastewater flow, traffic generation, and market dynamics. It is recommended that the transfer formula be revisited in consultation with the TDR committee every five years, or as market conditions change, to ensure that they are appropriately calibrated to both maximize the use of TDR credits without overburdening potential projects.

#### ***1.3. Remove the cap on the use of TDR credits for residential development.***

The Town should review Part D of Town Code §301-209, which sets a 500-unit limit on redemption of preservation credits at residential properties. This cap may inhibit the intent of the suggested TDR program revisions to expand the market for and use of TDRs. The Town should consider changing or eliminating the cap as this threshold is approached. Changing this cap would need to be balanced with land use, environmental, and infrastructure considerations.

## 2. Increase the use of TDR through administrative improvements and access to new funding mechanisms.

The effectiveness of the TDR program can be improved through the implementation of several administrative modifications and facilitating access to new funding mechanisms. This goal is aligned with the Town's commitment to balanced growth and preservation of vital resources. It is also acknowledged that the Town has limited capacity to address the unique challenges involved with administering a complex program like TDR. The small-town context necessitates strategic approaches that balance program effectiveness with administrative feasibility.

### 2.1. Establish a TDR Bank to facilitate transactions.

A TDR bank would serve as a central, trusted repository for developers and landowners to deposit, purchase, and trade development rights, simplifying the complex process while ensuring compliance with local zoning and land use regulations. A TDR Bank could connect interested buyers and sellers and hold credits or cash between transactions and could also collect fees for TDR transactions to pay for the administration of the program. Establishing a TDR Bank does come with administrative considerations; significant resources and funding would be needed for the bank's establishment and ongoing long-term management.

### 2.2. Support TDR administrative efforts and leverage community resources to connect buyers and sellers.

The Town is an essential partner in ensuring the TDR program is successful. Administrative resources are needed to document and track conservation credits in the program. Currently, the Planning Department and Town Clerk track certificates and credits and when they have been placed. Resources are also needed to connect interested buyers and sellers, and the Town should establish an active list of both. The Town does not currently have a list of interested farmers (sellers). The Town should work with other partners to assist with connecting buyers and sellers, such as the Long Island Farm Bureau, Suffolk County Farmland Committee, and Peconic Land Trust. These groups could assist the . such asFor example, the Long Island Farm Bureau, could partner with the town in an outreach capacity.

### 2.3. Continue to work with the TDR Committee to revise regulations as needed to better facilitate preservation of agricultural lands.

The TDR program should be reevaluated on a regular basis. The market may change, and the Town will need to ensure that the ratios remain attractive to developers and equitable to landowners.

## 3. Safeguard agricultural land through diverse approaches to preservation.

Preserving Riverhead's agricultural heritage requires a multifaceted approach. The choice to preserve agricultural lands is voluntary on the part of the property owner. This goal addresses the need for a

holistic and sustainable framework that combines financial collaboration, strategic land-use planning, and dedicated administrative oversight to ensure the long-term preservation of the Town's valuable agricultural lands.

### 3.1. Continue to plan for and coordinate efforts to permanently preserve farmland.

The Town should consult the CPF Fund Plan adopted in 2021 to ensure that priority properties are preserved when funds are available. While CPF funding is not currently available, the Town should continue to identify grants and collaborate with county, state, and federal agencies, as well as non-profit organizations, to explore additional funding sources and partnership opportunities. The primary means of farmland preservation should continue to be PDR, which keeps agricultural land and its soils in production.

### 3.2. Continue to promote cluster development subdivisions to preserve agricultural lands.

Cluster developments can be an effective land-use strategy for preserving agricultural lands while accommodating population growth and development. In the subdivision review process, the Town should ensure that preserved lands result in a single contiguous agricultural parcel rather than dispersed properties. More details on this recommendation regarding open space preservation can be found in the Open Space chapter.

### 3.3. Consider establishment of a CPF Management Division in the Town to administer the program.

Riverhead bonded against the CPF when it was established and is thus indebted until 2030. Once the debt is paid down, the Town will be able to use

CPF funds to protect farmland, open space, and water quality. The Town should review the CPF Fund Plan adopted in 2021 with the Agricultural Advisory Committee, Farmland Preservation Committee, Open Space Advisory Committee, and Peconic Land Trust to ensure that properties are prioritized when funds become available. A CPF Management Division in the Town would allow for ease of administration of property acquisitions and a strategy for long-term maintenance and stewardship of lands protected through the CPF program.

#### **4. Cultivate agricultural resilience and innovation for a sustainable future.**

This goal centers on preserving and enhancing Riverhead's agricultural legacy while supporting the economic vitality of local farmers. The recommendations address opportunities to foster collaboration among the community; promote innovation; and streamline the zoning code to ensure that it provides clarity, reduces obstacles, and facilitates the growth of the local agricultural sector.

##### **4.1. Consider flexibility in the zoning code to allow for agricultural innovation.**

Farming is an ever-evolving industry—economics dictate what crops farmers will grow, and technology advances can change the way farms operates. Providing flexibility in the zoning code can help the Town and farmers adapt to changing demands and techniques in the agricultural industry.

**Conditional use permits** for agricultural uses could allow unique uses that are not covered in the zoning code to be considered on a case-by-case basis. This

would be a helpful tool since the Town cannot predict future innovations in the farming industry. The Town Board would review the proposed use and consider any impacts, such as traffic or noise and visual impacts, and could require conditions to be met to ensure that those effects are mitigated. Conditional use permits would not be a town-wide option and would only apply to agricultural uses on farmland that is not preserved. Conditional use projects would not be exempt from SEQRA.

All sections of any conditional use permit for agricultural operations and buildings should reference NYS Dept. of Ag & Markets Law Section 301 for accepted agricultural definitions, practices, and rights of farmers. Any new conditional use permits should be developed with input from the Towns Agricultural Advisory Committee.

**Renewable Energy:** Solar facilities for commercial energy production are only allowed in industrial zoning districts. For agricultural properties in other districts with development rights intact, the State's current agricultural policies allow solar but limited to 110% of the anticipated annual electricity needs of the farm. It may be reasonable to provide some flexibility in allowing farmers to incorporate renewable energy facilities (i.e., solar or wind) beyond the 110% threshold, provided the solar is an accessory use to the primary agricultural use. This supports the financial stability of farmers and fosters the integration of renewable energy. It is important to acknowledge that Town regulations should be consistent with regulations provided by NYSERDA.<sup>10</sup>

This recommendation could be addressed with the creation of a special permit by the Town Board for solar or wind as an accessory use to the principal agricultural use. This mechanism would provide the Town Board with discretion to ensure that visual and

other impacts are addressed. The Town Board may also consider whether development rights have been previously extinguished (i.e. through the TDR or PDR programs). In addition, the Town Board could provide flexibility for agrivoltaic projects, which provide for a dual use with the production of vegetables or other crops. This approach allows for the prioritization of a site's continued agriculture use, as the project may be designed to maximize both renewable energy production and crop yields.

**Vertical farming** can complement traditional farming methods by allowing for year-round cultivation of crops and crop diversification. This can significantly increase a farm's overall productivity, providing a consistent supply of fresh produce and opening up new revenue streams and income opportunities for farmers, potentially increasing their economic stability. Vertical farming is different from traditional farming in many ways, for example, crops are grown in a substrate instead of soil and lighting, temperature, and watering are artificially controlled rather than depending on the natural weather.

During the public outreach process, members of the public expressed concerns about the visual impact of vertical farming structures. The Town should consider clear guidance for the total size, setbacks, landscaping, screening, and design, etc., to minimize the visual impact of these structures.

The Town could consider areas where vertical farming may or may not be permitted such as on prime agricultural soils. Some flexibility could be provided for a hybrid model where plants grown in a vertical farm are transferred to the adjacent agricultural land. Additional standards could apply. Flexibility could be provided for the adaptive reuse of agricultural buildings such as when these facilities are integrated into existing farm infrastructure. In residential zones,

<sup>10</sup> See section 4.3.2 of <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/-/media/Project/Nyserda/Files/Programs/NY-Sun/2023-Solar-Installations-in-Agricultural-Lands.pdf>

vertical farming could be limited to an accessory use to principal farming activities. In industrially zoned areas, allowances for vertical farming structures may be slightly more permissive but must comply with underlying standards of each district. This topic is discussed further on page 199.

#### **4.2. Provide flexibility for adaptive reuse of agricultural structures for permitted uses.**

Zoning regulations should be flexible enough to not overly burden applications for permitted uses within pre-existing agricultural structures. One example would be to ensure an expedited Planning Board review process for the reuse of pre-existing non-conforming structures to be used for agricultural purposes. These changes will help to strike a harmonious balance between preserving agricultural heritage and encouraging adaptive reuse for contemporary and sustainable purposes.

#### **4.3. Cleanup the zoning code to address inconsistencies and make sure farming operations are supported.**

There may be some instances where the zoning code could be revised to explicitly support farm operations that are already occurring and should continue to be allowed to do so. For example, the RA-80 district and APZ district are very similar with regard Farming. However, APZ allows for "Farm Operations" as an accessory use; this use is not provided for in RA-80. Properties that front both sides of Sound Avenue should be treated the same regarding the regulation of farm operations. Furthermore, farm operations should be permitted in any zone where the principal use of the land is agriculture production. The Town should follow New York State Agriculture and Markets Law Section 301 definitions to define the term in the Town Code.

#### **4.4. Support aquaculture and commercial fishing industries.**

Aquaculture and commercial fishing are important sectors for Riverhead's economy. To ensure that these businesses can operate efficiently, the Town should assure that commercial fisherman and shellfish farmers are able to access the waterfront. With the development of private marinas, these water-based industries are facing barriers to accessing their farms or fishing areas and bringing their produce or catch to land efficiently.

The Town should maintain its FLUPSY program in East Creek and consider expansion to other suitable locations within the Peconic Bay Estuary and its creeks. The Program provides the ability for growers to remain in aquaculture, engages potential future growers through its outreach program, and educates the general public on the aquaculture industry and the health of the Peconic Bay Estuary.

#### **4.5. Advocate to the US Fish and Wildlife and NYS DEC to mitigate the overpopulation of geese to protect farmers' cover crops.**

Cover crop is important to prevent periods of bare ground on farm fields when the soil (and the soil and nutrients it contains) are most susceptible to erosion and loss into waterways. In the fall when cover crops are planted, migrating geese become a problem when they land in the farm fields and feed on the emerging cover crops. This destroys the crop and prevents the farmer from benefitting.

#### **5. Support agritourism as a sustainable income source, balancing economic growth and community well-being.**

Riverhead recognizes the potential of agritourism to bolster local farm incomes while being mindful of mitigating negative impacts such as traffic and noise.

##### **5.1. Define and regulate agritourism.**

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets provides resources on agritourism, including existing definitions that the Town could add to its code. The Town should work closely with the farm community to ensure that definitions and regulations are not overly restrictive, which could harm the viability of farming operations.

The agritourism label is an umbrella term which can apply to a wide range of agricultural and rural tourism activities, such as farm tours, U-Pick operations, winery and brewery tours, pumpkin patches, and similar ventures. Adopting clear definitions, such as those provided by the Department of Agriculture and Markets, will help the Town to monitor and regulate activities in a consistent framework. This will ultimately help the Town to promote responsible and sustainable tourism while preserving the essence of Riverhead's rural landscape.

##### **5.2. Regulate events through a permitting process and size restrictions.**

It is important for the Town to address and balance the benefits of agritourism with the potential impacts on agricultural operations, public safety, and the surrounding community.

Generally, the State's Agriculture and Markets Law protects agritourism activities with the intention of directly marketing the farm's products, to a certain extent. When special events are conducted on a farm, the farm must ensure that profits from admissions, facility rentals, or vendor fees do not exceed income from the sale of farm produce.

One approach would be enumerating allowable agritourism events that are considered to directly market farm products, size limits, and parking requirements. For example, Suffolk County Code considers the following types of agritourism events part of agricultural production when accessory to an active farming operation: U-Pick, crop mazes, hayrides, or agricultural educational tours. Catered events are excluded. Permeable parking areas for agritourism events may be permitted as necessary.

All other events that do not meet the agreed-upon definition of agritourism require a special events permit. The permitting process can help to identify traffic and safety concerns and provide a funding mechanism for traffic control when needed. In addition, the Town should develop more transparent regulations that address event space. Limiting the capacity of these spaces can help manage traffic and mitigate safety risks.

When developing regulations, The Town should work with the Agricultural Advisory Committee and Farmland Preservation Committee; consult resources available through New York Ag and Markets and Cornell Cooperative Extension; and engage with stakeholders, including farmers, residents, and event organizers, to strike a balance that allows agritourism to thrive while addressing local concerns and maintaining the integrity of agricultural operations and rural communities.

### **5.3. Support efforts to enforce the Town's existing noise ordinance during events.**

The Town's noise ordinance, Chapter 201 of the Town Code, does not apply to farm practices that create noise (e.g., tractors, tillers, irrigation systems), but they should continue to be applied to events that occur on agricultural lands. The regulations allow code enforcement officers and police to issue violations for loud music, without needing to do a comprehensive sound study.

### **5.4. Continue to allow bed-and-breakfast (B&B) by special permit in the APZ, RA-8o, RB-8o zones.**

B&Bs are allowed by special permit in the zones where most of Riverhead's agriculture is concentrated: APZ, RA-8o, and RB-8o. Allowing B&Bs on farms can provide farmers with an additional source of income, making it financially viable for them to continue farming. This can contribute to the preservation of farmland and open space, which is often threatened by development. This type of tourism can attract visitors interested in experiencing the countryside, leading to the preservation of rural culture and heritage.

## **6. Promote Riverhead's agricultural industry and products.**

This goal strives to create a vibrant and interconnected ecosystem that champions Riverhead's agricultural industry, ensuring its continued growth and prosperity.

### **6.1. Continue enforcement of farm stand regulations and streamline the application process.**

The Farm Stand Review ordinance (§ 301-283) should be revised to streamline the permit application process for farm stands. Any amendments to the farm stand review code should be done in consultation with the Agricultural Advisory Committee and local farmers.

### **6.2. Partner with the local farmers market to promote the sale and purchase of local produce and products.**

East End Foods provides an indoor farmers market in Riverhead that is open seasonally and for holidays. They also offer a virtual farmers market that delivers goods. With the revitalization of the Downtown, there may be opportunities to expand the local farmers market to reach additional audiences. For example, the Town could partner with East End Foods to host farmers markets in the new Town Square. As part of this effort, the Town could explore other strategies to make the market more accessible such as evaluating the operating hours, improving financial access by accepting various payment forms, and looking at transportation options to the market for people with limited mobility.

### **6.3. Encourage public and private entities to buy and sell local produce.**

Consider partnerships between farmers and Town Hall, the School District, and other institutions to provide local produce for food service. A partnership with the Business Improvement District (BID) could help promote the use of local produce and products in downtown restaurants and specialty stores.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 7

# NATURAL FEATURES AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

This section explores the diverse natural elements that shape Riverhead, addressing key environmental resources and strategies to preserve and enhance its ecosystem for the benefit of current and future generations.

Riverhead occupies a unique place within the much-admired landscape of eastern Long Island. The Town lies literally “at the head of a river”—the Peconic—Suffolk County’s largest. Riverhead also acts as the geographic bridge between the north and south forks of the East End, lying at the juncture of these two landforms, with the Peconic River serving as the lynchpin. The fact that the community derives its name from a major natural feature shows how much that natural environment shapes the Town’s identity.

Riverhead is a coastal community bounded by water on much of its perimeter. In addition to its waterfront along the Peconic Estuary system (which includes the Peconic River, Flanders Bay, and the Great Peconic Bay), the Town is bounded to the north by Long Island Sound. Many of Riverhead’s shoreline and coastal areas are scenic—particularly the Sound waterfront, with its picturesque bluffs—and all of them have distinctive plant and animal communities. The Town is an agricultural community where natural resources play an essential role in the livelihood of residents, property owners, and businesspeople.

Through the Comprehensive Plan, Riverhead has an opportunity to plan for new development so that the natural environment can be better preserved. The condition and quality of natural resources not only affect public health and safety but play a significant role in the local economy. The conscientious stewardship of these resources safeguards public health and safety and stands as a pillar supporting the local economy, exemplified by the interdependence of the agricultural sector on the Town’s water and soil resources for sustained business vitality.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### SURFACE WATERS

Riverhead's unique and vital water resources, including the Long Island Sound and Peconic Estuary, are used for fishing and diverse recreational activities such as canoeing, kayaking, sailing, and swimming. Preservation of coastal waters, as well as rivers, ponds, and streams, is imperative to protect the fishing and tourism sectors. Equally crucial are the underground water aquifers, necessitating protection of recharge areas to sustain the numerous public and private wells vital for the community's drinking water.

These water resources play a pivotal role in Riverhead's economy, supporting local fishermen and attracting tourists to the scenic waterfront areas for water sports, hiking, biking, and other leisure activities. The tourism industry relies on the allure of the Town's water bodies, influencing residential property values, particularly in coastal areas. However, the delicate ecological balance of these areas is vulnerable to human activities, emphasizing the need for sensitive planning to prevent adverse impacts on water quality. Additionally, the rich biodiversity of Riverhead's water bodies, including freshwater and tidal wetlands, provides essential habitat for distinct plant and animal populations, underscoring the interconnectedness of environmental preservation and community well-being.

#### **New York Protection of Waters Program**

Under the State's Environmental Conservation Law, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) regulates activities within water resources, including rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. These resources provide essential ecological functions, recreation, aesthetic, and economic value while also contributing to the quality and supply of drinking water. Waters are classified based on their best use (see Figure 17). Regulations vary depending on the classification of the water, surface area, segment length, type (e.g., protected streams), buffer areas and banks, and the proposed project or action.

#### **Long Island Sound**

Long Island Sound, spanning approximately 1,320 square miles with 600 miles of coastline, is a vital economic and ecological hub. The Sound's impact on the regional economy, generating over \$15 billion annually, underscores its significance in supporting diverse activities, contingent upon the quality of its waters, living resources, and habitats.<sup>1</sup> The Sound's health and visual character are intrinsically linked to the well-being of the north shore communities, including Riverhead. The estuarine nature of the Sound, blending fresh and saltwater, fosters a rich ecosystem for fish, shellfish, waterfowl, and various plant species, supporting commercial and recreational fisheries and shellfisheries, educational opportunities, migratory bird habitats, habitats for endangered species, and coastal wetland functions.

#### **Long Island Sound Study (LISS)**

Designated as an "Estuary of National Significance" in 1987 under the National Estuary Program (NEP), Long Island Sound garnered formal recognition in 1985 with the establishment of the Long Island Sound Study (LISS). LISS is a partnership between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Connecticut, and New York, and includes representatives from government agencies, nonprofits, commercial entities, educational institutions, and community organizations. This cooperative effort has been pivotal in addressing the Sound's most pressing environmental challenges.

In 1994, LISS published the Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, which outlined actions to improve the quality and health of the Sound's waters and habitats. LISS revised the plan in 2015, with targets through 2035, and measurable implementation actions in five-year periods.<sup>2</sup> The update places emphasis on actionable targets to achieve four thematic primary goals:

- Clean Waters and Healthy Watersheds: Improve water quality by reducing contaminant and nutrient loads from the land and the waters impacting Long Island Sound.
- Thriving Habitats and Abundant Wildlife: Restore and protect the Sound's ecological balance in a healthy, productive, and resilient state to benefit both people and the natural environment.
- Sustainable and Resilient Communities: Support vibrant, informed, and engaged communities that use, appreciate, and help protect Long Island Sound.

<sup>1</sup> Long Island Sound Study, <https://longislandsoundstudy.net/>

<sup>2</sup> Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan 2015, [2015 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan - Long Island Sound Study](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/2015_ccmp_liss.pdf)

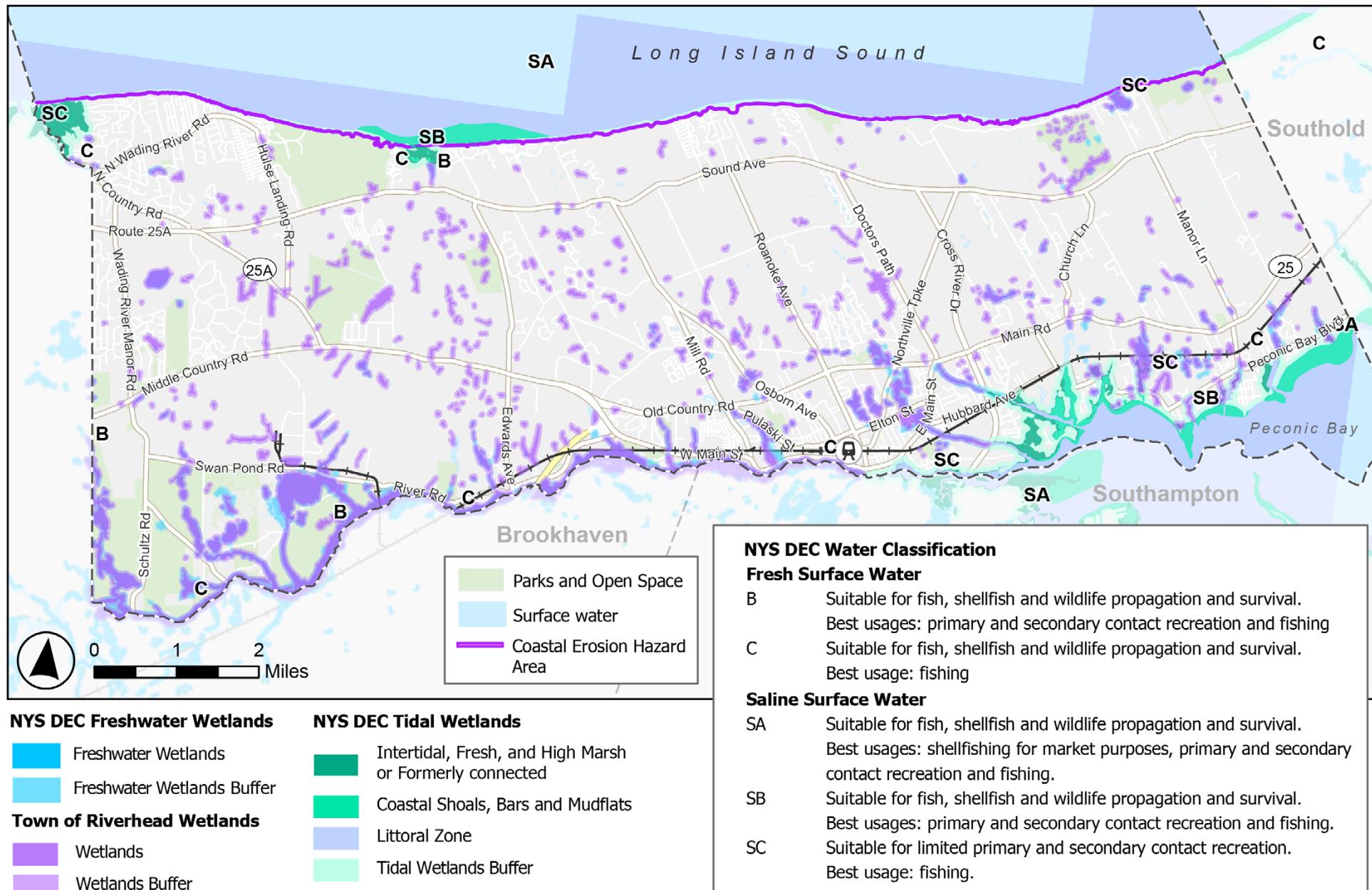


FIGURE 17: SURFACE WATERS AND WETLANDS

Source: Town of Riverhead, NYS DEC, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

- Sound Science and Inclusive Management: Manage Long Island Sound using sound science and cross-jurisdictional governance that is inclusive, adaptive, innovative, and accountable.

## The Peconic Estuary

The Peconic Estuary system, stretching from the Peconic River mouth to the Atlantic Ocean, encompasses over 100 distinct bays, harbors, embayments, creeks, and tributaries within its defined study area. Covering more than 158,000 surface water acres and 125,000 land acres, this vital ecosystem supports a year-round population of over 100,000 people, surging significantly during the summer months. Riverhead, situated at the estuary's western end, is intricately linked to this system, which includes Flanders Bay and the Peconic River mouth. The Peconic River, teeming with diverse plant and animal life both in its waters and along its banks, contains an 800-acre undisturbed salt marsh complex serving as a critical nursery for marine life.

Despite generally high water quality, the Peconic Estuary faces challenges from increased development pressure and land use changes, leading to water quality degradation and habitat loss, particularly in the system's western end near Riverhead. This vulnerability is attributed to inadequate water flushing compared with eastern waters. Recognized as an "Estuary of National Significance" in the National Estuary Program (NEP) since 1992, administered by the EPA, the Peconic Estuary is actively managed through the Peconic Estuary Program and the Peconic Estuary Partnership.

### Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP)

The PEP was established in 1992 and has brought over \$13 million of federal grant money to the Peconic Estuary Watershed. It provides monitoring, research, education, and collaboration to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary and Watershed.

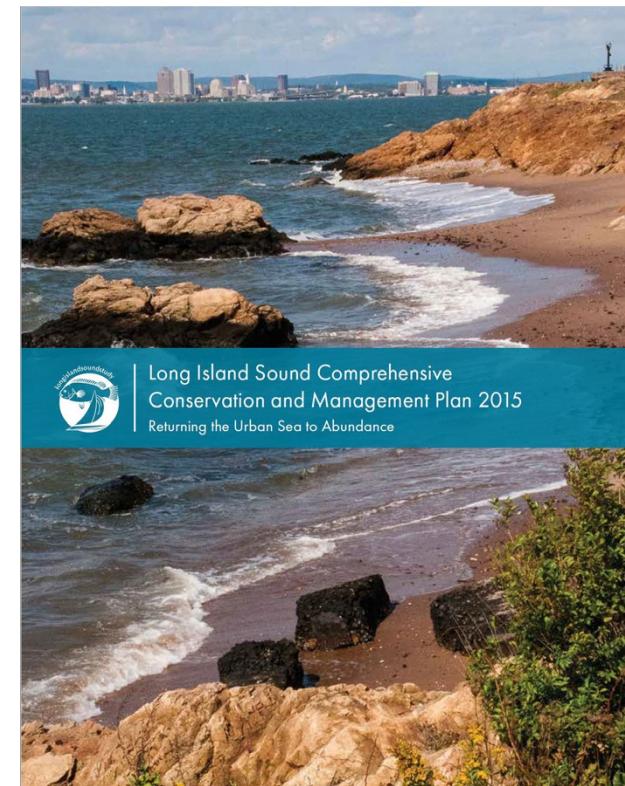
### Peconic Estuary Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan

PEP's 2020 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) is a strategic framework for protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary of eastern Long Island.<sup>3</sup> The 250-square mile estuary comprises Great Peconic Bay, Little Peconic Bay, Gardiners Bay, and a hundred other bays, harbors, and tributaries. Altogether, the estuary's shoreline totals more than 450 miles, and its watershed includes Brookhaven, East Hampton, Southampton, Riverhead, Southold, and Shelter Island.

The CCMP includes several recommendations relevant to this comprehensive planning effort:

- Enhance PEP's organizational structure, operational practices, and financial positions to support successful implementation the Plan. Empower local communities to support estuary health, including underrepresented groups.
- Help local communities take meaningful, well-informed action to prepare for and adapt to climate change impacts; identify and prioritize sustainable projects; conserve and protect habitats; acquire tools and databases related to goals; protect and restore coastal ecosystems; and collaborate on coastal and ocean acidification monitoring and research.

- Protect areas from degradation by identifying water quality in ground and surface waters. Communicate with local governments to increase understanding of negative impacts from legacy, current, and future nutrient inputs.
- Expand scientific understanding of the Peconic Estuary ecosystem and deliver information that supports management decision-making.
- Restore and protect key habitats and watershed biodiversity.



Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan 2015  
Returning the Urban Sea to Abundance

<sup>3</sup> CCMP Implementation Actions 2020-2024 Update, [CCMP Implementation Actions 2020-2024 Update - Long Island Sound Study](#)

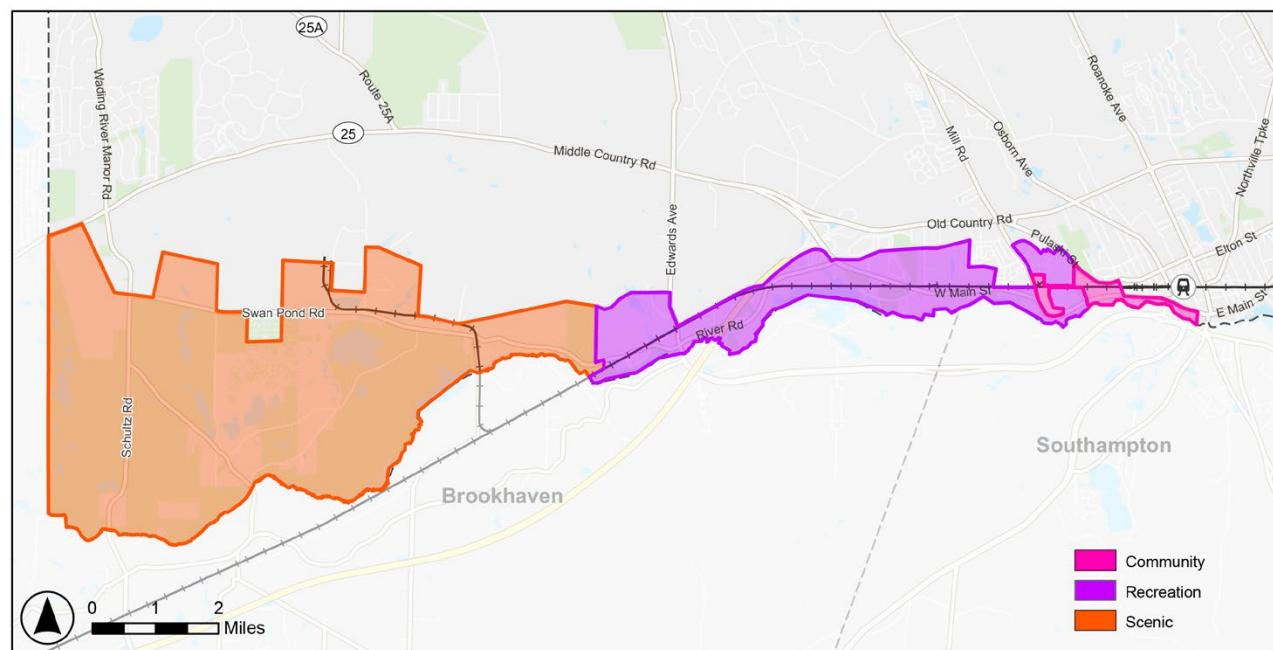
### Peconic Riverfront Zoning

Riverhead has integrated the protection of the Peconic waterfront into several zoning districts. Both the Riverfront Corridor (RFC) and the Peconic River Community (PRC) districts aim to provide a mix of residential, commercial, and recreational uses that harmonize with the Peconic River's natural habitat and ecologically sensitive areas. The PRC district is slightly different and was amended to be compatible with the regulations of the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers (WSRR) designation for that area, which is discussed further below. The Downtown Center 2 Waterfront (DC-2) district seeks to create a downtown waterfront area that provides continuous pathways and public waterfront access, generous open space and landscaping, and watershed protection through limits on impervious surfaces. The Natural Resources Protection (NRP) district restricts development to compatible agricultural, single-family, or recreational uses in the Pine Barrens area.

### New York Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Program

The State's Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act protects rivers with outstanding scenic, ecological, recreational, historic, and scientific values derived from fish, wildlife, and botanical resources; aesthetic quality; archaeological significance; and other features. Rivers should be preserved in free-flowing conditions and protected from overdevelopment and improper use to ensure future generations enjoy the rivers' benefits.

NYSDEC has designated portions of the Peconic River in Riverhead as "scenic," "recreational," and "community" rivers (see Figure 18). Specific activities within these areas (e.g. construction of new structures, subdividing land, cutting vegetation) trigger the need for a Wild, Scenic, and Recreational River Permit from NYSDEC.



**FIGURE 18: WILD, SCENIC AND RECREATIONAL RIVERS**

Source: NYS DEC, Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

### Wetlands

#### Freshwater Wetlands

Freshwater wetlands are found throughout Riverhead, especially along the Peconic River and in the Pine Barrens Preserve. They provide essential benefits to the ecosystem, including plant and animal habitats, flood protection and mitigation, educational and research opportunities, and aesthetic beauty.

NYSDEC regulates freshwater wetlands through the Freshwater Wetlands Act of the Environmental Conservation Law, which establishes regulations protecting wetlands larger than 12.4 acres and 100-foot buffer areas. In some cases, significantly smaller wetlands are also protected by the State. NYSDEC regulates the use of wetlands, particularly filling

and draining, and requires wetlands permits for projects within or near wetlands and provisions to avoid or mitigate the consequences of development. Local governments are authorized to add additional protections to wetland areas. Chapter 295 of Riverhead's Town Code outlines regulations and permitting requirements.

The State has adopted changes to its freshwater wetlands law that will take effect in 2025. The current wetlands maps will no longer be used for regulatory purposes, and maps will only be provided for informational use. NYSDEC is working closely with Cornell University to map wetlands more accurately and classify wetlands based on several factors, including whether they are in urban areas, in floodways, contain rare plants, provide habitats for

the essential behavior of endangered/threatened/special concern species, and other criteria. As of 2028, the State will regulate wetlands of 7.4 acres or greater in addition to wetlands of special significance. Until 2028, the 12.4-acre threshold remains in place.

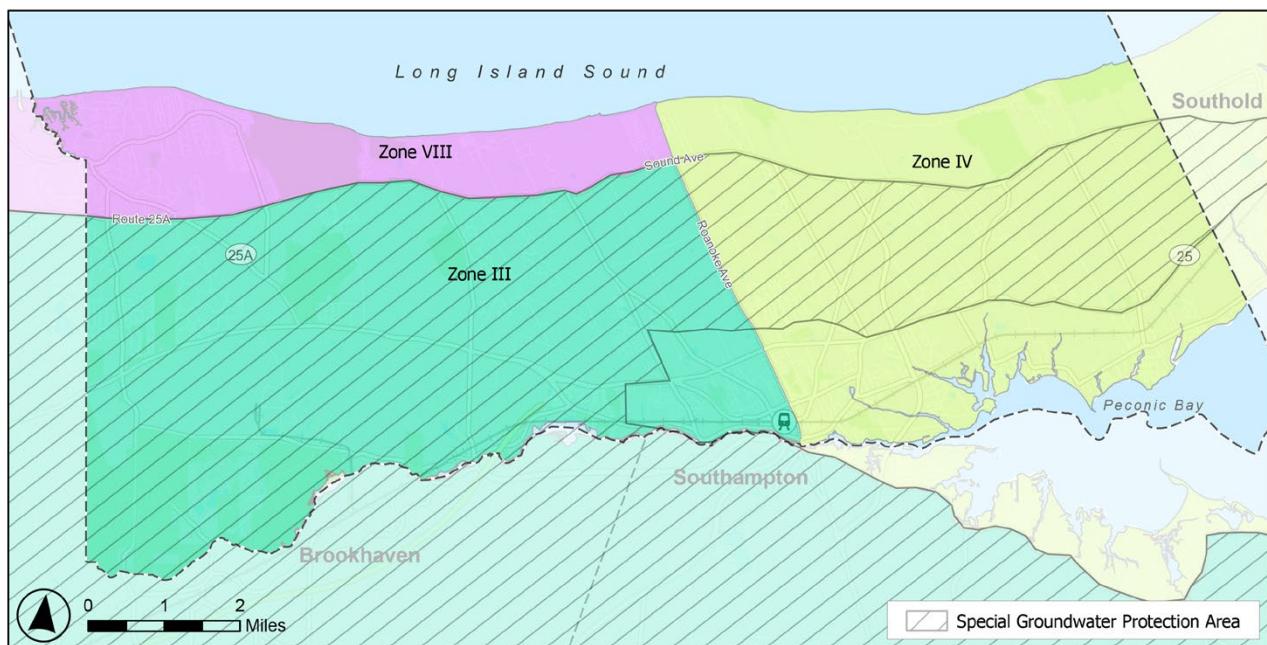
### Tidal Wetlands

Tidal wetlands line the shore, bays inlets, and estuaries of Long Island Sound and Peconic Bay in Riverhead. Some significant areas include the Wading River Marsh Preserve next to the Wading River Beach and Indian Island County Park on Flanders Bay. Tidal wetlands are irreplaceable resources that provide wildlife habitat, fish and shellfish production, flood and storm protection, and cleansing of ecosystems, among other benefits.

New York's Tidal Wetlands Act aims to preserve and protect habitats and enhance their ecological and other values by regulating activities within tidal wetlands and a buffer area around them. The regulations categorize wetlands based on the presence of tides and types of vegetation. NYSDEC tidal wetlands regulations apply anywhere tidal inundation occurs regularly, including within the salt wedge, and also regulated a 300-foot landward buffer around tidal wetlands.<sup>4</sup>

### Coastal Erosion Hazard Areas

New York State's Coastal Zone Management Act and Program mandates regulations on activities in coastal areas. Chapter 219 of Riverhead's Town Code outlines these regulations, including restrictions for nearshore areas, beaches, dunes, bluffs, and erosion protection measures. The Coastal Area Boundary established by the State is depicted in Figure 17.



**FIGURE 19: SPECIAL GROUNDWATER PROTECTION AREA**

Source: NYS DOS, NYS DEC, Suffolk County, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

### Groundwater Resources

The Groundwater Management Zone (GMZ) system in Riverhead is defined by Article 7 of the Suffolk County Sanitary Code. GMZs, or hydrogeological zones, correspond with the type of aquifer that lies beneath the surface and the characteristics and groundwater quality in each zone. Three GMZs cover Riverhead. Zone III is a deep recharge area that extends to Sound Avenue on the north and Roanoke Avenue on the west. It includes the Core Preservation and Compatible Growth Areas of the Pine Barrens. A good portion of Zone III is undeveloped. It contains high-quality groundwater in the upper glacial, Magothy, and Lloyd aquifers. Zone IV extends east of Roanoke Avenue to the Southold town line and has characteristically

shallow flow systems that discharge to streams and marine waters. Zone VIII is located west of Roanoke Avenue and extends north to Long Island Sound from Sound Avenue. Groundwater in Zone VIII flows toward Long Island Sound. In addition, with the Meetinghouse Creek restoration project, non-point source nitrogen pollution has been measured entering into the waterways of the estuary at this location. The suggested remediation is the installation of bioswales using phytoremediation (plants-as-filters) along the roadway on Church Lane.

<sup>4</sup> A salt wedge is the area in an estuary where freshwater and saltwater meet. Because of the difference in densities, freshwater will float above the denser saltwater which will form a wedge-like mass beneath it. As tides ebb and flow in the estuary and weather conditions change, the location of the wedge will move.

### Suffolk County Special Groundwater Protection Area

Figure 19 shows the Central Suffolk Special Groundwater Protection Area (SGPA) boundaries in Riverhead. Article 55, Sole Source Aquifer Protection, of the New York State Environmental Conservation Law seeks to protect designated sole source aquifers and prevent contamination of high-quality groundwater. It sets forth an ambitious program of groundwater protection requirements, including preparing a comprehensive management plan. The requirements generally seek to identify all known existing and potential point and non-point sources of groundwater degradation and to develop specific watershed rules and regulations.

### Watershed and Water Resources Management

#### Riverhead Stormwater Management

In compliance with federal statute, Riverhead's Stormwater Management Office maintains a Stormwater Management Plan that informs the NYSDEC what measures the Town takes on an annual basis to mitigate the impact of stormwater runoff into the surrounding surface waters. Compliance reports are filed annually.

Chapter 275 of Riverhead's Town Code contains regulations for stormwater management that aim to mitigate the flow of non-point stormwater runoff into environmentally sensitive surface waters. Land development and redevelopment activities are subject to standards established by the New York State's Stormwater Design Manual. Best Management Practices (BMPs) are a set of available methods to reduce the volume and nutrient content in stormwater runoff. Certain BMPs are more appropriate for different soil types or contexts, particularly when considering BMPs developed for farms.

#### Agriculture Stewardship Program

Riverhead's Agricultural community is working closely with the Cornell Cooperative Extension to reduce nutrient runoff from farms. Best Management Practices have been proposed by Cornell and the Nature Conservancy to minimize the use of fertilizers and pesticides through Best Management Practices. Costs are driving the reduction in volume of application of these artificial inputs, but combined with newer technologies (e.g., precision planting, robotics in direct application of chemicals, artificial intelligence, and Big Data for management) the agricultural community will continue to minimize the collateral damage of toxins overall. In addition, improving soil health through cover cropping, crop rotation, organic composting and other methods will increase the absorption of rain- and stormwater and help to alleviate runoff. Approaches that farmers are already taking in Riverhead, include:

- Nutrient Management Techniques: Farmers improve nutrient management practices by applying nutrients (fertilizer and manure) in the right amount, at the right time of year, with the right method and with the right placement. This can significantly reduce how much fertilizer reaches water bodies.
- Conservation Tillage. Farmers on Long Island utilize "no till" practices in addition to adding compost and organic matter back into the soil to help preserve nutrients and better drainage of soils. However, not all crops allow for no till agriculture and there are many regulations that make composting inefficient.
- Ensuring Year-Round Ground Cover: Farmers plant cover crops or perennial species to prevent periods of bare ground on farm fields when the soil (and the soil and nutrients it contains) are most susceptible to erosion and loss into waterways. The Soil and Water district

has done numerous programs and aids farmers to help find better and more advanced systems of cover cropping to recapture and reuse any nitrogen that may be in the fields.

- Planting Field Buffers: Farmers plant trees, shrubs, and grasses along the edges of fields; this is especially important for a field that borders water bodies. Planted buffers can help prevent nutrient loss from fields by absorbing or filtering out nutrients before they reach a water body.

#### Suffolk County Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan (2015)

This plan provides an analysis of the County's water quality, quantity, availability, and challenges. It sets goals in four significant categories: groundwater resource management, drinking water supply, surface water resource management, and wastewater management.

#### Suffolk County Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan (2020)

The Suffolk County Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan (SWP) was developed in response to the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan as part of the Reclaim Our Water initiative. Wastewater management options and recommendations explored in the SWP include connection of parcels to community sewers by expanding existing sewer districts or creating new sewer districts where possible, upgrading cesspools or conventional on-site sewage disposal systems to Innovative and Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (I/A OWTS), and requiring nitrogen-reducing technology on all new construction countywide. The plan indicates where nitrogen loads originate and how to minimize loadings and provides parcel-level recommendations for land preservation.

### Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP)

Through a Partnership between NYS DEC, the Long Island Regional Planning Council (LIRPC), and Suffolk and Nassau Counties, LINAP aims to reduce nitrogen levels in Long Island's surface and ground waters. The Program was launched in 2015 and has four overarching goals:<sup>5</sup>

- Assess nitrogen pollution in Long Island waters,
- Identify sources of nitrogen to surface waters and groundwater,
- Establish nitrogen reduction endpoints (ecological endpoints are desirable conditions in surface waters),
- Develop an implementation plan to achieve reductions.

Ongoing initiatives of LINAP include the Nitrogen Smart Communities Program, septic incentive programs, development of alternative wastewater treatment systems, improvements to wastewater and sewer systems, groundwater monitoring, studying the sustainability of the aquifer, and subwatershed planning to assess the amount of nitrogen discharged into waters.

## SIGNIFICANT HABITATS

Riverhead's natural environment includes unique and highly productive ecosystems, some aquatic and some terrestrial. These ecosystems support diverse living species, including microscopic plants and animals, seaweed, fish and shellfish, crustaceans, birds, sea turtles, marine mammals, trees, flowing plants, insects, amphibians (such as the endangered tiger salamander), and mammals (including the endangered northern long-eared bat). Riverhead encompasses the Peconic Estuary watershed, contributing to one of the State's highest concentrations of rare plants and

animals, including federally endangered shorebirds like the Piping Plover and the Roseate Tern found on regional beaches.

The interconnectedness of these resources emphasizes the importance of protecting broader habitats when specific species are endangered or threatened. The safeguarding of native plants and animals promotes ecological diversity and sustainability, contributing to the community's scenic, educational, and scientific values. Additionally, native plants act as natural filters, purifying water that enters aquifers and water bodies, while their roots help mitigate excess stormwater, reducing the potential for groundwater contamination and risks to life and property. However, landscaping practices may introduce invasive or naturalizing species beyond the 'Do not sell' list that pose a threat to the delicate balance of native ecosystems, as their seeds can be easily transferred by wind, water, birds, or insects. For example, many of the hardy, deer-resistant plants favored by property owners are not native to Long Island and force deer to decimate the understory in forest, preventing native species, such as oaks from regenerating.

### New York Significant Coastal Habitats

The New York Department of State (NYSDOS) designates Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat sites (see Figure 20). Coastal habitats range from marshes, wetlands, mud and sandflats, beaches, rocky shores, riverine wetlands and riparian corridors, stream, bay, and harbor bottoms, creeks submerged aquatic vegetation beds, dunes, old fields, grasslands, and woodlands and forests.

### New York Natural Heritage Areas

Under the Environmental Conservation Law, the New York Natural Heritage Areas Program defines Significant Natural Communities as locations with "rare or high-quality wetlands, forests, grasslands, ponds, streams, and other types of habitats, ecosystems, and ecological areas." Figure 20 shows the communities identified and tracked by the New York Natural Heritage Program.

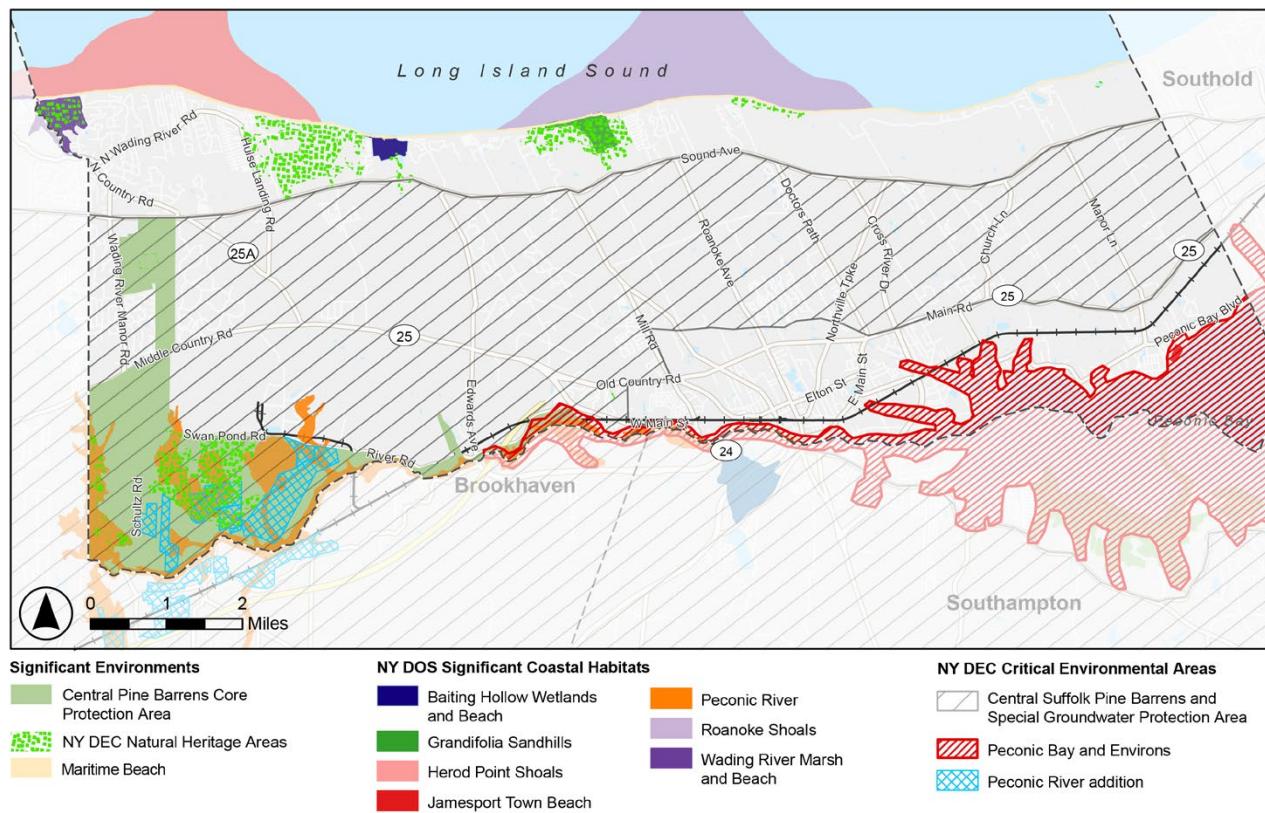
NYSDEC has an Endangered Species Program to track the State's endangered and threatened species. Natural Heritage Areas and their vicinity are habitats of endangered and threatened species. Some of Riverhead's significant natural communities are described below.

### Calverton Ponds Preserve

The Calverton Ponds Preserve, a 350-acre assemblage of pine barrens and coastal plain ponds, is an irreplaceable natural resource and is one of the rarest wetland ecosystems in the State. The Nature Conservancy and Suffolk County Parks cooperatively own and manage the preserve.

### Coastal Oak Beech Woodlands

The old-growth Coastal Oak Beech woodland is along the moraine that forms the Long Island shoreline. Rare Dwarf Beech woodlands are found in certain areas along the escarpment, such as Friar's Head and Wildwood State Park. The New York Natural Heritage Program has noted that this is the largest maritime beech forest in the State and one of three located along the East Coast. Beech Leaf Disease is a prevalent threat to these rare woodlands.



**FIGURE 20: SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS**

Source: NYS DOS, NYS DEC, Suffolk County, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

### Central Pine Barrens

Encompassing over 105,000 acres across Riverhead, Brookhaven, and Southampton, the Central Pine Barrens region (see Figure 21) is hailed as Long Island's paramount wilderness. Its significance extends to the watershed and headwaters of the Peconic River, overlapping with the Peconic Estuary and the proximity to Long Island Sound and the Atlantic Ocean and fostering a unique climate and biodiversity. Recognized for its globally rare dwarf pine plains, the

region hosts diverse flora and fauna, including the pitch pine tree species, oak varieties, and wetland plants found exclusively on Long Island. Regular wildfires, intrinsic to the Pine Barrens, release nutrients that trigger new growth and maintain the balance of the ecosystem, providing habitats for animal communities and serving as breeding grounds for migratory birds.

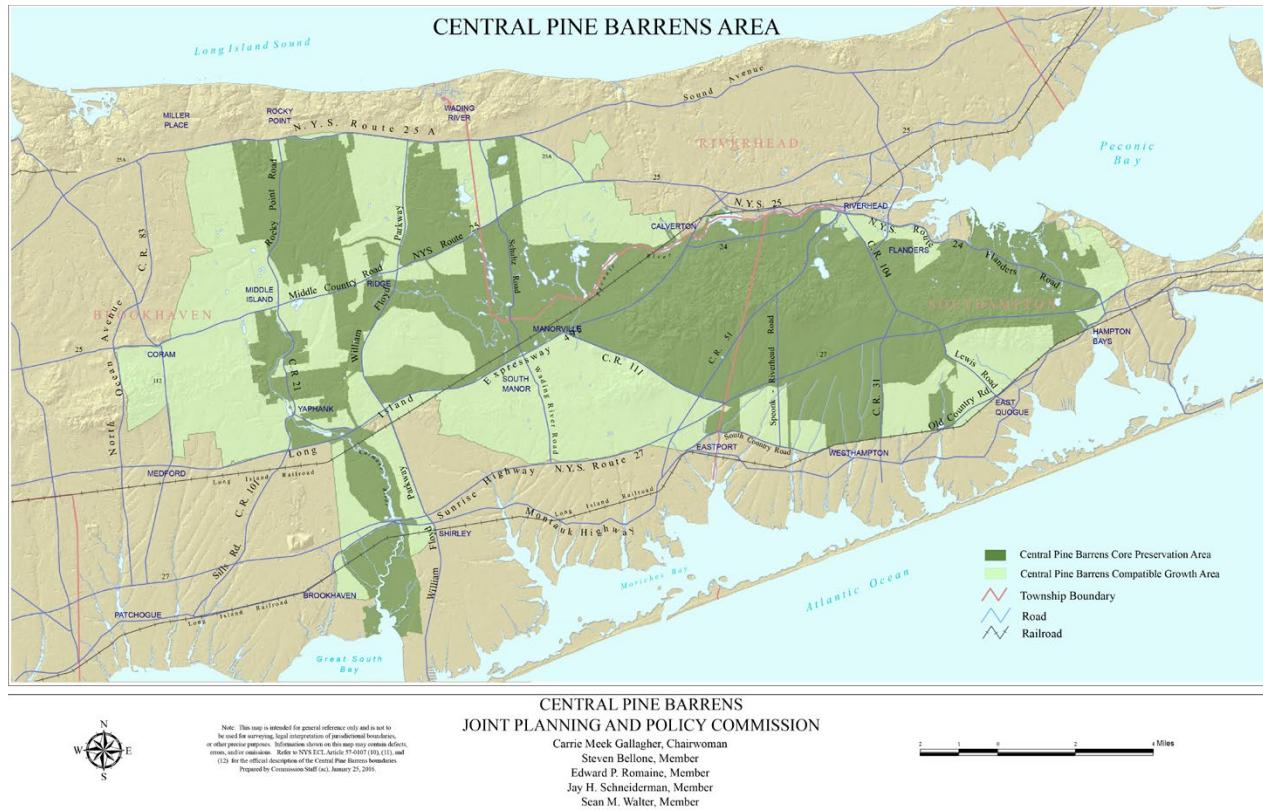
Situated above Long Island's federally designated sole-source drinking water aquifer system, the Pine Barrens' porous soils facilitate groundwater recharge

through deep flow recharge. This aquifer, crucial for Long Island residents' clean drinking water, is susceptible to contamination due to the soils' high permeability, which hampers the ability to filter contaminants effectively. Recognizing the Central Pine Barrens' importance, laws and policies at the County, State, and federal levels have been enacted to shield it from the adverse impacts of development. Much of the land within the region has been preserved through acquisitions by governmental entities and nonprofit organizations, reflecting a collective commitment to its enduring protection.

### Central Pine Barrens Commission and Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Established in 1993, the Central Pine Barrens Commission operates under the mandate of the Long Island Pine Barrens Protection Act, requiring the development of a Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) with a five-year review cycle. The inaugural CLUP was crafted in 1995, and proposed amendments to chapters 4-6 are anticipated for adoption in 2024.<sup>6</sup>

The CLUP identifies two regions within the Central Pine Barrens — the Core Preservation Area and the Compatible Growth Area — shown in Figure 4. The Core Preservation Area consists of 55,000 acres (4,720 in Riverhead), in which all new development is essentially prohibited, with limited expansion of existing agricultural uses being permitted. The Compatible Growth Area consists of 47,500 acres (5,484 in Riverhead), in which appropriate patterns of compatible residential, commercial, agricultural, and industrial development are permitted. The Calverton redevelopment policy under section 9.2 of the CLUP recognizes that economic development on the former Calverton Naval Industrial Reserve Plant property, known as EPCAL, is a public improvement and is not considered "development," as defined in the Pine



**FIGURE 21: CENTRAL PINE BARRENS CORE PRESERVATION AREA AND COMPATIBLE GROWTH AREA**

Source: Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission

Barrens Protection Act. This policy effectively exempts the area from additional restrictions on development that are otherwise imposed on areas within the Core Preservation Area.

The CLUP includes a strategy for the public acquisition of private vacant property in the Core Preservation Area, with a goal of purchasing 75% of the remaining privately owned vacant land. To this end, a type of development rights transfer program called the Pine Barrens Credit (PBC) program has been created.

Property owners in the Core Preservation Area may transfer the right to develop a parcel in the Core to another parcel outside the Pine Barrens region.

The Pine Barren's PBC program does not compete with Riverhead's TDR Program. PBC allows for the purchase of additional sanitary credits. TDRs increase allowable development through increases in dwelling units, or FAR. Sometimes, these two programs can be used in conjunction with each other.

## TOPOGRAPHY AND SOILS

The characteristics of landforms determine those areas best suited for agricultural use and areas unsuitable for development, such as steep slopes and eroding bluffs.

### Topography

Riverhead's elevation ranges from 230 feet above sea level to sea level, and its topography is characterized by a rolling landscape, flat lands, and coastal bluffs. Figure 22 shows a map of steep slopes in Riverhead. Topography is largely created by the following: the advance and retreat of glaciers formed these natural features thousands of years ago; the weathering action of rain that erodes the landscape over time; the movement of soil particles through the landscape by rivers and streams; and the shifting of landforms created by the movement of large water bodies, particularly those with tides.

Riverhead's north shore has a hilly ridge known as the Harbor Hill moraine, which runs along the northern edge of Long Island Sound. Along the southern edge of the Town, just south of the Peconic River, is a second ridge known as the Ronkonkoma moraine. Between these two ridges is a broad, flat outwash plain that characterizes most of Riverhead's land and provides prime agricultural soils in its core.

## Soils

Figure 5 shows a pattern of prime agricultural soils and soils that are suitable for farming in Riverhead based on the USDA Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO).<sup>7</sup> Categories used to describe the farmland suitability of different soil types and descriptions of soil types in this section are adapted from Soil Survey of Suffolk County, New York, and the USDA-NRCS Official Soil Series Descriptions.<sup>8</sup>

### Prime farmland

Prime farmland areas comprise approximately 29% of Riverhead's total land area. These areas are characterized by deep, well-drained, moderately coarse-textured soils with moderate to high available moisture capacity. These features make them well-suited for agriculture, and their ease of excavation makes them viable for housing and other development. In Riverhead, prime farmland soils are found in the outwash plain between the two moraines corresponding to the Town's existing agricultural regions.

### Farmland of statewide importance

Farmlands of statewide importance comprise 15% of Riverhead's total land area. These areas consist of deep, excessively drained, coarse-textured soils with low available moisture capacity. Farmland of statewide importance is often found on the outwash plain and steeper sloping areas along the moraines.

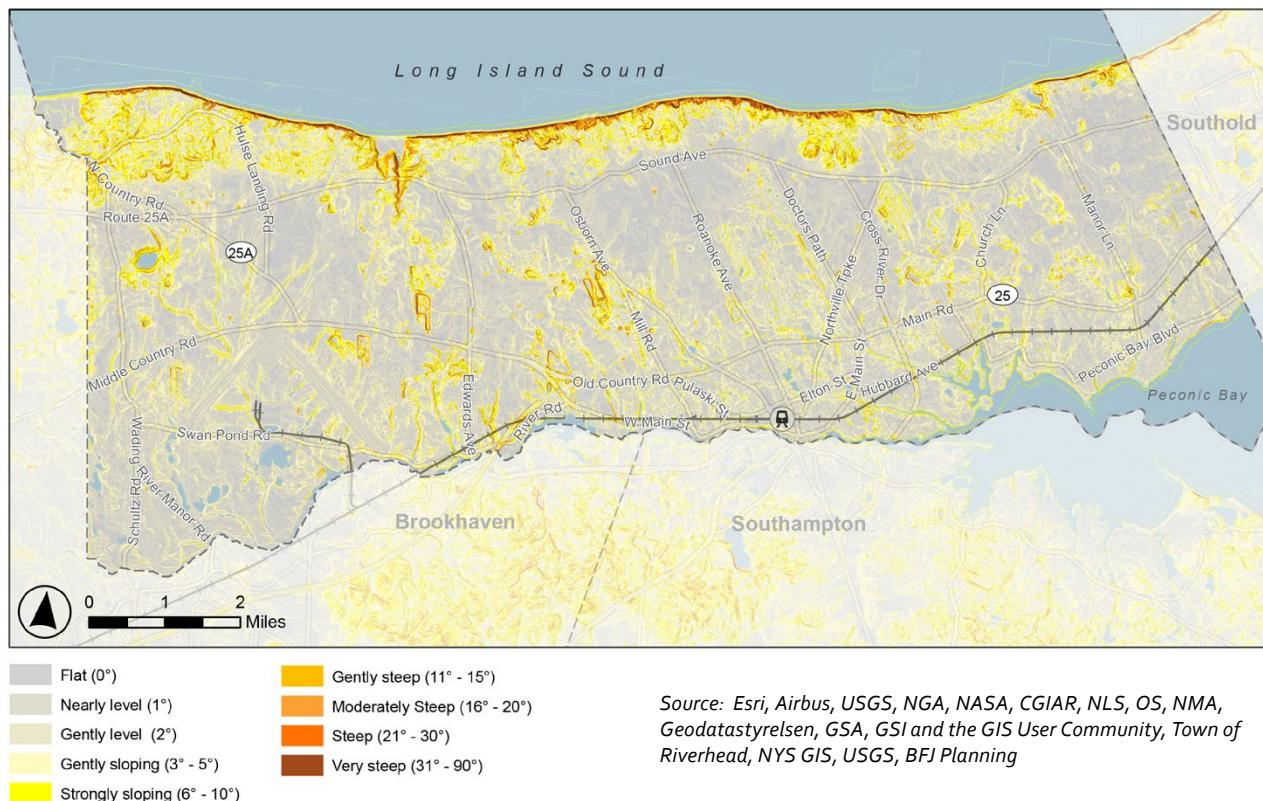


FIGURE 22: SLOPES

### Prime farmland if drained

The only area in this category found in Riverhead is mainly within the boundary of the North Fork Preserve (between Sound Avenue and Long Island Sound, north of Church Lane), a conservation area owned by

the County. Soils in this category are only well suited to crops if they are artificially drained but are better conserved as woodland areas.

<sup>7</sup> United States Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO), <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/data-and-reports/soil-survey-geographic-database-ssurgo>

<sup>8</sup> United States Conservation Service, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975. Available on Google Books. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=QdgJAAAYAAJ&rdid=book-QdgJAAAYAAJ&rl=dot=1&pli=1>

United States Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Official Soil Series Descriptions (OSD), <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/data-and-reports/official-soil-series-descriptions-osd>

### Not prime farmland

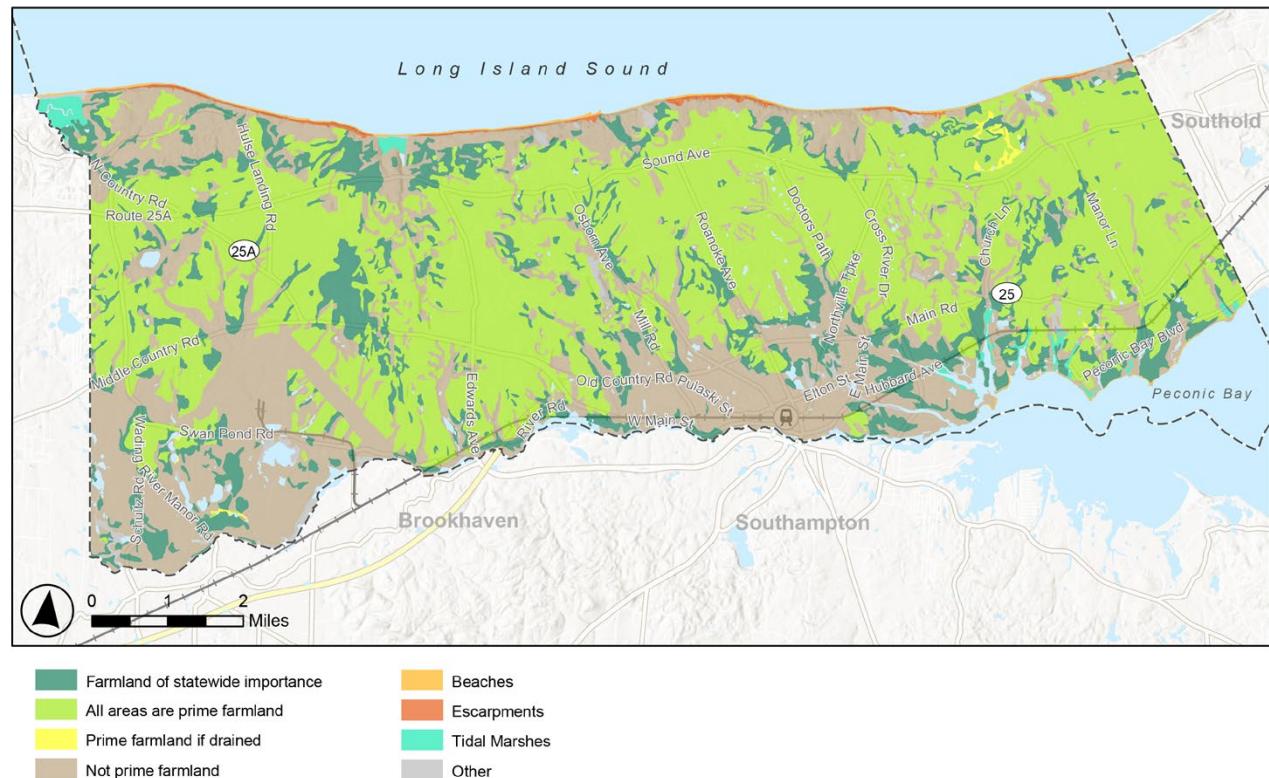
About a third of Riverhead's land area is not prime farmland. Two general areas of this category run east-west along the moraines to the north and south of the prime agricultural regions.

The area of Riverhead on the north shore, along the Harbor Hill moraine, is comprised of excessively well-drained coarse-textured soils. Steep slopes and the sandy texture of the soil make it unsuitable for farming, prone to erosion, and limited in development potential. Grading, loading, or clearing of woodlands can exacerbate erosion.

The rolling, hilly area in the south of Riverhead, bordering the Peconic River and Flanders Bay, has coarse-textured soil that drains rapidly, making it unsuitable for agriculture. In addition, steep slopes and high-water tables in areas also limit development. The rapid permeability of the soils can contribute to groundwater contamination.

Three incredibly fragile soil types are found in small quantities in pockets or along Riverhead's coast.

- Beaches: Riverhead's beaches on the North Shore are gravelly and cobbly, while beaches on the bays are sandier. Measures should be taken to keep the beach wide enough to protect nearby dunes and uplands.
- Escarpments: Escarpment soils include bluffs with slopes greater than 35% that occur along the north shore of Riverhead. With such steep slopes, they are highly subject to erosion. Riverhead's escarpments generally lack vegetation and have large boulders embedded in them. Escarpments are habitats for some species of songbirds.
- Tidal Marsh: Tidal marshes are shoreline areas not inundated by daily tide flow but subject to flooding during abnormally high moon or storm



**FIGURE 23: SOILS BY SUITABILITY FOR AGRICULTURE**

Source: NYS GIS, Suffolk County, Town of Riverhead, USGS, USDA, SSURGO, BFJ Planning

tides. Tidal marshes have layers of organic matter and pale gray or white sand. Tidal marshes are best suited to wildlife habitat.

### TOWN REGULATIONS AND PROGRAMS

#### Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)

Riverhead's Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) reviews applications for development activities within 150 feet of Town-designated Freshwater Wetlands and 300 feet of NYSDEC Tidal Wetlands, as regulated in Riverhead Town Code Sections 293 and 295.

While most of the applications relate to single-family residential development and the construction of related structures, there have been several significant applications that the CAC has reviewed that have a broader Town impact. For example, applications for development on the Peconic Bay require 10-foot buffers along bulkheads to prevent the introduction of nitrogen-based fertilizers into the Peconic Estuary.

### ***Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC)***

In 2018, the Town Board established the Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) to advise on the preservation, development, and use of natural and man-made features with consideration for beauty, quality, biological integrity, and other environmental factors. The EAC identifies threats posed to environmental quality and works to ensure long-term sustainability. Its mission is to serve as a resource for facilitating conservation and environmental stewardship by the Town and its residents through education, government policies, and incentives. The EAC has been instrumental in leading the Town's NYSDEC Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program, discussed further in the Sustainability and Resilience chapter.

### ***Community Preservation Fund***

As discussed in the Agriculture chapter, The Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Fund (CPF) is a public program managed by each of the five East End Towns to protect farmland, open space, and community character.

## **REGIONAL PARTNERS AND PROGRAMS**

The Town regularly collaborates with many regional partners to assist with environmental stewardship and sustainable resource management, including the following:

### ***Peconic Land Trust***

Since its founding in 1983, the trust has been dedicated to conserving and protecting the scenic beauty, farmlands, and natural resources of the Peconic Bay region. Through strategic land acquisitions, conservation easements, and community engagement initiatives, the Peconic Land Trust actively works to sustain the delicate balance between development and preservation.

### ***The Nature Conservancy***

The Nature Conservancy's work combats climate change, protects the oceans, land, and freshwater, and provides for food and water sustainability through research, partnerships, and actions. It has worked with Riverhead to acquire lands for protection and stewardship, including the Central Pine Barrens Preserve, Calverton Ponds Preserve, and Wading River Marsh Preserve.

### ***Cornell Cooperative Extension***

Cornell Cooperative Extension is a collaboration among Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and College of Human Ecology and local communities. The Suffolk County chapter is in Riverhead. Researchers, Educators, and volunteers are dedicated to preserving the heritage, protecting the ecosystems, and supporting the economy through research, training, and educational initiatives.

### ***New York Sea Grant***

Sea Grant is a program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). New York's Sea Grant partners with Stony Brook University to advance research in a variety of marine, aquatic and coastal topics. Sea Grant has been instrumental in examining the health of Long Island Sound and the Peconic Estuary, leading projects on fisheries and aquaculture, coastal ecosystems, coastal resiliency, and environmental justice.



*Peconic River  
Photos Courtesy of Joe Maiorana*



*Bluffs along Long Island Sound*

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *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.*

The Central Pine Barrens area and the aquifer beneath are among the Town's most critical natural resource areas from both a natural resource and public health point of view. The aquifer is part of a more extensive system providing millions of people drinking water. The State, County, Town, The Nature Conservancy, and others have acquired lands in the Pine Barrens Core Preservation Area for permanent preservation. Additionally, private property owners in these areas have transferred development rights through the PBC program.

#### **1.1. Continue to implement the Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan and meet its development standards and guidelines.**

Following the CLUP's directives is essential to help protect natural resources critical to Riverhead and the region for the long term. The CLUP is anticipated to be amended in 2024, and the EAC should review the update to identify necessary revisions to Riverhead's Community Preservation Project Plan and Town Code. As noted earlier, section 9.2 of the CLUP allows economic development in EPCAL without the development restrictions that are imposed elsewhere in the Core Preservation Area.

#### **1.2. Cooperate with local nonprofit organizations, the County, and the State working to acquire and protect lands in the Central Pine Barrens area.**

Encourage private property owners within the Core Preservation Area to use the Pine Barrens PBC program. Through a coordinated effort, the State, County, Town, or nonprofits should acquire any lands that become vacant or available for sale.

### *2. Protect the quality of ground water and surface waters throughout the Town.*

Watershed management is essential for protecting and preserving the Town's water resources, including groundwater and surface water. Stormwater runoff, fertilizer and pesticide usage, improper disposal of hazardous waste, household chemicals, and pharmaceuticals, and sanitary systems contribute to water quality issues. Nitrogen pollution is one of the most significant concerns for Riverhead and the Long Island region. Poor surface water quality leads to the loss of habitats for plant and animal species and the closure of waters for swimming or shell-fishing due to biotoxins.

Groundwater quality and quantity are essential for safe and sustainable access to drinking water. Groundwater pollution, saltwater intrusion, rising sea levels, and future water supply demands all impact the aquifer's ability to provide drinking water.

#### **2.1. Consider the creation of a Comprehensive Water Management Plan With identified targets**

The Plan should establish targets to address issues raised in the Suffolk County Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan and identify specific water quality improvement and nitrogen (or other contaminant) load reduction targets that will provide the Town better funding access.

#### **2.2. Encourage the use of I/A Systems and work to limit inputs of nitrogen, other nutrients, and toxic materials from sewage treatment plants.**

Suffolk County's Septic Improvement Program and New York State Septic System Replacement Programs give homeowners grants and low-interest financing options to transition to Innovative and Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (I/A OWTS or I/A). The Town should inform property owners about these grants and waive or reduce permit fees for installing I/A systems to incentivize their use.

The Town should ensure that in all areas where wastewater is discharged to the ground (i.e., septic systems, constructed wetlands, and package treatments plants) are built with the appropriate densities and are designed to prevent nitrogen contamination of groundwater or surface water. Wastewater treatment is discussed further in the Infrastructure and Utilities chapter.

### 2.3. Encourage the use of Permeable Reactive Barriers and other means of cleaning contaminated groundwater.

Permeable reactive barriers are an inexpensive method to trap a range of contaminants. They can be used on brownfield sites, properties near the Central Pine Barrens Special Groundwater Protection Area, shoreline properties, and other locations where groundwater contamination is present.

### 2.4. Improve enforcement of requirements for proper waste discharge from boats and houseboats and evaluate the need for additional pump-out facilities or vessels.

Boating is a popular recreational attraction in Riverhead. Boats are required to discharge wastewater into the sewer connections available at Town docks; municipal pump out stations are at the East Creek marina and at the downtown municipal dock. To minimize the potential for boats improperly discharging their wastewater directly into the Sound and Peconic Estuary, the Town has acquired multiple marine pump-out vessels.

The Town should evaluate whether pump-out vessels and stations are adequate and if more facilities are needed. It should also notify houseboat owners about requirements for wastewater holding and disposal systems.

### 2.5. Develop a best practice manual that instructing owners and operators about proper vessel discharge practices.

Through a partnership with Sea Grant, the Bay Constable, and the Parks and Recreation Department, the Town should develop a manual outlining appropriate vessel discharge with resources for more information.

### 2.6. Carry out dredging projects where needed.

Determine whether flushing, dredging, and other improvements can improve small water bodies adjacent to the Sound and Peconic Bay, including Baiting Hollow, Iron Pier, Wading River and Creek, Wading River Duck Ponds and East Creek Marina or other docking facilities in Riverhead.

## 3. *Limit future increases in impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff to help reduce flood impacts and surface water pollution.*

Climate change is anticipated to bring increased an increased frequency and intensity of storms, which will require improvements to existing stormwater infrastructure. Reducing the coverage of impervious surfaces will also enable the ground to absorb rainwater. Constant vigilance is required by the Town's engineering and highway departments to keep infrastructure in working order and to proactively maintain and enhance the system when needed.

Based on observations and discussions with the Town's Highway Department, a continual maintenance issue is runoff from fields during heavy rain events. There are locations where highway crews must be dispatched on a continual basis to remove muddy runoff from the roadway surfaces. Chronically flooded roadways pose safety issues for motorists and increase the need for roadway repair and maintenance. Several chronic flooding locations have been identified:

- Sound Avenue east of Edwards Avenue, in the vicinity of Owens' Landscaping
- Manor Road, Calverton

- Roanoke Avenue, north of Joyce Drive
- Doctors Path north of NY25
- Reeves Avenue west of Old Vine Road
- Reeves Avenue between Horton Avenue and Roanoke Avenue
- Peconic Bay Boulevard across from the Town beach parking lot
- Sound Avenue just east of Hulse Landing Road
- Edwards Avenue approximately a half-mile south of Sound Avenue
- Horton Avenue in the vicinity Reeves Avenue

### 3.1. Continue to update regulations, ensuring they incorporate the latest stormwater best management practices (BMPs).

Riverhead should revise its Town Code (§301-231) the Town Code to increase stormwater storage capacities in parking areas to mitigate overflow and flooding. For projects that do not need a SWP, increasing the required storage capacity for self-contained stormwater management is recommended to be consistent with the International Building Code.

### 3.2. Reevaluate Impervious coverage limits in commercial zones.

Since the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, Riverhead's Zoning Code has been revised to include impervious surface coverage limits. The Town should reduce coverage limits in commercial zones and encourage pervious surfaces and stormwater runoff improvements. On Route 58, the Town should consider reducing parking requirements (to meet current industry standards), and developing design guidelines to require landscaped islands and other green areas. Recommendations for design guidelines and landscaping on Route 58 are also discussed in the Economic Development chapter.

### 3.3. Continue maintenance of Town-owned drainage systems.

Riverhead's engineering and highway departments are always working to improve the performance of the Town-owned stormwater management system. The Town files an annual Stormwater Management Plan with the NYSDEC that outlines priorities for the coming year. The condition of 52 outfalls is periodically checked and controlled to prevent pollution of Flanders Bay, Peconic Bay and River, Meeting House Creek, and Terry's Creek. Property owners are required to control the discharge of stormwater to the street. In addition, Riverhead has approximately 2,300 catch basins; the Highway Department cleans about 200 of them per year and repairs catch basins and manholes as needed.

### 3.4. Investigate chronic flooding locations, design, and install drainage infrastructure as appropriate.

Solutions should include conventional mitigation measures that accommodate stormwater once it has reached the roadways, but should also consider innovative measures that serve to mitigate flooding but can also increase runoff reabsorption by the soil prior to the run-off reaching the roadway. These measures are particularly appropriate where high groundwater might preclude a more conventional solution. Leaching basins can be deployed in isolated locations with or without measures to reduce sedimentation, petroleum-based contamination from automobiles, and other impacts. The Town should consider connected systems, with or without recharge basins for larger areas. In addition, innovative solutions including rain gardens and other means of delaying runoff to allow for additional time for stormwater to recharge into the aquifer can be considered.

### 3.5. Continue to implement and develop best management practices for stormwater runoff that are tailored to the unique conditions of working farms in Riverhead.

Farmers are collaborating with the Cornell Cooperative Extension to address impacts of stormwater runoff from agricultural lands. Strategies include:

- Adopting Nutrient Management Techniques
- Conservation Tillage
- Ensuring Year-Round Ground Cover
- Planting Field Buffers

### 4. Conserve coastal features, including bluffs, shoreline, and dunes.

Riverhead has seen its coastline recede year after year. Changing sea levels, increasing storm frequency and surges, clearing of trees, and development near Long Island Sound and Peconic Estuary have all contributed to the erosion of bluffs and the coastline and other hazards.

#### 4.1. Clarify and strengthen the Coastal Erosion Hazard Area (CEHA) regulations.

The Town needs to have a more definitive way of determining if development is permitted under 219-14 B (Bluff Area Restrictions) of the Town Code. While the Planning Board is responsible for reviewing and approving the 219 application, any development not listed in section 219-14 B requires relief from the

Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), which is designated the Coastal Erosion Hazard Board of Review in Chapter 105.

Additional guidance could be added to the code for the ZBA to reference when reviewing applications in coastal erosion hazard areas. The Town should clarify the definitions within Chapter 219 and define when applications for development would require relief from the ZBA. For example, the CEHA line and top of bluff/point of inflection are not always the same.

#### 4.2. Advocate for DEC to update Coastal Erosion Hazard Area (CEHA) Maps and adopt a map and regulations for the Peconic Estuary coast.

The Town should work with DEC to encourage the State to update the CEHA map for Riverhead. New York State Law requires the commissioner review the boundaries the CEHA every 10 years.<sup>9</sup> However, Riverhead's CEHA map has not been updated for over 30 years, despite clear erosion along the bluffs and beaches on the Long Island Sound and anticipated erosion due to sea level rise and climate change. In addition, the Town's regulations only apply to the Long Island Sound Coastline. As coastal erosion is occurring and further anticipated on the Peconic Bay coastline, The Town should work with DEC to establish a CEHA map and adopt regulations for these areas.

#### 4.3. Track receding bluffs and shoreline.

Lidar data could be used to map and track where the land is receding along the coastline and bluffs. This information would be useful for the public, Planning Board, and ZBA when making decisions about development on coastal properties.

<sup>9</sup> The New York State Senate, Consolidated Laws of New York, Chapter 43-B Environmental Conservation, Article 34 Coastal Erosion Hazard Areas, Section 34-0104.

## 5. Protect and restore environmentally sensitive lands, wetlands, and marine habitats.

Animal and plant communities, wetlands, and marine habitats are critical to Riverhead and the region's ecosystems. For example, trees improve air quality, reduce stormwater runoff, provide habitat for wildlife, and enhance property values. Significant threats to Riverhead's environment include the loss of trees, displacement of species caused by development, disconnected wildlife habitat areas, spread of invasive species, coastal erosion, alterations in hydrology, and climate change.

There is a need for more local knowledge and resources to address on-the-ground conditions in Riverhead. Fortunately, several regional institutions and conservation organizations are studying habitats and implementing restorative measures, including The Nature Conservancy, Peconic Estuary Partnership, Long Island Sound Study, Save the Sound, Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program, and Stony Brook Sea Grant.

### 5.1. Strengthen enforcement of tree clearing.

The Town has guidelines for permissible tree clearing; however, they are sometimes ignored when properties are redeveloped. Improved monitoring and enforcement is needed to ensure compliance, promote sustainable development practices, and maintain Riverhead's forest.

### 5.2. Conduct a tree inventory to assess the health and condition of the Town's forest.

This inventory would identify the types and locations of trees throughout the community and help the Town make informed decisions about tree management and preservation. The inventory would focus on trees along roadways as well as in Town-owned open spaces. The tree survey would also help with policy and funding for tree replacement and replenishment in connection with land development projects and property transfers. The Open Space Committee could assist the Town with the tree inventory, identifying open space sites and assessing them for tree replanting or planting.

### 5.3. Document and protect wildlife corridors.

This study would help to document scattered wildlife areas and determine how to connect and preserve them. The study could identify preservation mechanisms, such as easements, and make the Planning Board aware of them when reviewing site plans.

### 5.4. Establish formal standards around water bodies and wetlands.

Guidelines for permitted development in regulated areas should be clarified in the Town code to help property owners and the Conservation Advisory Council with review of proposals. For example, guidelines could establish different standards for the distance from wetlands for lawn areas, structures, and sanitary systems. The Town should review wetlands and non-disturbance buffer areas alongside its efforts to inventory and map wetlands and collaborate on wetlands restoration.

### 5.5. Comprehensively inventory and map wetlands.

To supplement the County and State wetlands maps that rely on satellite or aerial data sources, Riverhead should incorporate on-the-ground field surveys, vegetation and soil sampling, and hydrology assessments to provide updated information to inform wetland protection and restoration decisions. The Town's Freshwater Wetlands Inventory was last updated in 1979. Wetlands boundaries have likely shifted since that time and mapping and documentary technologies have improved substantially.

### 5.6. Partner with environmental conservation groups and experts on a wetlands restoration initiative.

The comprehensive wetland inventory and mapping process could be part of a wetlands restoration plan that the Town could develop with experts at conservation organizations and educational institutions.

### 5.7. Encourage sustainable fishing and shell fishing practices.

The Town could work with the Conservation Advisory Committee and Sea Grant to develop educational materials that inform anglers about sustainable practices, such as use of bycatch reducing gear and bird friendly fishing lines, and shell recycling.

### 5.8. Continue to support and collaborate with the State, County, and institutions to protect significant coastal habitats and critical environmental areas.

There are nine NYDOS-designated significant coastal habitats and several NYDEC-designated critical environmental areas in Riverhead. The Town should continue to follow the State's recommendations and support efforts of partner institutions, such as The Nature Conservancy, Peconic Estuary Partnership,

Save the Sound, Cornell Cooperative Extension Marine Program, and Sea Grant that are working toward this goal.

### 5.9. Partner with East End Towns to share Community Preservation Funds (CPF) to protect critical environments of the Peconic Estuary.

The Peconic Estuary is a regional resource and protecting lands along this significant environment is critical to the long-term health of all East End communities and habitats. A percentage of CPF revenues collected in each East End town could be allocated for joint acquisition of parcels identified in the Critical Lands Protection Strategy (CLPS), regardless of what Town collected the funds. The East End towns share the responsibility for protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary. Together, the towns should consider Flanders, Little Peconic, and Great Peconic Bays as shared open space and acquisition of the CLPS parcels is critical for the enhancement, protection, and stewardship of these resources. These lands could be eligible for protection as enhancement of community character.

### 6. Encourage eco-friendly landscaping and maintenance techniques.

Eco-friendly landscaping projects include planting native plant species; removing invasive species; and creating pollinator gardens, rain gardens, and bioswales. Native species enhance the local ecosystem, provide food sources to native animals and microorganisms, require less irrigation, and are easier to grow. Nature-based stormwater management techniques, such as rain gardens, are an attractive solution that property owners can easily implement and help reduce flooding, filter pollutants, and recharge groundwater.

### 6.1. Establish and showcase best practices for eco-friendly landscaping and stormwater management on public property.

The Town, Highway Department, and relevant committees should identify appropriate locations to implement eco-friendly landscaping projects, train Town landscaping staff to maintain them, and recruit volunteers to help. Landscaping materials and plants should be sourced from local nurseries and farms. The Town should remove invasive species from Town owned properties and revegetate those areas with native plants. The Town should also continue to encourage County and State agencies to plant native species alongside roadways or in roadway medians where they have jurisdiction. There are also grant opportunities to fund the landscaping of Town-owned properties.

### 6.2. Inform private property owners about available grants and programs to implement their own eco-friendly gardens and green infrastructure.

Grants and programs through Suffolk County, Long Island Regional Planning Council, Long Island Sound Study, and Peconic Estuary Partnership are available for interventions such as rain barrels and gardens. The Town could also provide incentives to encourage homeowner participation.

### 6.3. Work with nonprofit and academic institutions to develop an educational campaign promoting best practices for natural resource conservation.

An educational campaign could include a manual, website, channel 22 broadcasting, and programming targeted at residents, property owners, businesses, and developers. It should address stormwater management; encourage the use of native species; discourage the use of invasive plants; provide best practices to reduce the use of fertilizer, herbicide, and pesticide; discuss laws regarding environmental protection (e.g., wetland and hazardous waste disposal regulations); encourage sustainable practices such as water and energy conservation, waste reduction, and on-site nitrogen reduction systems; and provide information on government grants and other incentives.

The Town could work with Cornell Cooperative Extension and other organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy and the Long Island chapter of the Wild Ones<sup>10</sup>, on this initiative. Many relevant resources have already been developed, such as Cornell Cooperative's Long Island Horticulture Guide. Information should be posted on the Town's website.

<sup>10</sup> Wild Ones is a national nonprofit organization that promotes the many benefits of landscaping using native plants such as wildflowers, shrubs, trees, and grasses.

## ***7. Increase the Town's administrative capacity for natural resource conservation efforts.***

The Town needs more staff with specialized knowledge and skills in environmental and natural resource conservation and the ability to coordinate and enforce environmental policies. Monitoring of open space areas is required to ensure that wetland and water buffer areas, CEHAs, and open space set-asides in cluster subdivisions are not being cleared, developed, or otherwise inappropriately used. The State also requires the Town's help to enforce the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Regional projects related to natural resource conservation efforts must be coordinated between government agencies, research institutions, conservation organizations, and Town committees.

### ***7.1. Provide the human resources necessary to help implement the goals and recommendations of this chapter.***

An Environmental Planner or similar position within the Planning Department would help the Town coordinate environmental and natural resource conservation efforts with other entities.

### ***7.2. Improve enforcement of environmental regulations in Riverhead.***

Improved enforcement capabilities are needed for all environmental regulations contained in the Town Code, as well as enforcement of the State's Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, while ongoing monitoring is needed of protected environmental and open space areas.

Riverhead should consider employing an additional Code Enforcement Officer to work exclusively on the environmental regulations and covenant restrictions. The Town should review penalties for violations and application fees to ensure that they are effective and can offset enforcement costs.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 8 PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND RECREATION

This chapter discusses the Town's parks and open space resources and presents strategies to safeguard and enhance them for generations to come. Riverhead has a variety of unique parks, recreational facilities, and beaches that are linked by a network of wooded lanes, open space, and farmland. The Town is fortunate to have over 22 miles of shoreline, including one of the largest spans along Long Island Sound. A large portion of Enterprise Park at Calverton and adjacent areas are part of the Central Pine Barrens Core Preservation Area. Riverhead also has County and State parks, golf courses, and camping, hunting, boating, and other recreational facilities.

As Riverhead experiences more development, expansion and enhancement of the park system is critical to maintaining the Town's quality of life. Parks provide balance to built-up areas, adding to the visual character and quality of life in the community and enhancing property values. The Town should expand and improve parks throughout Riverhead and should establish a greenway system that connects parks and open spaces. This includes improved access to waterfront areas for recreational purposes, including the Peconic River, Flanders Bay, the Great Peconic Bay, and Long Island Sound. It also includes improved accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### PARKS

#### Riverhead Parks

Riverhead has 26 parks, over 150 acres of Town-owned parkland, and a dozen public waterfront access points (see Figure 24). These resources include neighborhood parks, sports amenities, memorials, and beaches. Neighborhood parks, such as Horton Avenue Park, Unity Drive Park, Millbrook Gables Park, and Two Bears Park, offer basketball courts, grill and picnic areas, and playgrounds. Grangebel Park, also known as Milton Burns Park, is a picturesque riverside destination in historic downtown Riverhead. Grumman Memorial Park and World Trade Center Memorial offer places of quiet reflection. The Town has three public beaches on Long Island Sound, Wading River Beach, Reeves Beach, and Iron Pier Beach. Some of Riverhead's significant parks are described in more detail below.

#### Veterans Memorial Park

The 93-acre park, which opened in 2013, features softball and baseball fields, bocce ball and pickleball courts, a playground, dog park, concession stand, picnic areas, and nature trails. The park provides access to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Recreational Trail (see below).

#### Vietnam Veterans Memorial Recreational Trail

This 9.2-mile off-road path loops around Enterprise Park and connects Veterans Memorial Park, Grumman Memorial Park, the New York State Route 25 Bike Route, and the County Route 94 Bike Path. The trail encourages biking, walking, running, and other non-motorized means of transportation. Completion of

the first 3 miles was completed in 2008. After several more years of advocacy efforts by the Riverhead Alternative Transportation Committee, an extension was completed in 2019. The project was partially funded through a New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation grant. The Wells family cemetery is situated between the recreation trail and River Road and was recently restored through an Eagle Scout project.

#### Stotzky Park

Stotzky Memorial Park offers a range of sports fields and courts, picnic areas, Wesley Dean Ackley Skate Park, a fitness trail equipped with exercise stations, and several other amenities.

#### Grangebel Park (also known as Milton Burns Park)

This riverside park is in historic downtown Riverhead and features paths, benches, and an outdoor art gallery with statues from local artists.

#### Police Officers Memorial Park (formerly Bayberry Park)

This 7-acre park in Wading River features multi-purpose fields, tennis and basketball courts, a playground, a grill and picnic area, and other amenities.

#### Wading River Duck Ponds

Most of this park (about 90%) falls within the Town of Brookhaven, but a portion of it is in Riverhead. Brookhaven has carried out several improvement projects on the Duck Ponds to address issues of flooding and pollution, including dredging and stormwater improvements to prevent runoff and pollutants from contaminating the water. However,

most drainage issues occur within Riverhead's jurisdiction. While Riverhead has previously applied for grant funding to contribute to drainage and bulkhead improvements at the Duck Ponds, these applications have not been successful. The Duck Ponds provide a passive environment with paths and benches, but are activated every summer with Duck Pond Day, a festival that began in 1994 and includes a 5k, parade, and street fair.

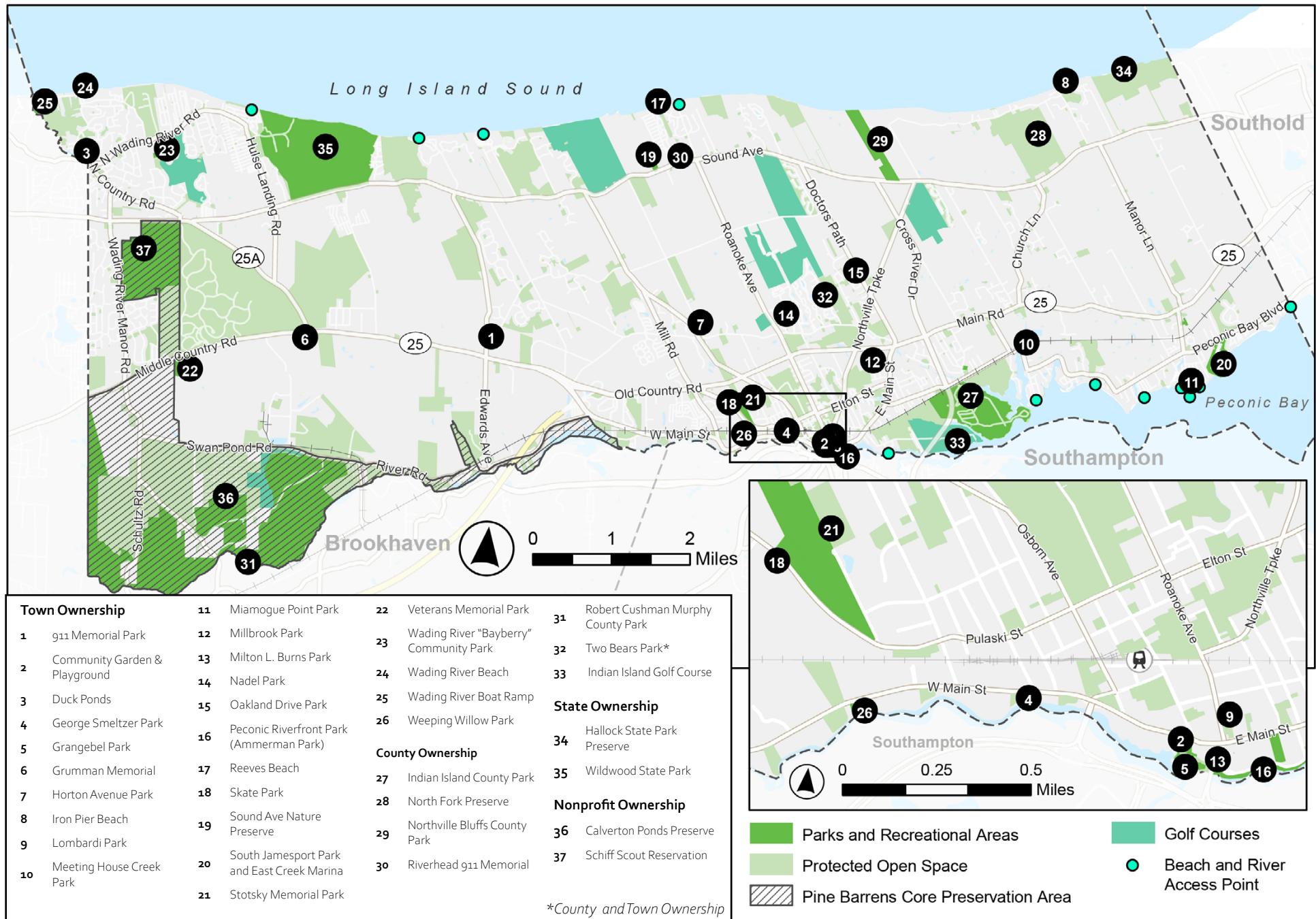
#### Town Beaches

Riverhead has three public beaches on Long Island Sound: Iron Pier Beach, Reeves Beach, and Wading River Beach. Iron Pier Beach offers scenic water views, playgrounds, and picnic areas. Reeves Beach provides a tranquil setting with a gazebo and picnic spots and allows 4x4 access during designated times. Wading River Beach, farthest west, features swimming, restrooms, a playground, 4x4 access, and a boat ramp. In addition, Riverhead has two Town beaches on the Peconic Bay: South Jamesport Beach and Miamogue Point.

#### East Creek Marina

The Marina is owned by the Town of Riverhead. Access to the marina is limited to resident boatowners with current slip leases. Residents with appropriate permits purchased from the Town may launch their boats at the East Creek boat ramp which is across the creek from the marina.

### Parks and Recreation



**FIGURE 24: OPEN SPACE, PARKS, AND RECREATIONAL AREAS**

Source: Town of Riverhead, Suffolk County, Peconic Land Trust, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

## Department

Riverhead's Parks and Recreation Department conducts annual inspections of all its parks and recreational facilities to assess their needs, and annually reviews and revises the Town's Parks and Recreation Department five-year capital plan. Proactively staying ahead of trends, the department engages in meetings with other towns, conducts research, and seeks feedback from Riverhead residents.

In an effort to enhance accessibility and streamline processes for Town residents, the Department actively explores new technologies. This includes facilitating easier access to permits, schedules, and activity sign-ups. The integration of social media has become indispensable for the Department, serving as a vital tool for connecting with Town residents.

## Adopt-a-Park Program

This program serves as a platform to actively engage the community in preserving the cleanliness and appeal of Riverhead's parks and beaches. Residents, resident groups, and organizations are encouraged to "adopt" specific sections within these recreational areas. Adopters commit to conducting litter and debris cleanup, promptly reporting any safety concerns or maintenance needs, and engaging in manual labor activities. While routine inspections and maintenance are carried out by the Parks and Buildings & Grounds Departments, adopting groups and individuals provide additional care and attention to these locations.

## Suffolk County Parks

Riverhead has six parks and one golf course owned by the County. Indian Island County Park is a 275-acre estuarine park at the mouth of the Peconic River that offers campgrounds, beaches, and hiking trails. The Robert Cushman Murphy County Park provides hiking trails in the unique ecosystem of the Central Pine

Barrens. Other county parks include Northville Bluffs County Park, the North Fork Preserve, and the public golf course at Indian Island.

## New York State Parks

There are two state parks: Wildwood State Park and Hallock State Park. Wildwood State Park, located in Wading River, spans over 600 acres and offers campsites, hiking and biking trails, and beachfront access to Long Island Sound. The Hallock State Park Preserve land was acquired by the State from KeySpan Energy in 2002 and opened to the public in 2017 after over 15 years of conservation and planning work. It comprises approximately 220 acres in Northville and primarily serves as a nature preserve while offering public trails and a beach.

## Other Private Recreation

### Golf Courses

Riverhead has eight privately-owned golf and country clubs that provide outdoor recreational space. Both 18-hole and 9-hole courses are available. These include Cherry Creek Links / The Woods at Cherry Creek, Long Island National Golf Club, Swan Lake Golf Club, Baiting Hollow Golf Club, The Rock Golf Club, Friar's Head, Sandy Pond Links, and the Vineyards Golf and Country Club.

A ninth private golf course, Calverton Links, closed in 2013 and has been redeveloped as a solar farm. Golf continues to be a popular sport that attracts visitors to Riverhead, and it seems unlikely that additional courses will close in the near term. Most golf courses in the Town are in residentially zoned areas that would require cluster subdivisions with open space set-asides if they were to be redeveloped.

## Private Marinas and Yacht Clubs

There are several marinas and clubs offering private boat slips, docking services, and water recreation activities. Notable examples include Treasure Cove Resort Marina, Lighthouse Marina, and Great Peconic Bay Marina. Riverhead Moose Lodge and Riverhead Yacht Club provide docking facilities for members.

### splash splash

Splash Splash is a large privately owned water park open to the public with paid admission. It is a popular entertainment destination, drawing visitors from around the region with its array of water slides, wave pools, and other aquatic attractions, making it the largest water park on Long Island and one of the largest in New York State.

## OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

Because of Riverhead's precious natural features and rich agricultural lands, many programs and regulations have been implemented to preserve open space permanently. These are meant to protect significant natural areas, farmland, and community character while providing open space and recreational opportunities, protecting water and wildlife, and ensuring long-term agricultural production. Zones in Riverhead, including the Open Space Conservation District (OSC), Natural Resources Protection (NRP), and Riverfront Corridor District (RFC), have been designated to further these goals. The primary means of open space preservation in the Town are public and nonprofit ownership of properties, conservation easements, and cluster development set-asides. Land preserved as open spaces or parks in Riverhead is shown in Figure 24.

## Community Preservation Fund

Riverhead set up a \$72 million bond against future revenues to enable preservation of key properties. However, the Town's opportunity to purchase development rights, acquire land, or invest in other eligible properties with CPF funds is limited by the repayment of the bond indebtedness. As of January 1, 2023, the remaining debt payments, including interest, are approximately \$20 million. The bond is expected to be paid off by 2030.

As of 2021, the Town has invested \$22 million in purchasing open space parcels using CPF funds and has successfully preserved about 300 acres of open space.<sup>1</sup> A list of properties protected with CPF funds is included in the CPF Plan.

The 2021 CPF Plan prioritized open space to be protected and recommended the best method to do so. Various data, including NYS DEC Open Space Plan priority status, Regional Aquifer Protection Land Acquisition Program criteria, Suffolk County priority list, wetlands status, Pine Barrens preservation boundaries, and other fragile environmental statuses, are used to prioritize land for preservation.

The Open Space Committee established a parcel ranking system to evaluate open space for preservation, considering State and federally designated rare, endangered, threatened, and special concern species habitats, rivers, water bodies, floodplains, critical environment areas, Peconic Estuary Program (PEP)-identified areas to protect and restore the Peconic estuary and watershed, and at-risk properties identified in PEP's Climate Vulnerability Assessment.<sup>2</sup>

## Ownership

About a third of Riverhead's CPF funds have been used to purchase open space parcels through fee-simple acquisition. These parcels are owned by the Town and can be used for recreation or conservation. The Town may also acquire land through a land donation or grants. For example, New York Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) funding was used to preserve the Miamogue Park and Weeping Willow Motel properties.

Properties in Riverhead are also preserved through ownership by the public and nonprofit entities. For example, the Nature Conservancy and the County worked together to preserve River Club and Riverhead Meadows. The Town and the Peconic Land Trust preserved the former Pratt property on Long Island Sound. The County's quarter-percent sales tax for open space and hamlet park preservation program partnered with Town to protect large open space parcels, including North Fork Preserve.

## Other Preservation Tools

### Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between the property owner and a public, nonprofit, or other entity restricting the land's use. The owner may continue to use their property and transfer it. However, the easement stipulates the allowable uses, conservation values, and permanent protection of the property. There are several types of easements in Riverhead. For example, the Town's cluster zoning regulations require developers of residential subdivisions to record conservation easements restricting a portion of the property to open space or farmland. Suffolk County and NYS

OPRHP have conservation easement programs, while the U.S. Department of Agriculture provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands through conservation easements. Non-governmental organizations may also hold easements and have agreements for land stewardship. For example, Peconic Land Trust will accept conservation easements and help property owners conserve natural resources. The Pine Barrens transfer of development rights program involves the record of an easement in the Pine Barrens Core Area in exchange for Pine Barrens credits that can be sold and used for development elsewhere. This program is discussed in further detail in this plan's Natural Features and Environmental Resources chapter.

### Open Space Set-Asides in Subdivisions

Cluster development requirements in the APZ, RA-80, and RB-80 zones aim to preserve 70% of the land for agriculture or open space while concentrating development on the remainder of the property. Cluster development regulations are discussed in further detail in the Agriculture chapter. In industrial subdivisions, open space or recreational reserved land should have an area of at least 1 acre per 50 acres of the plat, and no reserved area should be less than 1 acre.

### Payment in Lieu of Parkland

In the Town code, there are provisions to require that developers, when proposing a subdivision, must establish recreational facilities. If insufficient or unsuitable land is available, the Planning Board may require a developer to make a payment in lieu of parkland. The Park Fund is only usable for capital improvements to parks.

<sup>1</sup> Town of Riverhead, Community Preservation Fund Plan, Adopted 2021

<sup>2</sup> Peconic Estuary Program, Peconic Estuary Program Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Action Plan, 2019, <https://www.peconicestuary.org/peconic-estuary-program-climate-vulnerability-assessment-and-action-plan-final-report/>

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

### Open Space Committee

The Open Space/Park Preserve Committee (Open Space Committee) is an advisory committee comprised of five members appointed by the Town Board, including a member of the Recreation Committee and a member of the Conservation Advisory Council (CAC). This advisory committee is responsible for identifying and recommending to the Town Board land acquisitions for open space preservation and incorporation into the park system. In addition, the committee is tasked with developing an open space conservation plan for the use, maintenance, and management of lands owned by the Town.

The Open Space Committee uses a parcel rating system that rates the natural habitat and community value of properties under consideration for recommending purchase by the Town. In the past, the Open Space Program has been funded through the CPF, which was used to purchase several properties such as the Kayak Launch (formerly Weeping Willow Motel), the Sound Avenue Preserve, Riverhead Meadows (Riverside Drive), and Miamogue Point Park. The Open Space Committee has recently focused their efforts on stewardship, considering CPF funding is not currently available. Some recent activities include:

- Collaboration with Town and County to implement walking paths and culturally respectful signage at Sharper's Hill, Jamesport, a burial ground.
- Collaboration with the Highway Department to improve signage and parking lots at Sound Avenue Preserve.
- Advising the County on several County open space purchases, such as Saw Mill Creek.
- Advocacy for the acquisition of the Broad Cove property by the Peconic Land Trust.

- Advising the Town of Southampton to purchase the former Peconic Paddler property.
- Input on the Town Square Project to incorporate maximum green space.
- Work with the Peconic Land Trust to update the Town's open space priority list and create the updated CPF Plan.

### Beach Advisory Committee

The Beach Committee plays a crucial role in advising the Town Board on ways to improve the appeal, physical conditions, and accessibility of Riverhead's beaches. Comprising Town residents and including members of the Montauk Surfcasters Association, a representative from the Parks and Recreation Department, and a Town Board Liaison, the committee makes recommendations on maintenance programs, amenities, and usage regulations.

As part of its initiatives, the Beach Committee has created a brochure outlining beach rules, including regulations for 4 x 4 truck access on the north side of the beach. Beyond educational efforts, the committee actively organizes and executes beach cleanup initiatives.

### Recreation Advisory Committee

The Recreation Advisory Committee oversees the allocation of park and recreation funds dedicated to Recreation Capital Projects in Riverhead. Comprising eight members representing various town areas, a Town Councilperson, and the Parks and Recreation Superintendent, the committee collaborates with the Recreation, Engineering, and Accounting Departments. Together, they prioritize new projects and improvements to existing facilities, submitting recommendations to the Town Board. The committee also plays a vital role in planning and administering approved Recreation Projects.

Recent activity includes constructing a Beach Booth, installing park signs, and establishing new facilities like pickleball courts at Veterans Memorial Park and a playground at Iron Pier Beach. As of 2023, prioritized projects for the committee involve upgrading facilities at Two Bears (tennis courts, basketball courts, playground, and walking paths), East Creek (surveillance and lighting, pavers for the parking lot, and concession stands), Reeves Beach (bathrooms), Veterans Memorial Park (bathrooms), Police Officers Memorial Park (formerly Bayberry Park) (parking lot), and Horton Avenue (parking lot and lights).

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Expand recreational opportunities to address additional community interests and needs.**

There is a strong commitment to creating new park and open space opportunities, even though CPF bonds won't be fully paid off until 2030. Riverhead's Department of Parks and Recreation, along with the Recreation Advisory Committee, has worked to improve recreational offerings and facilities, addressing resident-identified priorities. The Town manages non-resident beach access to mitigate crowding and cleanliness issues, and the Beach Advisory Committee works on improving beach etiquette and facilities. Residents have identified various priority projects for the upcoming years, such as enhancing parking facilities, upgrading playgrounds, augmenting lighting, resurfacing courts and playing fields, and adding recreational facilities like a gym and an indoor pool. The downtown area is also evolving with new public spaces, streetscape improvements, and amenities, reflecting ongoing efforts for community enhancement.

#### **1.1. Continue planning for new parks, prioritizing environmentally sensitive and/or underserved areas.**

The Town should continue to monitor use patterns to assess exactly how much land will be required and when new facilities may be needed. The best sites would be those located in hamlet centers, in the downtown area, or adjacent to schools. Sites in proximity to preserved open space areas, having waterfront access points or greenway connections, or

with attractive scenic vistas should also be considered. See Chapter 5 Transportation for recommendations related to recreational pedestrian and bicycle trails. If feasible, the Town should consider purchasing and reserving preferred parkland sites in advance of development.

The process of identifying park needs should be done in close collaboration with various departments and committees to ensure transparency and cooperation. The Recreation Committee has expressed their need to receive periodic updates on the Town's open space priority list, the status of funding, and site plan and subdivision applications. Likewise, the Town should continue to have open conversations and information sharing among the Open Space Advisory Committee, Recreation Advisory Committee, Beach Committee, and Environmental Advisory Committee.

The Town should also continue to collaborate with State and County officials to explore the feasibility of expanded or new parks. Because the Town is not responsible for maintaining State and County parks, they provide a relatively low-cost amenity to the community. Moreover, the value of residential property located near parkland is typically increased, strengthening neighborhoods.

There are also several nonprofit partners with whom the Town collaborates to identify priority lands for conservation including the Peconic Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy. The PEP has developed a useful GIS tool to prioritize parcels for acquisition and protection that considers climate change metrics, which the Town should use in its decision-making processes.

#### **1.2. Implement the vision for the Town Square and other public spaces in Downtown Riverhead.**

The Town should continue to implement this transformative project, which will be developed over five phases: 1. Town Square, 2. Parking Garage and Passages, 3. Adaptable Play and Plaza, 4. East End Arts, and 5. Riverfront and Heidi Behr Way. Placemaking strategies, such as moveable chairs and tables in the Town Square and an amphitheater and event lawn at East End Arts, were identified for each of these phases. Several of these projects were selected for funding in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI).

#### **1.3. Pursue opportunities to repurpose the armory for community use.**

The George Young Community Center is in the Jamesport area, which is farther away from residents in the western portions of Town. Residents have expressed the need for additional community space in the Wading River, Calverton, or downtown areas. The YMCA is considering occupying the former State Armory on Route 58, which has served Riverhead as a community recreation facility in the past. This opportunity is further discussed in the Community Facilities chapter.

#### **1.4. Expand recreational programming.**

Riverhead's Department of Parks and Recreation provides ample year-round programming for all age groups. The Town may consider expanding recreational programming to address additional interests, such as passive recreation. Residents have expressed the need for expanded recreational facilities

such as a gym and/or an indoor pool. Communications about programming should be provided in Spanish to better include the needs of the Town's growing Hispanic community.

The Town could partner or coordinate such efforts with YMCA of Long Island and/or the Riverhead Central School District. Riverhead should consider the feasibility of building a Town gym (i.e. an indoor facility with multi- purpose playing courts and activity rooms) that would provide dedicated space for the Recreation Department's programs. Ideally, the gym would be centrally located and co-located with other public facilities, such as a police substation, a school, a branch library, or a community center.

The Town may also consider a dedicated youth center to serve as a clearinghouse for the full range of youth services and programs. In particular, the youth center could provide a location for 4-H programs, information on youth services, mentoring or big-brother/big-sister programs, counseling sessions, summer classes and activities, sports outings, and social events. This could also be done in coordination with the YMCA should they come to Riverhead. Maintain and improve facilities, cleanliness, accessibility, and safety in all Town parks and beaches.

The Town should work with the Parks and Recreation department and Town committees on various initiatives to improve the experience of parks in Riverhead. Some of the suggestions heard by the public during this comprehensive planning process include adding and improving wayfinding and informative signage at the beaches and in all parks, adding additional trash and recycling cans and collecting litter and waste regularly, keeping trails clear of overgrowth and debris, improving parking lots and recreational features (e.g., tennis and basketball courts) and providing safety features such as additional lighting, security cameras, and emergency call boxes within parks.

Riverhead should continue to engage the public to collect feedback from residents and visitors by adding suggestion boxes in Town parks and a digital form on the Town website. Suggestions could be reviewed by the Department of Parks and Recreation and relevant Town Committees to prioritize capital improvements and programming.

## ***2. Activate the Peconic Riverfront and other navigable waterways with recreation opportunities and good stewardship.***

Programming along the Peconic Riverfront in Riverhead is primarily for active uses such as boating. The Recreation Department and partners should explore opportunities for passive activities such as hiking and birding. In addition, there are several identified issues with boat access, ranging from the need for adequate parking areas near boat launches, to the lack of depth in the Peconic River and other water bodies to enable boating.

### ***2.1. Provide safe public access to the Peconic Riverfront and improve signage to make attractions more visible and accessible.***

This could include new pathways or trails along the riverbank, improved access points, designated launch sites for non-motorized watercraft, improved signage and wayfinding, and other measures to protect and preserve the natural habitat while making it accessible. This would include regular clean-up efforts and educational programs on river conservation. The Town should work closely with NYS DEC to regularly clear overgrown invasive plant species, such as Carolina Fanwort. In addition, a police officer and/or a recreation attendant should be stationed

on the riverfront in downtown to assist visitors and boaters (i.e., collect fees, help dock, provide dining recommendations, ensure security.) Life rings should also be provided near the riverfront in case of emergencies.

Effective signage is crucial in guiding individuals to the many attractions and points of interest along the riverfront, ensuring that visitors can find their way to key attractions, parks, trails, and recreational facilities.

### ***2.2. Develop a plan for moorings.***

The Town should create formal requirements for moorings in Town waters to ensure safety, establish locations, and provide revenues for the Town. Any discussion about the siting of moorings or other water infrastructure should include input from the aquaculture industry to ensure that their business is not obstructed or negatively impacted.

## ***3. Encourage open space preservation and public access opportunities in new development.***

This goal provides several recommendations to strengthen Town Code to better leverage new development to provide open space. The Town currently mandates an open space provision for subdivisions, allowing flexibility through options like in-lieu payments into a parks fund when proposed preserved lands are unsuitable for public use. In waterfront areas, some subdivisions extend properties up to the water, restricting access for the public and neighboring properties. Adhering to New York State's Public Trust Doctrine, the public has the right to use waters for activities, such as recreation and fishing, and to access navigable waters surrounding

Riverhead. The State owns the lands underwater, as determined by the last known natural location of the mean high-water mark for tidal waters. Open space preservation should also consider opportunities for off-street pedestrian and bike corridors. The success of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Recreation Trail at Calverton Enterprise Park has spurred residents' desire for an expanded bicycle network with on- and off-street paths, interconnected to regional networks. Considering opportunities like power line corridors and the Peconic River, the Town aims to enhance connectivity and accessibility for a more robust network.

### **3.1. Conduct a comprehensive review of both subdivision and cluster regulations to strengthen open space requirements.**

Subdivision and cluster regulations should be adaptable to the unique needs and characteristics of the community. Open space requirements can be tailored to address the need to preserve natural features (wetlands, woodlands, etc.), and to promote interconnected open spaces such as wildlife corridors. The Town should explore partnerships with landowners and developers to leverage private funds and expertise for open space creation and long-term stewardship.

The Town should allow subdivisions to provide a portion of the required park space in the form of a linear greenway, provided that the greenway meets established standards, is accessible to the public, and fits into the adopted greenway plan discussed below. The Town should also consider allowing a developer to use an in-lieu fee to purchase a greenway easement or improve a greenway near the subdivision. This provision would help bolster the greenway system and would ensure that subdivisions without neighborhood parks have access to a nearby greenway.

### **3.2. Encourage cluster development on waterfront sites in RA40 and RB40 zones.**

The zoning code is currently vague with regard to when cluster development is required. It is currently encouraged in APZ, RA80, RB80, and HR; however, cluster development should be mandatory in these districts for major subdivisions. It can remain optional for minor subdivisions, as there may not be a suitable quantity of land to set aside a meaningful amount of open space. The Planning Board should also be allowed to request a cluster development alternative in RA40 and RB40 to protect unique natural features and open space.

### **3.3. Require public easements as part of subdivision approval wherever possible to ensure public access and connectivity between open spaces, the waterfront, and greenways.**

In cluster developments, the Planning Board may require open space easements to the Town as a condition of approval. In any subdivision, public easements could be required as trails, greenways, waterfront access, and other open spaces to allow the public uninterrupted enjoyment of open spaces. Public access to the beach and the waterfront should be maintained to the greatest extent by requiring developers to maintain public water access and ensure that public rights-of-way are kept clear.

Riverhead subdivisions in waterfront areas where properties extend right up to the water have wonderful waterfront views and access, but other properties in the subdivision and the community at large are cut off from the waterfront. Public access to the beach and the waterfront should be maintained to the greatest possible extent. To safeguard the public's right to access State-owned waters and underwater lands, the Town should continue to provide access points to the waterfront from local roads, for public uses, including

boating, fishing, and swimming. However, according to New York State Public Trust Land Laws, the Town cannot legally require developers to dedicate or otherwise provide access to tidal beach areas above the mean high tide line for use by the public.

Additionally, the Town should ensure that an existing public right-of-way that provides waterfront access is not obstructed because of private development. In some cases, those access points have been grown over and no longer have the appearance of a public right-of-way. The Town should endeavor to identify all such rights-of-way and ensure that they are kept free and clear, continuing to provide access to the waterfront.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 9

# SCENIC AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Riverhead has a variety of significant scenic and historic resources, ranging from expansive views of working agricultural landscapes to scenic roadways like Sound Avenue, the historic structures and property of the Hallock Homestead, the scenic bluffs along Long Island Sound, historic communities like South Jamesport, and the historic buildings and compact layout of downtown Riverhead. These features reflect the richness and diversity of the East End's historic, cultural, and natural landscape. They also contribute to the quality of life for residents and attract visitors to the Town. By preserving these resources, Riverhead can ensure that future generations can enjoy the same cultural heritage and natural beauty that makes the Town unique.

This chapter provides an overview of existing policies and resources to enhance and protect those resources and an inventory of designated historic sites. Though often treated separately, scenic and historic resources are intertwined and best addressed jointly. Historic structures contribute visual quality and cultural identity to valued areas—such as hamlets, downtown centers, and agricultural zones. Because of this interrelationship, Riverhead's scenic and historic resources are considered here together in a single chapter. Scenic landscape elements are also discussed in Chapter 6: Natural Features, Environmental Resources, and Agricultural Lands and Chapter 4: Economic Development, as they contribute to Riverhead's long-term economic vitality and business development.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### INVENTORY OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

Riverhead's long history of settlement, detailed in Chapter 2: Land Use and Zoning, has given the a wealth of historic resources. Historic buildings, sites, structures, and landscapes help to establish the sense of place and community character that visitors and residents cherish. Historic landmarks and districts are designated at the local, state, and national level.

#### ***State and National Register Individual Historic Landmarks***

There are 14 State and National Register listed properties in Riverhead. Numerous eligible properties are also located within the Town; these properties are not included in this assessment and are available for review on the database maintained by New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (NYS OPRHP).

#### ***United States Post Office-Riverhead, 23 West Second Street***

The Neoclassical-style building was constructed circa 1929 and is within the Second and Ostrander Historic District.

#### ***Vail-Leavitt Music Hall, 18 Peconic Avenue***

The Music Hall is located within the Riverhead Main Street Historic District. The building was constructed in 1881 as the Vail Music Hall and is now one of the few surviving music halls in Suffolk County. The brick building has a Classically-inspired façade with gauged brickwork, round-arched windows and a steep gable roof.

#### ***Hallock Homestead, 6038 Sound Avenue, Northville***

The Hallock Homestead is a collection of early 19th century farm buildings, owned by the Hallock family for over 160 years. The original portion was likely built circa 1765, with other buildings added in the early 1800s.

#### ***Suffolk County Historical Society Building, 300 Main Street***

The Georgian Revival-style institutional building was constructed in 1930-1931 after designs by architect Augustus H. Galow. The building was constructed to house the Suffolk County Historical Society's growing archive.

#### ***Hallock-Bilunas Farmstead, 733 Herricks Lane, Northville***

The Hallock-Bilunas Farmstead includes a circa 1880 house and six associated agricultural buildings, surrounded by farm fields.

#### ***Jamesport Meeting House, 1590 Main Road, Jamesport***

The Jamesport Meeting House, formerly the Jamesport Congregational Church, is an anchor of the hamlet of Jamesport. The building was constructed in 1731 as a Presbyterian Church, and is recorded as the first church in the Town.

#### ***Benjamin King Woodhull House, 126 Sound Road, Wading River***

Also known as Four Chimneys, this house was originally constructed in the mid-18th century and enlarged circa 1843 in the Greek Revival style.

#### ***Jedediah Hawkins House, 400 South Jamesport Avenue, Jamesport***

The Italianate-style house, constructed in 1864, is one of the largest in the hamlet and is highly visible from South Jamesport Avenue. Jedediah W. Hawkins made his fortune in the shipping industry during the Civil War and in the fish oil business during the late 19th century.

#### ***Tuthill-Lapham House, 324 Sound Road, Wading River***

The earliest portion of the building, also known as Friendly Hall, is a Federal-style section constructed circa 1820 for Bartley Fanning Tuthill. The remaining sections, built in 1838, 1869, and the 1920s, are distinguished by different roof heights.

#### ***Daniel and Henry Tuthill Farm Complex, 1146 Main Road, Aquebogue***

This complex includes a Greek Revival-style house built circa 1890. The property remained in the Tuthill family from 1733 until the mid-20th century.

#### ***Harrison Downs House & Farm, 5793 Sound Avenue, Northville***

This property includes an Italianate-style farmhouse, built circa 1874 as a gentleman's country retreat, and a complex of early 20th century agricultural buildings.

#### ***Wading River Radio Station, 408 North Side Road***

The radio station is located on the campus of Camp DeWolfe, although the station predates the summer camp. It was built as a house circa 1912 and operated

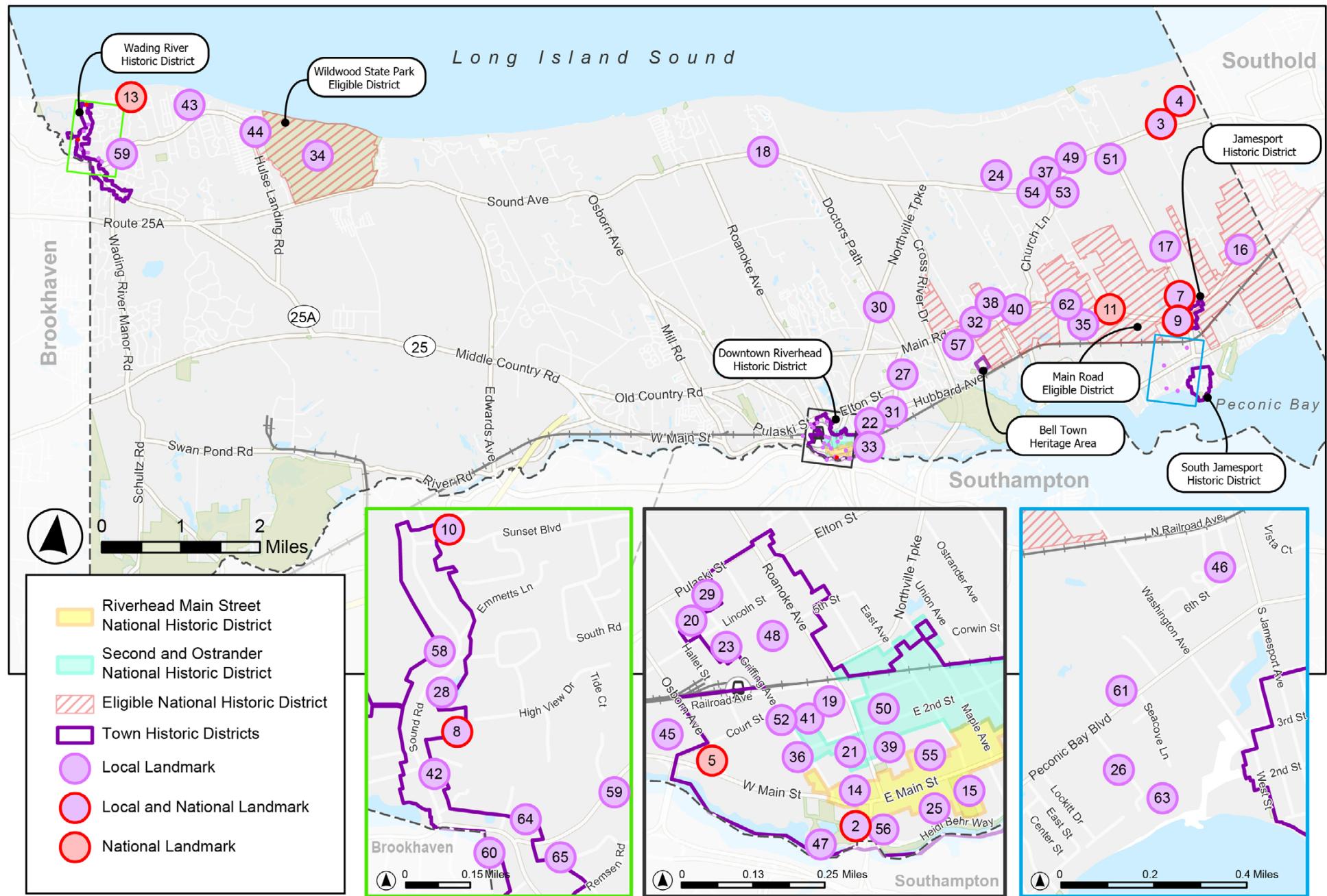


FIGURE 25: HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND LANDMARKS

Source: Town of Riverhead, NYS OPRHP CRIS, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

**Table 12: Historic Districts and Landmarks (See Figure 25)**

1	United States Post Office-Riverhead	33	Howell House
2	Vail-Leavitt Music Hall	34	Irving Hulse House
3	Hallock Homestead	35	J. Victor Wilson Barn
4	Eugene Hallock House	36	Jeremiah Edwards House
5	Suffolk County Historical Society Building	37	John Luce House
6	Hallock-Bilunas Farmstead	38	Luther Moore house
7	Jamesport Meeting House	39	Meyer House
8	Benjamin King Woodhull House	40	Modern Snack Bar Sign
9	Jedediah Hawkins House	41	Moore-Barnes House
10	Tuthill-Lapham House (Friendly Hall)	42	Oliver's Hill Cemetery
11	Daniel and Henry Tuthill Farm Complex	43	Paine Family House Site and Cemetery
12	Harrison Downs House & Farm	44	Paul Hulse House
13	Wading River Radio Station	45	Perkins Carriage House (a.k.a., the Yellow Barn)
14	Bank Building	46	Peters-Kimmel Cottage
15	Benjamin House and Barn, Fresh Pond School House	47	Pump House
16	Capt. Austin Penny House	48	Roanoke Avenue School
17	Captain Dimon House (Jamesport Manor)	49	Salem Wells House
18	Centerville Chapel	50	Second Street Fire House
19	Charles Hallett House	51	Sheldon Downs House & District #11 School
20	Conklin House	52	Slade-Hallett House
21	Corwin-Davis-McGrath House (Old Riverhead News Building)	53	Sound Avenue Congregational Church
22	Corwin-Terry House ("East Lawn")	54	Sound Avenue Hall
23	Corwin-Young House	55	Suffolk Theater
24	David Wells House	56	Taft Candy Store
25	Davis-Corwin House	57	The Witch's Hat
26	District # 10 School	58	Tuthill-Davis House
27	Elks Lodge	59	Wading River Cemetery
28	Ellsworth Tuthill House ("1812 House")	60	Wading River Congregational Church
29	Everett Conklin House	61	Washington Young House
30	Fletcher Booker Homestead	62	Wells-Hutchinson House
31	Granite Stone from "Octagon" Jail	63	Wilbur-Fanning House
32	Griffing-Wells House	64	Zophar Miller Cottage
		65	Zophar Miller Homestead

covertly as an FBI radio transmission station between 1942 and 1945, to intercept valuable information from the German military intelligence service.

## State and National Register Historic Districts

Two historic districts in the Town are listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places, and two are determined eligible for listing. National Register districts in Riverhead include approximately 175 contributing resources.

### Riverhead Main Street Historic District (listed)

Riverhead Main Street Historic District includes 61 properties (contributing and non-contributing) along Main Street, between Griffing and Union Avenues. The historic district covers the densest portion of the commercial corridor and is characterized by two- to four-story commercial buildings with ground-floor storefronts.

### Second and Ostrander Historic District (listed)

The Second and Ostrander Historic District includes 147 properties (129 contributing and 18 non-contributing) in a residential area immediately north of the downtown commercial corridor. Developed from 1837 to 1940, the area was home to both wealthy and working-class residents and it now includes a variety of building styles and sizes.

### Main Road Historic District (eligible)

Main Road Historic District includes 273 properties along a 6-mile segment of the semi-rural Main Road, or NYS Route 25, in Aquebogue, Jamesport, and Laurel, including parts of Southold Town in the hamlet

of Laurel. The historic district is determined State and National Register eligible due to its associations with the region's agricultural and social history.

### **Wildwood State Park Historic District (eligible)**

The 600-acre Wildwood State Park is located in the western portion of Riverhead and is determined State and National Register eligible, for its intact landscape design and park architecture and for its associations with the early development of Wading River. A portion of Wildwood was originally owned by Ronald Mitchell, who had planned on building a private estate there. Another section (known as the Driftwood Manor) was owned by Joseph Robin. The only original portion of the manor that still stands today is the Carriage House, located on the eastern boundary of the park.

### **Local Landmarks**

According to the most recent inventory updated in March 2023, Riverhead's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has officially designated 62 buildings and sites as Town Landmarks (two of which have been demolished or destroyed). This inventory can be referred to in Table 13 at the end of this chapter.

### **Local Historic Districts and Heritage Area**

Riverhead has four designated local historic districts, which together include 373 qualifying structures, and one locally designated heritage area.

### **Downtown Riverhead Historic District**

The Downtown Riverhead Historic District, designated in 2006, includes 219 resources. The local district encompasses the State and National Register of Historic Places Main Street Historic District.

### **Wading River Historic District**

This historic district includes 40 resources along Sound Road and North Country Road. Designated in 2008, the district is a rural country road with numerous houses, as well as two churches, a post office, and school.

### **South Jamesport Historic District**

The South Jamesport Historic District includes 78 historic resources and was designated in 2006. It is characterized by residences on narrow tree-lined streets near the waterfront.

### **Jamesport Hamlet Historic District**

This historic district includes 36 resources near the junction of South Jamesport Avenue and Main Road. It was designated in 2006.

### **Bell Town Heritage Area**

Bell Town, the area north of Hubbard Avenue between Bell Avenue and Zion Street, was designated the first Heritage Area in Riverhead in 2021. Bell Town was founded in the 1930s by Black families who were descendants of slaves that migrated from the south.

### **Archaeological Sites**

Due to its location along the Peconic River and Flanders Bay, Riverhead was—in pre-Colonial times—an attractive fishing, hunting, and gathering area for Native Americans. Many archeological sites have been identified since the 19th century and are recorded by NYS OPRHP. The most significant archeological site in Riverhead may be the 3,000 year old Native American burial site at Sharper's Hill in Jamesport.

### **Historic Property Watch List**

The LPC maintains a "Watch List" of threatened buildings to encourage their restoration. Several buildings previously on the list have been restored, in part as the result of LPC efforts. The current watch list consists of the following properties:

- 178 Main Road (corner of 105)
- 1117 Main Road (Leslie Alexander)
- 57 South Jamesport Avenue (Albert Young House)
- 1368 Sound Avenue (Irving Hulse House)
- 1997 Main Road, Laurel (AJG13 LLC)
- 1129 West Main Street, Perkins Generating Plant
- 1884 Sound Avenue
- 29 East Second St.
- 214 Griffing Avenue (Town-owned)

## EXISTING POLICIES AND RESOURCES

This section describes existing policies and resources, including commissions, organizations, local laws, incentives and other tools for historic preservation and the protection of scenic resources in Riverhead.

### State and National Resources

#### State Historic Preservation Office

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is responsible for working with the National Park Service (NPS) to administer programs such as the statewide historic resources survey, federal rehabilitation tax credit, Certified Local Government program, State historic preservation grants, federal environmental review, and technical assistance. In compliance with the federal historic preservation law, the SHPO produces a five-year historic preservation plan.

#### State Register

The State Register is the official list of buildings, structures, districts, and other resources that are significant to the history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture of the State. Listing on the State Register gives some protection from the effects of State agency-sponsored, licensed, or assisted projects through a notice, review, and consultation process. Matching State historic preservation grants are available for municipal and not-for-profit owners of registered historic properties. Listing does not put any restrictions on private owners of the registered properties.

#### National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places, maintained by the NPS, is the nation's official list of sites worthy of preservation for their historic, architectural, and

other cultural values. Listing on the National Register provides some protection from the effects of federal agency-sponsored, licensed, or assisted projects through a notice, review, and consultation process. Being listed on the national register gives property owners access to federal preservation tax credits, NPS grant programs, and preservation easements. In addition, property owners can order a bronze plaque to mark their property. There is a sense of prestige in listing properties for owners, neighbors, and visitors.

#### Eligible Resources

Before a resource is listed on the State and National register, the SHPO will determine if it is "eligible," meaning that it meets specific criteria, and additional documentation is requested of the nominator. If the required information is provided, the New York State Board for Historic Preservation will review and recommend listing on the State Register and forward the application to the NPS for review and listing on the National Register. There are hundreds of eligible properties in Riverhead that have been documented during surveys or individual nominations.

#### State and Federal Preservation Tax Credits

Structures listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places or contributing structures in a National Register historic district may be eligible for federal and State tax credits. An owner of a historic property may also enter into an easement agreement with a preservation or conservation nonprofit to preserve their property in perpetuity while qualifying for tax reductions.



**Long Island North Shore Heritage Area**

Source: NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

#### Federal Historic Preservation Fund

The Historic Preservation Fund provides funding to states, local governments, and nonprofits. States must subgrant 10% of their funds to Certified Local Governments; however Riverhead is not currently a Certified Local Government.

#### New York State Heritage Areas

Riverhead is within the Long Island North Shore Heritage Area (LNSHA), which spans from Great Neck to East Marion and covers most of the area north of I-495. New York State Heritage Areas are state-local partnerships in regions with significant natural, historic, and cultural resources. The program intends to create shared resources and goals for preservation, education, recreation and leisure, and economic development. There are only five of these heritage areas in New York.

## Local Policies and Resources

### Local Landmarks Law

Landmarks and historic districts promote the economic, cultural, educational, and general welfare of the public. The landmarks law provides the criteria and procedure for the local designation of landmarks and historic districts and for the referral and advisory process for building permit applications and site plan review involving landmarks and historic districts. Local designation tends to be more effective in preserving historic landmarks compared with State or National designation, because local laws have more authority to prevent demolition. Local landmarks laws can also help property owners and the Town Board make informed decisions about the alteration and permits for designated properties.

### Landmarks Preservation Commission

The LPC was established in 1976 and serves an advisory capacity to the Town Board. They may recommend designation of a landmark or historic district or the acquisition of a historic property by the Town. The LPC also assists with review applications for alterations (in conjunction with the Architectural Review Board), or demolitions of designated landmarks or structures within historic districts. The Building and Planning Departments will refer such applications and site plans to the LPC. The LPC develops the criteria used for the identification of significant historic, architectural and cultural landmarks and for the delineation of historic districts. They also work to increase public awareness of the value of preservation through educational programs and literature.

The LPC is comprised of seven members appointed by the Town Board and must include a member of the American Institute of Architects; an architectural historian; an attorney; and four Town residents.

Since completion of the current Master Plan in 2003, the LPC has implemented several of that plan's recommendations and carried out other initiatives:

- Designation of four historic districts and more than 25 additional historic resources as individual Town landmarks.
- Designation of two National Register historic districts and four additional National Register sites.
- Proposal for an extensive National Register historic district along Main Road.
- Institution of a 10-year tax abatement for increases in assessed value caused by historic preservation renovations.
- Publication of a booklet in 2008 titled "Wood, Brick and Stone," with walking and driving tours of Downtown Riverhead.
- Launch of a Downtown Riverhead Historic Trail in 2022 that is available through QR codes or virtually on the Town and BID websites.
- Dedication of an historic marker for the Bell Town Heritage Area in 2022, celebrating the Town's heritage of Black communities founded during the Great Migration.
- Preparation of a Survey of Historic Resources in Riverhead and creation of design guidelines for landmarks and historic districts.

### Architectural Review Board

New development can have a substantial impact on existing character. While some harmful visual impacts can be prevented through land use regulations (i.e. zoning, subdivision regulations, and building codes), other visual impacts need to be evaluated by qualified personnel who can ascertain the appropriateness of architectural design or appearance within their context.

The was established for this purpose and is responsible for reviewing site plans for the quality of their exterior design, sign permit applications, and compliance with other ordinances that affect visual impact. The ARB also works to prevent the unnecessary destruction or blighting of the natural landscape or man-made environment and to ensure that architectural treatments relate harmoniously to existing buildings that have a visual relationship to proposed development.

The ARB is appointed by the Town Board upon the recommendation of the Town Building and Planning Administrator or the Chief Building Inspector. It is comprised of five members including a licensed architect, and other architects, landscape architects, or designers. Requirements for review and procedures are detailed in Chapter 209 of the Town Code.

### Other Committees and Partners

In addition to the LPC and the ARB, several other committees work to preserve Riverhead's scenic and historic qualities. These include the Farmland Preservation Committee, TDR Committee, Open Space Committee, and others who are introduced in other chapters of this plan. Local businesses, nonprofits, and organizations may also be partners, including the Long Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, Peconic Land Trust, East End Arts & Humanities Council, Suffolk Theater, the Suffolk County Historical Society, and the Long Island Railroad Museum.

## Design Guidelines, Zoning Code Provisions, and Other Regulations

### Historic Preservation Design Guidelines

The LPC and the ARB published the Historic Preservation Guidelines, which provide recommendations for the treatment of historic properties in Riverhead. The guidelines, available on the Town's website, are targeted to property owners, design professionals, contractors, the LPC, the ARB, and Town officials and staff.

### Historic Preservation Tax Abatement

Town-designated landmarks and contributing properties in a designated historic district are eligible for a 10-year exemption from property taxes on any increase in the assessed value of the property resulting from an alteration or restoration, under chapters 279-39 and 40 of Town Code.

### Variances for Historic Properties

As recommended by the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, the LPC has worked with property owners to obtain reasonable variances when they are willing to designate their properties as town landmarks. Allowing owners of historic sites variances for land use, parking, bulk, and other requirements can help protect threatened landmarks.

### RLC Special Permit

Under chapter 301-64-7, in the Rural Corridor (RLC) zone along Main Road, by special permit, "Existing structures may be enlarged for use as professional offices of attorneys, architects, medical doctors or dentists, as wellness facilities or as general offices" provided that the subject property is designated as a town landmark and is restored following guidelines in town code. Moreover, additions up to 100% of the

floor area of the existing structure or 3,000 square feet, whichever is less, may be added if they comply with landmarks standards and do not exceed total lot coverage allowed for this zone.

### Lighting Ordinance

In addition to promoting public health, safety, and welfare, Riverhead's Lighting Ordinance seeks to maintain the quality of life, preserve the Town's rural character, and allow the public the ability to view the night sky. The ordinance establishes regulations and a process for review of exterior lighting under Chapter 301, Article XLIX Exterior Lighting.

### Cluster Development Requirement

The subdivision regulations in Chapter 301 of the Town Code include cluster development requirements intended to maximize the preservation of open space, significant natural features, agricultural lands, and scenic vistas. The provision requires that 70% of the land be conserved as open space or agricultural lands.

## SCENIC RESOURCES

Riverhead's scenic character helps maintain the Town's economic vitality and overall quality-of-life. The following scenic resources include natural and built features that are distinctive and integral to the community's unique character.

### Shorelines, Rivers, Streams, Ponds, and Wetlands

Views of and access to water bodies are important in defining Riverhead as a coastal community. Major water bodies and their shorelines or banks serve as scenic vistas, including Long Island Sound, Flanders Bay, Great Peconic Bay, and the Peconic River. The

picturesque bluffs along Long Island Sound are part of the natural landscape and give a unique feeling to the northern part of Riverhead.

The Peconic River is a major scenic feature in Riverhead's landscape. It contributes to the character of the Pine Barrens region as well as downtown Riverhead, and the Town's name and identity is closely tied to the Peconic. Under New York State's Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Act, portions of the Peconic River in Riverhead are designated as "scenic," "recreational," and "community." More information about NYS Wild, Scenic and Recreation River designations and a map are provided in Chapter 7. Most new development along the waterfront is strictly limited, but recreational trails and paths are permitted.

### Vegetation

Wooded areas, such as the Pine Barrens, contribute to the Town's rural character. There are mature trees throughout Riverhead, including notable stands along Sound Avenue. Areas with significant expanses of native vegetation can be found in woodlands, wetlands, and meadows. Native plants are valuable not only from an ecological point of view but also as historic elements of the Town's landscape.

### Agricultural Landscapes

Agricultural lands include cultivated fields, vineyards and orchards, pastures, greenhouses, barns and other farm structures, and farm stands. These areas can be found throughout Riverhead; however the main farming belt is within the APZ zone in the central part of Town between Sound Avenue and Middle Road. Agricultural lands are also commonly found outside of this "belt" north of Sound Avenue within the RA-80 zone and south of Route 25 in the eastern part of Town within the RB-80 zone (Aquebogue/Jamesport). Views of working agricultural land are integral to

Riverhead's rural identity and play an important role in attracting tourists. The aesthetic value of these views needs to be balanced with the economic values of working farms.

### ***Scenic and Historic Corridors***

Scenic corridors are roads, streams, trails, and other linear paths that are characterized by an exceptional visual quality along the sides of the corridor. Many factors may contribute to their visual quality: views of agricultural landscapes; forested tree cover; the presence of historical sites; and vistas of bluffs, wetlands, water bodies, or other natural features. These corridors attract visitors for driving, walking, biking, or traveling through Riverhead's scenic landscape. These corridors are the vantage points from which most people—residents and visitors alike—experience Riverhead's rural landscape.

In 1975, in honor of the Bicentennial and Long Island's role in the American Revolution, the New York State Assembly and the Riverhead Town Board established the Sound Avenue Scenic and Historic Corridor. However, this State designation does not include any meaningful regulatory protection. According to the LPC, nearly 40% of the 90-plus historic resources identified in a 1975 survey have been demolished or moved. Moreover, the LPC believes that a new survey would likely identify many more historic structures overlooked in that early survey which focused mainly on pre-1900 homes, not early 20th century homes and not agricultural buildings.

Scenic and Historic Corridors are not defined in the Town Code, and their preservation relies on other policies including zoning, landmark and historic district designations, and TDR. Following the adoption of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, the Town added the Rural Corridor (RLC) zoning district, the Agriculture Protection Zone (APZ), and the Residence A-80 (RA80) zone to the Town Code and map. Among their

other purposes, these districts help to preserve vistas and the Town's rural character. RLC provides some restrictions along Route 25, and RA80 specifically provides protections for the Sound Avenue corridor. The APZ and RA80 zones limit development density and play essential roles in the TDR program, with the intent of preserving open space and agriculture.

### ***Historic Structures and Sites***

Older homes, barns, and churches, whether found on individual sites or in small clusters, can contribute to scenic views, particularly in rural areas and along scenic corridors. For example, a historic home or church situated at a crossroads can endow that place with a special character. An old farmhouse, cemetery, or stone wall adds to the rural character of a farm as much as the presence of cultivated fields or grazing farm animals.

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Continue to identify, document, and promote public awareness of town's historic resources.**

The Town must engage in ongoing efforts to identify and document the diverse array of historic sites, structures, and cultural assets that contribute to the tapestry of its history. This effort requires collaboration with local historical societies, preservation organizations, and community stakeholders. Targeted educational initiatives, public outreach, and interpretative signage will help to raise awareness and ensure Riverhead's rich history remains a celebrated aspect of the community's identity for generations to come.

#### **1.1. Update the comprehensive survey of historic resources in Riverhead.**

Historic resources include individual buildings, groups of buildings (such as a hamlet area), and sites and landscapes (e.g. cemeteries, archaeological sites) that are important to the Town's historic character. An updated survey would supplement the list of officially designated Town landmarks maintained by the LPC.

#### **1.2. Develop an integrated public signage program for historic resources**

Signs should be located along Sound Avenue, at historic structures and archaeological sites, and within historic districts. These signs will allow residents and visitors to recognize, understand, and better appreciate the various points of interest throughout the Town.

#### **1.3. Provide educational materials and technical assistance to historic and designated landmark property owners.**

The Town should continue to support the LPC's efforts to educate the public and encourage property owners to consider the designation of their properties on the local, State, and National Registers. The LPC should continue to inform municipal land use boards to ensure that the preservation of historic buildings (regardless of their designation status) is considered in all planning and development decisions. These resources will help property owners to access funding, tax incentives, and educational materials to maintain their property correctly.

#### **1.4. Designate additional historic districts.**

The SHPO determined that the Main Road Historic District and Wildwood State Park Historic District are eligible for State and National Register listing. Eligible status provides some protection of historic structures by requiring additional review for state or federally funded projects within the districts. However, without National and State Register listing, the property owners cannot access tax credits and other benefits. The LPC should continue its efforts to officially designate these districts.

Additional districts to consider nominating to the National Register include:

*Sound Avenue  
Polish Town  
South Jamesport  
Jamesport Campgrounds*

#### **1.5. Pursue local, State, and national designation of individual landmarks.**

There is interest in designating resources related to the town's Black history and resources on the Main Road corridor and in hamlet areas. Completion of nominations for eligible properties should be pursued when the property owner agrees.

### **2. Protect scenic resources and views.**

A fundamental goal of this Comprehensive Plan is to protect and enhance Riverhead's scenic resources and views. This requires implementing thoughtful land-use policies, promoting responsible development practices, and collaborating with stakeholders. Integrating protective measures into development regulations will help to strike a balance between growth and preservation, fostering a resilient and visually appealing environment for residents and visitors alike.

#### **2.1. Identify locations throughout Riverhead with scenic resources and significant views.**

At the discretion of the Town Board, and by recommendation of a Town committee, Riverhead should undertake a study to identify scenic resources and viewsheds. This could include the documentation of scenic viewsheds along with recommended mechanisms for maintaining them. As part of this effort, the Town should also define what scenic

resources are. Scenic resources that include natural features, agricultural lands, and open spaces, are discussed in more detail in other chapters.

## 2.2. Continue to recognize the importance of scenic qualities throughout the Town Code and in site plan review.

This could include strengthened zoning regulations, design guidelines to protect views, or other provisions in the Landmarks Preservation Law. Most zoning use districts, cluster development, and subdivision regulations identify the importance of scenic qualities. During the subdivision review process for future cluster developments on Sound Avenue, the Board should take into the consideration the scenic qualities of Sound Avenue and aim to preserve farmland or open space along the roadway and placing development farther from site.

## 2.3. Coordinate scenic preservation initiatives with other community enhancement programs

Other recommendations throughout the Comprehensive Plan are intended to help preserve open space areas and natural features of the landscape. The Open Space chapter provides recommendations such as open space acquisition and improved waterfront access. The Natural Features and Environmental Resources chapter gives recommendations for protecting natural features (such as the Peconic River and bluffs overlooking Long Island Sound). The Land Use and Zoning chapter discusses design guidelines for Downtown, hamlet centers, and Route 58. These initiatives should consider scenic vistas and protect them wherever possible. Farmland preservation efforts are discussed in the Agriculture chapter. It is important to balance the need to support the economic vitality of the agricultural industry with the desire to preserve scenic resources.

### 2.4. Continue to enforce exterior lighting code violations.

Riverhead's Exterior Lighting provision aims to preserve its rural character and allow the public the ability to view the night sky. Riverhead should continue code enforcement efforts and be vigilant in reviewing exterior lighting on future development applications.

### 2.5. Consider nominating Sound Avenue and other scenic corridors to the National and/or New York State Scenic Byway Program

The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration and the New York State Department of Transportation both have scenic byway programs. These programs provide grant funding for designated byways and require the development of a Corridor Management Plan, which helps create a community vision and priorities including economic development and environmental and historic preservation.

### 2.6. Continue protecting the visual quality of scenic corridors through zoning regulations.

Currently, scenic corridor protection is provided by RLC, APZ, and RA80 zoning districts. The Town should strengthen zoning regulations to further protect views along scenic corridors, such as expanding buffer areas and enhancing landscaping requirements. Chapter 5: Transportation recommends that the Town develop and adopt design criteria for rural corridors. Designation of historic landmarks or districts, as appropriate, should also be considered along scenic corridors.

## 3. Ensure that design of new development is compatible with its surroundings and scenic and historic resources.

This Comprehensive Plan underscores the commitment to fostering a built environment that is not only functional and sustainable but also harmonious with natural and cultural landscapes. By encouraging thoughtful site planning, architectural diversity, and the use of sustainable design practices, new development can enhance, rather than detract from, the distinctive charm of Riverhead.

### 3.1. Adopt design elements from the Downtown Pattern Book into the zoning code.

This document is a valuable tool, providing clear guidance for developers, architects, and the community on how to design buildings that preserve and enhance the unique character of the downtown district.

### 3.2. Develop design standards for historic hamlet center areas to ensure any development is compatible with the area's scenic and historic characteristics.

Hamlet-specific design guidelines would prioritize compatibility in scale, architectural heritage, and scenic vistas of the surrounding areas. These guidelines would require a collaborative approach, involving residents, stakeholders, design professionals, and Town officials. Chapter 13 Future Land Use proposes the development of pattern books for Main Road, Sound Avenue, Jamesport, Aquebogue, Polish Town, and other areas. The development of any pattern book or design guidelines will require a study,

planning process, and public outreach to determine specifications. Once developed, the pattern books should be adopted into the Town Code.

Any design regulations should define terms with respect to massing, size, roof slope, building arrangement, etc. The pattern book should also define subjective terms such as "rural appearance," to ensure that desirable outcomes are implemented.

It is also suggested that design standards and guidelines for subdivisions and site plans be developed to protect scenic views and historic resources. This would create more predictability for applicants, by clarifying what aspects of design the ARB should focus on and base its decisions upon.

### 3.3. Improve coordination between the LPC and ARB review process.

Where possible the ARB and LPC should have a common member. The ARB and LPC should meet jointly when considering major projects in historic districts. To ensure that the ARB can make informed decisions, expertise of Town departments should be consulted as appropriate. The ARB may request that a developer provide elevations showing adjacent structures and properties for context.

## 4. Protect historic resources from destruction or neglect and encourage their restoration and adaptive reuse.

Riverhead is committed to the preservation and sustainable use of its historic resources and protecting these irreplaceable assets from destruction or neglect. Implementing robust preservation policies and regulations can safeguard historic structures, ensuring they remain integral to the Town's cultural fabric. Adaptive reuse is another key strategy, as it preserves the architectural integrity of these structures but also contributes to economic revitalization. Incentive programs, streamlined approval processes, and collaboration with developers will be explored to foster the responsible and innovative repurposing of historic properties, striking a harmonious balance between preservation and progress.

### 4.1. Establish an official watch list and map of buildings that have potential for landmark preservation but have not been designated.

The LPC maintains a "Watch List" of threatened buildings to encourage their restoration. Several buildings previously on the list have been restored, in part as the result of LPC efforts. Alteration, construction, and demolition permit applications for Watch List resources should be referred to the LPC for their recommendation. The Building Department should be aware of the list and other historic structures outside of mapped historic districts so they can make a referral to the LPC prior to the issuance of any building permits. The current watch list is included in the existing conditions section of this chapter.

### 4.2. Prevent demolition of historic structures.

The Town should consider requiring referral of demolition permit applications to the LPC to review for potential historic significance, particularly for structures over 75-years old and buildings on the official Watch List. The Building Department should provide the LPC with prompt notification of building or demolition permits affecting potentially historic or cultural properties and give them ample time (30 days) to review and respond with a recommendation. Following the Model Landmarks Preservation Local Law for New York State municipalities, economic hardship provisions can be incorporated into the code.

Demolition review should also be coordinated with the NYSHPO (potentially through their CRIS platform) to ensure that properties that are designated or eligible for State and National landmark and historic district designation are evaluated prior to issuance of a demolition permit.

To prevent "demolition by neglect" of Town landmarks or structures within local historic districts, the Property Maintenance and Unsafe Structures and Conditions (Chapter 217 Parts IV and V) sections of the Town Code should be reviewed. The LPC should be notified when there is an unsafe building violation in an historic district. The specifics of this policy will need to consider the procedure to notify the LPC and property owners and to correct conditions.

#### 4.3. Provide flexibility to historic property owners who seek variances for the purpose of protecting the historic character of the property.

The Town should consider a streamlined land use review to encourage the adaptive reuse and restoration of eligible buildings. Area variances (i.e. for parking, bulk, and setbacks) for historic and cultural landmarks and structures within historic districts should be considered when the variance is necessary to maintain the historic or cultural aspects of the property. In the past, the LPC has worked with property owners to obtain reasonable variances when they are willing to designate their properties as Town landmarks. The Town and LPC should continue to monitor State initiatives to update the Building Code to be more flexible toward historic structures.

#### 4.4. Ensure enforcement of the Landmarks and Historic Districts chapter of the Town Code.

At present, only the Building Inspector can issue a stop-work order, and the Town can fine the offender \$1,000 for violations of this chapter. The Town should continue to monitor the effectiveness of landmarks and historic districts code enforcement and make adjustments as appropriate. The code should be revised to allow all code enforcement officials to issue stop-work orders, as well to expand enforcement capacity.

#### 4.5. Promote and facilitate adaptive reuse of historically and architecturally significant buildings.

The Town should consider a flexible and streamlined land use review to encourage the adaptive reuse and restoration of eligible buildings. The LPC could develop a list of eligible buildings and can help property owners find compatible uses and resources to appropriately retrofit the building for its new purpose. The zoning code could also be revised to provide some flexibility on issues such as setbacks and parking.

#### 4.6. Consider Pursuing Certified Local Government (CLG) status.

CLGs meet standard best practices established by the NPS and New York SHPO. CLG status gives increased access to federal survey and planning funds, which are distributed annually, and support from SHPO. To be eligible, Riverhead may need to revisit its Landmarks Preservation Law to ensure it complies.

#### 4.7. Educate property owners on financial incentives for historic preservation.

Riverhead has implemented a tax abatement program to incentivize property owners to rehabilitate historic properties. The Town also provides a special permit in the RLC zone to enlarge existing structures for professional offices if they are designated a Town landmark. Other incentives to encourage historic preservation include state and federal rehabilitation tax credits, historic preservation easements that may provide tax benefits, and other preservation grants. National Register designation will bring 20% state tax credits for homeowners for many types of repairs on historic homes (i.e. over 50 years) and combined 40% federal and state tax credits for restoration of income producing historic properties.

#### 4.8. Identify, promote, and apply for preservation grants and funding opportunities.

In addition to opportunities available to private property owners, grants and funding opportunities may be available at the municipal level. The Town should explore opportunities including the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation League of New York, New York State Council for the Arts, and NYS Community Preservation Fund legislation.

Table 13: Riverhead Landmarks

Map ID	Landmark	Address	Built Date	Local Listing	National Listing
1	United States Post Office-Riverhead	23 W Second St	c. 1929	N/A	1989
2	Vail-Leavitt Music Hall	18 Peconic Ave	1881	1979	1983
3	Hallock Homestead	6038 Sound Ave	c. 1765 and 19th century additions	2005	1984
4	Eugene Hallock House	6142 Sound Ave	1859	2005	1984
5	Suffolk County Historical Society Building	300 W Main St	1930-1931	N/A	1994
6	Hallock-Bilunas Farmstead	733 Herricks Ln	1880 house, late 19th - early 20th century outbuildings	N/A	2003
7	Jamesport Meeting House	1590 Main Rd	1731	1979	2009
8	Benjamin King Woodhull House	126 Sound Rd	mid-18th century, and enlarged circa 1843	1982	2008
9	Jedediah Hawkins House	400 S Jamesport Ave	1864	2003	2008
10	Tuthill-Lapham House (Friendly Hall)	324 Sound Rd	c. 1820, and additions 1838, 1869, and the 1920s	1982	2009
11	Daniel and Henry Tuthill Farm Complex	1146 Main Rd	c. 1890	N/A	2015
12	Harrison Downs House & Farm	5793 Sound Ave	c. 1874, early 20th century outbuildings	N/A	2016
13	Wading River Radio Station	408 North Side Rd	1912	N/A	2018
14	Bank Building	34-38-42 W Main St	1892	1981	NA

Map ID	Landmark	Address	Built Date	Local Listing	National Listing
15	Benjamin House and Barn, Fresh Pond School House	141 E Main St	c. 1860, 1822	1976	NA
16	Capt. Austin Penny House	2014 Main Rd	c. 1872	2004	NA
17	Captain Dimon House (Jamesport Manor)	370 Manor Ln	Late 18th-Mid 19th Century, Rebuilt 2007	2000	NA
18	Centerville Chapel	3718 Sound Ave	1888	1976	NA
19	Charles Hallett House	218 Griffing Ave	Mid-Late 19th Century	1985	NA
20	Conklin House	216 Lincoln St	Late 19th Century	1994	NA
21	Corwin-Davis-McGrath House (Old Riverhead News Building)	215 Roanoke Ave	Early-Mid 19th Century	1983	NA
22	Corwin-Terry House ("East Lawn")	536-540 E Main St	1855	1988	NA
23	Corwin-Young House	445 Griffing Ave	1891	unknown	NA
24	David Wells House	5120 Sound Ave	c. 1790	1987	NA
25	Davis-Corwin House	133 E Main St	c. 1840	1976	NA
26	District # 10 School	86 Winds Way	1872	2003	NA
27	Elks Lodge	1239 E Main St	1921	2017	NA
28	Ellsworth Tuthill House ("1812 House")	144 Sound Rd	1812	1982	NA
29	Everett Conklin House	206 Lincoln St	1892	unknown	NA
30	Fletcher Booker Homestead	1185-87-89 Northville Tpke	1939	2007	NA
31	Granite Stone from "Octagon" Jail	200 Howell Ave	1854	1981	NA
32	Griffing-Wells House	396 Main Rd	1758	2006	NA
33	Howell House	533 E Main St	1929	2004	NA
34	Irving Hulse House	790 Hulse Landing Rd	1822	1981	NA

## Riverhead Landmarks (Continued)

Map ID	Landmark	Address	Built Date	Local Listing	National Listing
35	J. Victor Wilson Barn	977 Main Rd	1908	2017	NA
36	Jeremiah Edwards House	193 Griffing Ave	c. 1870	1976	NA
37	John Luce House	5298 Sound Ave	c. 1800	1988	NA
38	Luther Moore house	486 Main Rd	c. 1865	2007	NA
39	Meyer House	18 1st St	c. 1890	unknown	NA
40	Modern Snack Bar Sign	628 Main Rd	1956	2007	NA
41	Moore-Barnes House	224 Griffing Ave	Mid-Late 19th Century	1982	NA
42	Oliver's Hill Cemetery	Sound Rd	1696	2006	NA
43	Paine Family House Site and Cemetery	2730 N Wading River Rd	18th Century	2007	NA
44	Paul Hulse House	3060 N Wading River Rd	c. 1812	1983	NA
45	Perkins Carriage House (a.k.a., the Yellow Barn)	330 Court St	c. 1880	2017	NA
46	Peters-Kimmel Cottage	11 Kimmel Ln	1911	2011	NA
47	Pump House	73-79 Peconic Ave	pre-1900	1979	NA
NA	Reeve/Corwin House (Roswell Corwin)*	Main Rd	c. 1700	1977	NA
48	Roanoke Avenue School	573 Roanoke Ave	1924	2005	NA
49	Salem Wells House	5412 Sound Ave	c. 1760	1988	NA
50	Second Street Fire House	24 E Second St	1931	2017	NA
51	Sheldon Downs House & District #11 School	941 Manor Ln	1860 & 1834	unknown	NA
52	Slade-Hallett House	214 Griffing Ave	Mid-Late 19th Century	1982	NA
53	Sound Avenue Congregational Church	5267 Sound Ave	1904	1981	NA

Map ID	Landmark	Address	Built Date	Local Listing	National Listing
54	Sound Avenue Hall	5268 Sound Ave	1831	1981	NA
55	Suffolk Theater	118 E Main St	1933	2004	NA
56	Taft Candy Store	48-52 Peconic Ave	1898	1988	NA
57	The Witch's Hat	347 Main Rd	c. 1927	1987	NA
58	Tuthill-Davis House	179 Sound Rd	c. 1790	1982	NA
59	Wading River Cemetery	2289 N Wading River Rd	1849	2006	NA
60	Wading River Congregational Church	2057-2059 N Country Rd	1837	1981	NA
61	Washington Young House	890 Peconic Bay Blvd	c. 1880	2005	NA
62	Wells-Hutchinson House	939 Main Rd	c. 1770	1988	NA
63	Wilbur-Fanning House	73 Winds Way	c. 1790/1836	1982	NA
64	Zophar Miller Cottage	2078 N Wading River Rd	1832	1982	NA
65	Zophar Miller Homestead	2098 N Wading River Rd	1799	1982	NA

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 10 COMMUNITY FACILITIES

This section discusses the practical aspects of community facilities that play a pivotal role in the daily lives of those who live and work in the Town. It examines the current state of these essential services, from schools and medical facilities to parks and emergency services, and outlines specific goals and recommendations for improvement. The Coronavirus pandemic highlighted the importance of community facilities in supporting well-being and a strong economy, particularly during a period of distress and recovery. The focus of this Comprehensive Plan is to identify strategies to ensure these facilities are not only efficiently maintained but also well-positioned to meet the community's evolving needs.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Figure 26 identifies the locations of key community facilities throughout the Town. This map serves as a foundation for discussions on where resources are located and where they may be needed or expanded to meet the evolving needs of Riverhead's vibrant and diverse population.

#### ***Municipal Facilities and Services***

In 2023, Riverhead moved its Town Hall to a downtown location on Second Street. This strategic move brought the civic and administrative hub to the center of the community and provided more space for other departments to expand in the prior location. The Justice Court will move from the building it shared with the Police Department at 210 Howell Avenue into the former Town Hall building at 200 Howell Avenue. Other Town facilities include Town Hall West at 1295 Pulaski Street, the Highway Department, Municipal Garages, and the Parks and Recreation Department, as shown in Figure 26. The Town also owns a landfill property, which is discussed in further detail in Chapter 10. In addition, the Town-owned Henry Pfeiffer Building located on Grumman Boulevard is leased to a nonprofit organization, East End Disabilities; the Town thus has discretion to determine its future use and potential long-term plans.

#### ***Police Department***

The Police Department serves an essential role in public safety and crime prevention and is also involved with many public service efforts. According to the Department, crime and overall police calls decreased

during the pandemic. The most prevalent crimes are minor offenses, such as larceny, petty larceny, and criminal mischief.

As of 2023, the Police Department consists of 95 full-time sworn officers and 16 dispatchers. Expansion of the police force and staff is planned for 2024 and anticipated in the future as Riverhead's population and call volume grow. The Department has the following divisions and bureaus: Patrol, Detective, Juvenile Aid, School Resource, Marine, and Fire Investigations. The Police Department anticipates expanding into the former Justice Court on Howell Avenue in 2024.

In 2021, the Riverhead Police Department adopted the Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative Plan, produced by an advisory panel appointed by the Town Board. The plan publicly shares the results of a community survey completed by approximately 1,200 people, revealing that the Police Department received high marks, with 52% rating services as excellent and 34% as good. Additionally, 75% of respondents trusted the Department's ability to make unbiased decisions. The reform plan, by public feedback and the executive order requirements, consists of six categories: equality and social justice, accountability and transparency, community relations, policy and procedures, training, and NYS-mandated changes.

The Riverhead Community Oriented Policing Enforcement (C.O.P.E.) unit aims to improve quality of life by addressing public safety concerns and collaborating with residents, local schools, community groups, and law enforcement agencies to address immediate issues affecting neighborhoods. It investigates complaints; engages in community partnerships; provides a visible presence in schools and

downtown areas; and works on various investigations, including DWI, narcotics, prostitution, anti-terrorism measures, and underage substance sales.

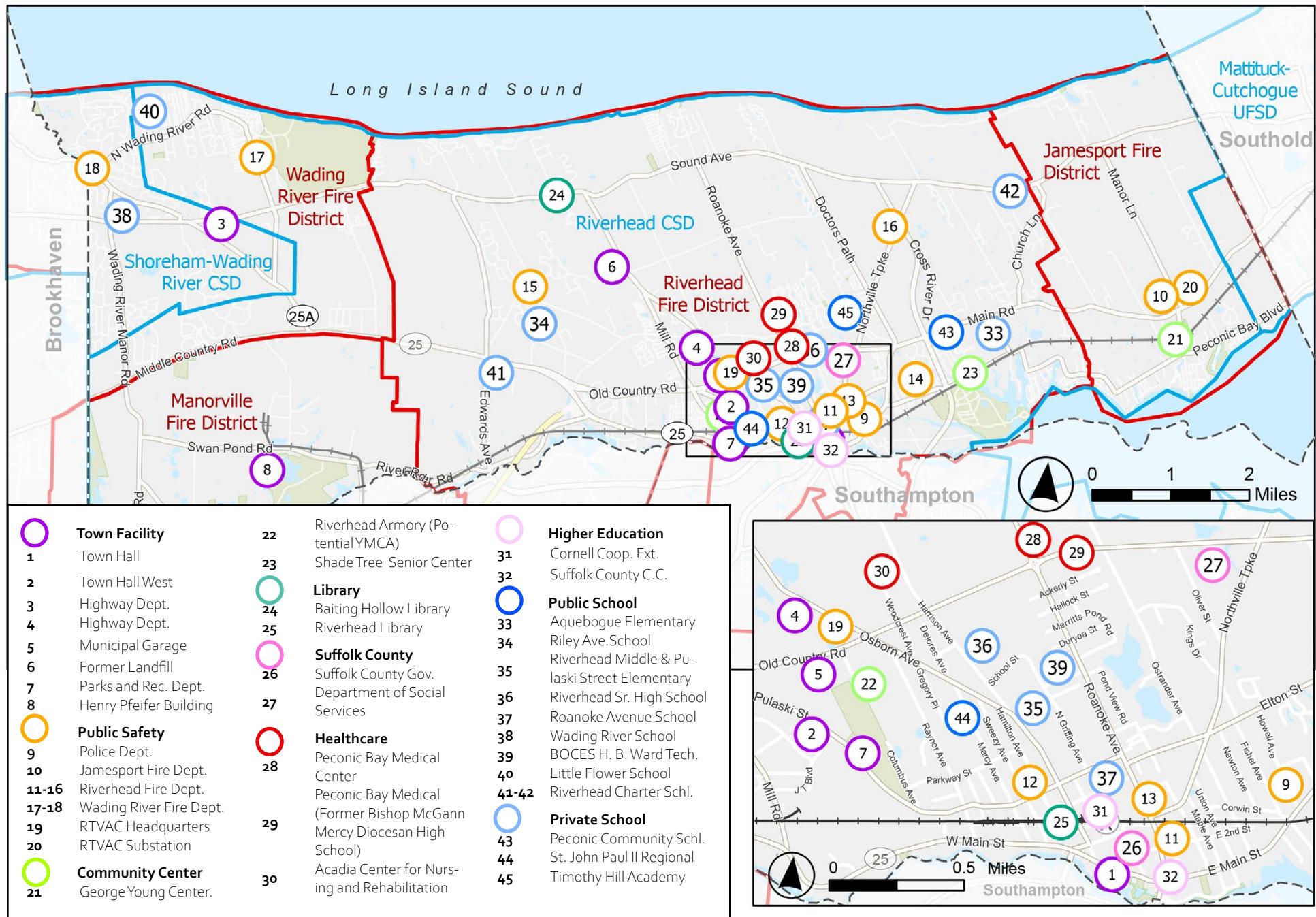
#### ***Police Department Needs***

Facility space is of concern, as the Police Department has outgrown its current facility. With the recent relocation of Town Hall, there are new options available for the Police Department to address needs. As discussed in the recommendations, renovation and additional space in the new Justice Court building (former Town Hall building at 200 Howell Street) may be required for efficient police and justice operations. Other needs cited by the Department include improved technology and additional police vehicles. The Department expects that there will be increasing demand for services, particularly considering anticipated development downtown and the potential for industrial or other development at EPCAL.

#### ***Emergency Response***

Riverhead's emergency response section on its website provides a general guide for residents in times of crisis. Suffolk County's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) oversees the County's reaction to natural and human-made crises. OEM staff handle the creation of the Comprehensive All-Hazards Emergency Management Plan; run the County's Emergency Operation Center (EOC); and collaborate with local, state, and federal authorities on shelter management, resource planning, and emergency response and recovery efforts.

The New York State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) addresses hazard mitigation planning and risk assessment to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance preparedness; outlines



## FIGURE 26: COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND FIRE DISTRICTS

Source: Town of Riverhead, Suffolk County, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

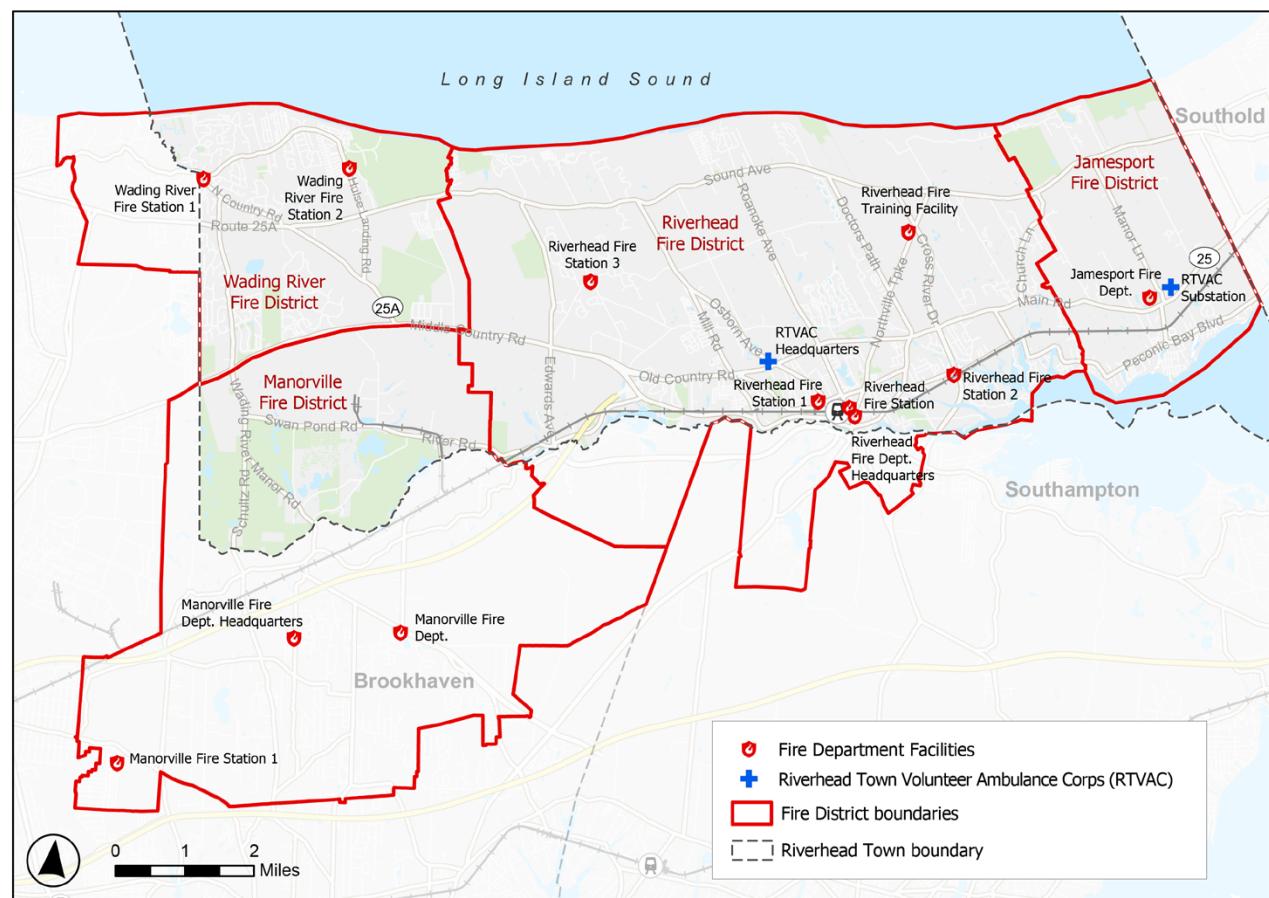
the state's policies, authorities, and organizational structure for immediate emergency response; and focuses on long-term recovery efforts to restore and rebuild communities affected by disasters for sustained resilience.

## Fire Protection

Four fire districts serve Riverhead: Jamesport, Riverhead, Wading River, and Manorville (see Figure 27). Each fire district may have multiple stations to ensure adequate response time and service, and each has a budget funded through tax collection in the corresponding district, donations, and grants on occasion.

All fire districts are volunteer and do not have career firefighters. Because of dwindling human resources, especially daytime volunteers, fire districts have formed mutual agreements to share resources during staff shortages. Fire districts have been actively recruiting volunteers and working on recruitment and retention programs. For example, the Jamesport and Riverhead Fire Districts have adopted Length of Service award programs for qualified firefighters. Manorville has a junior program through the Boy Scouts of America, which has been very successful for the past 15 years, with 24 juniors promoted into the Manorville Fire Department. However, program attendance has dropped in recent years. Jamesport had a Junior Contingent, but it has not been active in the past 10 years. Wading River has expressed interest in establishing a Junior Corps program.

Each department has individual capital improvement plans for the acquisition of new equipment and the renovation or expansion of facilities. Several districts noted that some of their apparatuses and trucks are over 30 years old and need replacement. Others stressed the need to expand stations to accommodate tall apparatus and trucks, expand parking, or



**FIGURE 27: FIRE DISTRICTS AND FACILITIES**

Source: Town of Riverhead, Suffolk County, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

add maintenance and storage space. Additional equipment needs include ATVs and rescue boats to access emergencies off the main roads (such as in the Pine Barrens Preserve) or on water. Specific needs described by each district are noted in this chapter's goals and recommendations section.

## Ambulance

Wading River Fire District provides ambulance service within its district. In other areas of Riverhead, the Riverhead Town Volunteer Ambulance Corps (RTVAC) operates as a volunteer ambulance department and responds to around 5,500 emergency medical assistance calls annually. RTVAC maintains its

headquarters on Osbourne Avenue and operates a substation in Jamesport. The organization relies heavily on donations to sustain its operations.

## Community Centers

### George Young Community Center

The George Young Community Center, once the Jamesport School, now serves as a venue for various town events and activities. Rooms are available for rent for public and private events. The Town invested \$10,000 in CDBG funds to improve the center's Honor Garden, incorporating walkways and a gazebo, to honor Riverhead's veterans. The Recreation Department also introduced new playgrounds at the center and recently replaced its aging historic cupola.

### Shade Tree Senior Center and Senior services

Riverhead's Senior Citizen Department offers a comprehensive range of programs and services for older residents at 60 Shade Tree Lane in Aquebogue. The center provides various amenities, including a dining room, kitchen, auditorium, and activity rooms. Other Senior Citizen Department services include:

- Dial-A-Ride: Transportation within Riverhead for grocery shopping, banking, and medical appointments. Reservations must be made in advance, and the service is funded by the Town and Suffolk County Office of the Aging.
- Home Aide: Light housekeeping, shopping, laundry, and errands for eligible seniors. Funded by the Town and County, eligibility is determined through an assessment by the County Department for Aging, and fees are based on a sliding scale.

- Meals on Wheels: Hot noontime meals delivered to homebound seniors or those unable to cook for themselves. Eligibility for meal delivery requires an in-home assessment by Senior Citizen Department staff.
- Residential Repair: Minor home repairs for Riverhead homeowners at no labor cost, with payment only for materials.

### Riverhead Armory

The Armory Building next to Stotzky Park on Route 58 previously housed Parks and Recreation Department programs such as indoor basketball and tennis. Currently, the Police Department is using it for storage. The feasibility of repurposing the property for the YMCA is under study; however, the facility needs extensive and costly renovations (and possible asbestos remediation). There is also an impediment related to the State's deed, which requires that the property be used by the Police Department, Justice Court, or Town-operated recreational programs, thereby limiting use by a private entity.

## Libraries

### Riverhead Free Library

Riverhead Free Library offers traditional material borrowing, digital media access, classes and activities, and technology literacy programs. It also hosts community services such as health screenings and counseling.

The library underwent a renovation following the last comprehensive plan and secured a grant for an exterior walkway. Additionally, the library secured a \$25,000 grant to restore the historic Perkins Carriage House, known as the Yellow Barn, a Town-designated landmark, and received \$215,000 from the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) for a new entrance and welcome center at the library building. The Yellow

Barn operates seasonally as a bookstore managed by Friends of the Library, with proceeds supporting the library's operations.

Since the last comprehensive plan in 2003, the library's patronage has grown from approximately 33,000 to 41,000 patrons. Additional expansions and facilities to accommodate the growth are considered in this Plan.

### Baiting Hollow Free Library

The Baiting Hollow Free Library, established in 1903, joined the Suffolk Cooperative Library System in 1972. The library operates on Thursdays and Saturdays for limited hours, providing book lending and a public computer.

## County Facilities

Riverhead is the County Seat of Suffolk County, with the County's government offices, courts, and other offices located downtown. Suffolk County Department of Social Services also has an office on Route 58.

## Social Services

Suffolk County Social Services and private institutions mainly provide social services for Riverhead. Some notable social-service organizations include the Riverhead Family Center, Maureen's Haven, Long Island Cares, The Retreat, and East End Hospice. These organizations provide crucial support in housing, food assistance, healthcare, and mental health services.

## Health Care

### Peconic Bay Medical Center

Peconic Bay Medical Center (PBMC) is the largest hospital in eastern Suffolk County and the eastern hub of Northwell Health, the largest healthcare organization in New York State. With a focus on

orthopedics, women's health, and heart care, PBMC is a critical contributor to the regional healthcare infrastructure. It is also one of the largest employers on Long Island.

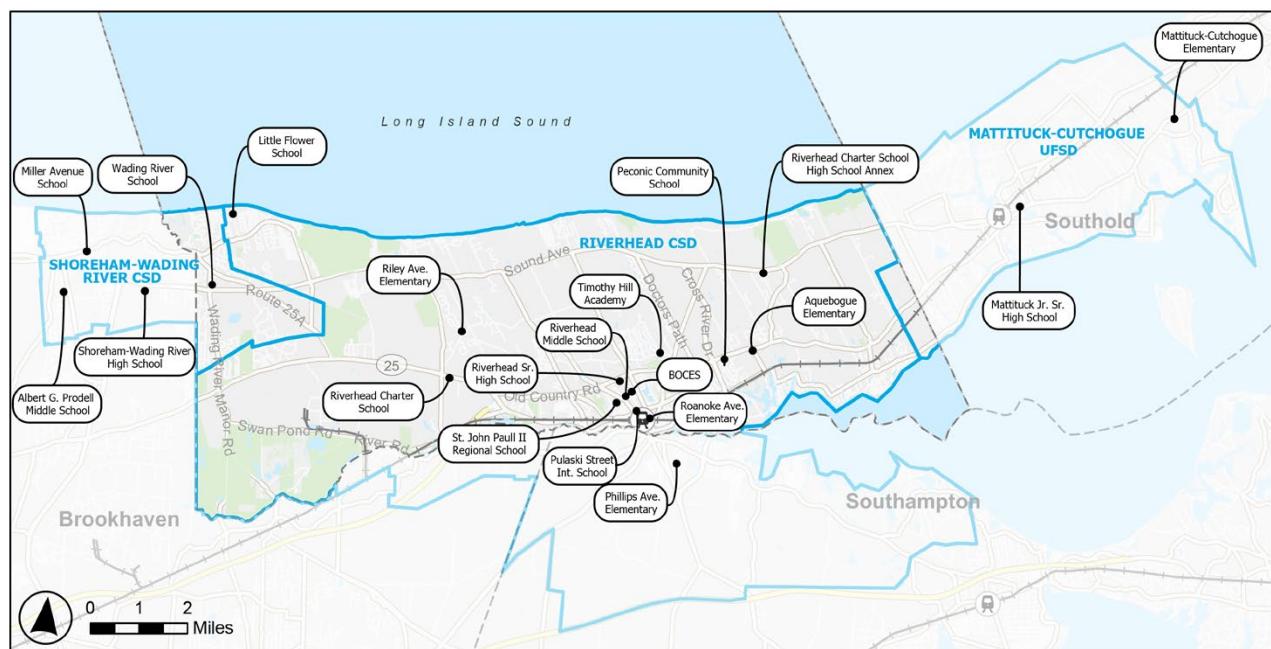
To address the growing demand for critical care due to population growth, PBMC is expanding its emergency department by 6,600 square feet. Renamed the Poole Family Trauma & Emergency Center after a \$5 million donation, the expansion includes a 75% increase in capacity, a new trauma unit, advanced cardiac technology, and enhanced radiology. The hospital also acquired the former Mercy High School property and is envisioning future development there.

### Acadia Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation

The Acadia Center, previously known as Riverhead Care Center, has provided skilled nursing services to Long Island's East End for over four decades and is committed to providing person-centered care in a home-like environment.

## Higher Education

The Eastern Campus of Suffolk County Community College and Cornell Cooperative Suffolk County Extension are in Riverhead. These institutions offer associate degrees, vocational training, workforce development initiatives, and continuing education opportunities. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County also provides various community-based educational programs and resources in agriculture, horticulture, health education, youth development, environmental initiatives, and community outreach.



**FIGURE 28: SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS**

Source: New York Department of Education, Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

### Schools

Riverhead has three school districts (see Figure 28). Riverhead Central School District (Riverhead CSD) encompasses most of the Town and portions of Southampton and Brookhaven. Geographically, it is the largest school district in Suffolk County. Some areas of the western side of Town are in the Shoreham-Wading River Central School District (Shoreham-Wading River CSD), while some areas on the eastern side of Town are in the Mattituck-Cutchogue Union Free School District (Mattituck-Cutchogue UFSD).

New York State Education Department (NYSED) provides annual data on enrollment, student demographics, academic achievement, and financial

reports, and is the source of all data referenced in this section.<sup>1</sup> Riverhead CSD is much larger than either of the other school districts (See Table 14). Enrollment has notably grown (14% from 2005-2023), while in the other two school districts, it has fallen substantially (Shoreham-Wading River CSD by -26% and Mattituck-Cutchogue UFSD by -37%) during the same period.

Riverhead has a significantly higher percentage (63%) of Hispanic students enrolled than the County (38%), the State (29%) and neighboring school districts (Shoreham Wading River 11%, and Mattituck-Cutchogue 24%). The demographics of the Riverhead CSD have changed significantly over the past 20 years. Enrollment data between 2002 and 2022 shows that the Hispanic student population increased from 10%

<sup>1</sup> New York State Education Department, 2023 <https://data.nysed.gov/>

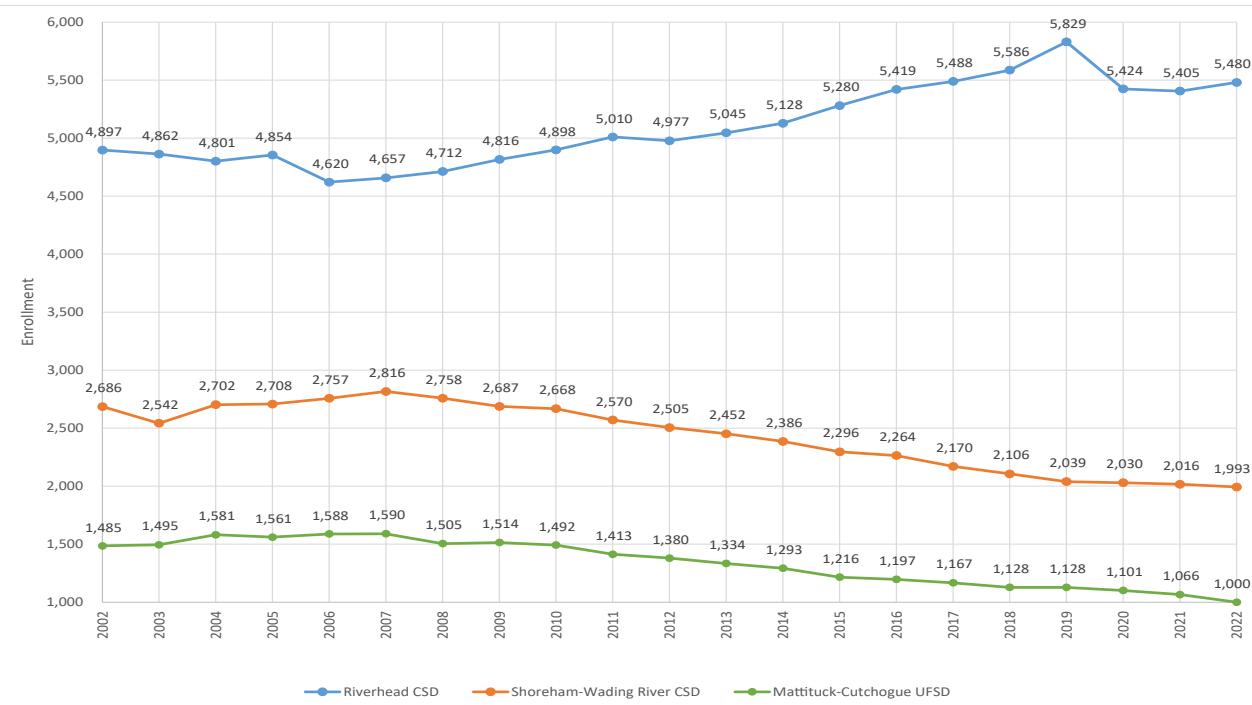


Chart 22: K-12 Enrollment (2002-2022)

Source: New York State Education Department, 2002-2022

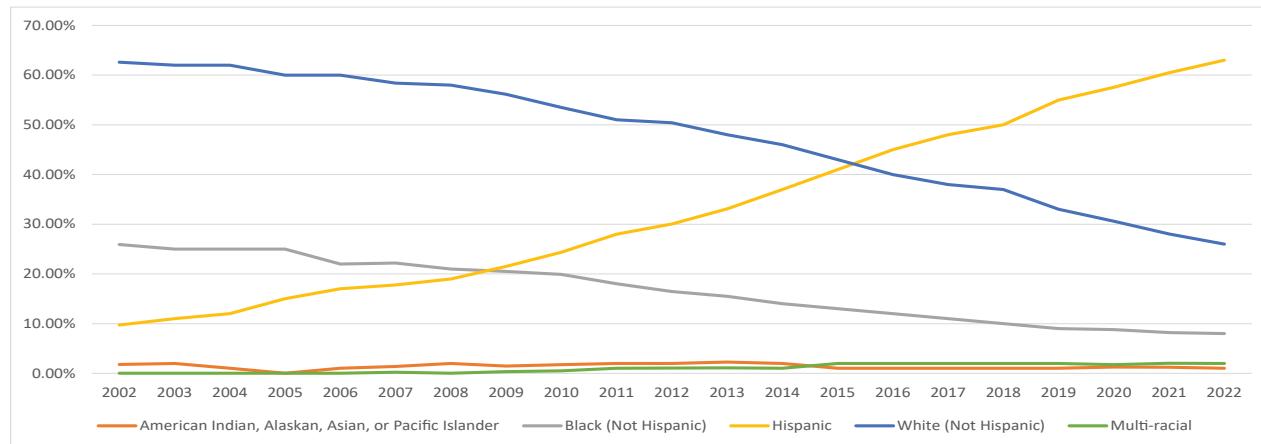


Chart 23: K-12 Enrollment Percentage of Race and Ethnicity (2002 – 2022)

Source: New York State Education Department, 2002-2022

## Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update

of enrollment (475 students) to 63% of enrollment (3,433 students). At the same time, the Black or African American (non-Hispanic) student population has declined from about 26% of enrollment (1,267 students) to 8% of enrollment (450 students). In the same period, the white (non-Hispanic) student population also declined from 63% of enrollment (3,067 students) to 26% of enrollment (1,432 students).

Several indicators show that Riverhead CSD has more student needs than the other two school districts, the County and the State. As of the 2022-23 school year, 37% of Riverhead CSD students qualify as English language learners, 62% are economically disadvantaged, and 4% are homeless. In the 2021-2022 school year, 50% of students were eligible for free lunch. Riverhead CSD has significantly higher percentages in many of the categories in Table 14.

At about \$19,000, Riverhead CSD's spending per pupil is significantly lower than the County and State averages (~\$27,000 and \$28,000, respectively), and spending in both other local school districts (~\$33,000). Riverhead CSD's average class sizes are also generally larger than their counterparts in Shoreham-Wading River CSD and Mattituck-Cutchogue UFSD.

## School Facilities

Riverhead CSD, Shoreham-Wading River CSD, and Mattituck-Cutchogue UFSD have 5-year strategic or facilities plans that include goals for capital improvements.<sup>2</sup> However, these plans do not indicate anticipated expansions of new facilities within the Town of Riverhead.

<sup>2</sup> RSCD Strategic Plan, July 2022, <https://www.riverhead.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/RCSD-Strategic-Plan-July-2022-final.pdf>  
[http://www.swrschools.org/Assets/District/062719-621\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.swrschools.org/Assets/District/062719-621_Strategic_Plan.pdf)  
[https://files.smartsites.parentsquare.com/3594/5\\_year\\_facilities\\_plan\\_december\\_2021.pdf](https://files.smartsites.parentsquare.com/3594/5_year_facilities_plan_december_2021.pdf)

	Enrollment	English Language Learners	Students with Disabilities	Economically Disadvantaged	Migrants	Homeless	Free School Lunch*
Riverhead CSD	5,480	37%	17%	62%	2%	4%	50%
Shoreham-Wading River CSD	1,993	1%	17%	6%	1%	1%	1%
Mattituck-Cutchogue UFSD	1,000	11%	18%	31%	3%	2%	30%
Suffolk County	2,188,77	13%	17%	44%	0%	1%	NA
New York State	2,422,494	10%	19%	58%	NA	NA	NA

**Table 14: Student Enrollment Statistics (2022-2023 School Year)**

\*2021-2022 School Year, 2022-2023 School Year data not available

Source: New York State Education Department, 2002-2022

## Pre-K

Several pre-K programs are available in Riverhead:

- SCOPE Education Services provides a private pre-K program following New York State learning standards. The program is taught by NYS-certified teachers, emphasizing STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math).
- UPK: Riverhead CSD offers a UPK lottery for district residents only, providing free full-day pre-K classes for eligible children five days per week.
- Just Kids operates integrated universal pre-K classrooms in Riley Avenue Elementary School in Riverhead CSD. These classrooms include UPK students and children with special needs, offering related services like speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling in a modern early childhood classroom.
- Head Start operates a location in Riverhead, and a second in Flanders, providing public educational programs for preschool children.

These programs typically offer early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parental involvement services.

## BOCES

The New York Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) Suffolk County East division's Harry B. Ward Technical Center is located in Downtown Riverhead and shares some facilities with Riverhead High School.

## Other Community Resources

### Quality of Life Advisory Committee

The Quality of Life Advisory Committee aims to enhance community members' well-being by addressing issues like aging, safety, homelessness, crime, and sanitation.

### Senior Citizen Advisory Council

The Senior Citizen Advisory Council was re-established in 2014, to identify the needs of the senior community and advise the Town Board on coordinating services and programs.

## Veterans Advisory Committee

The Veterans Advisory Committee focuses on improving the quality of life for veterans by assessing their needs, recommending increased services, advising on veteran-related matters, maintaining awareness of veterans' issues, facilitating a forum for veteran feedback, and fulfilling additional duties assigned by the Supervisor. This Committee recently collaborated with the Riverhead Business Improvement District to install personalized tribute banners honoring veterans on Main Street lampposts in Downtown Riverhead and Jamesport.

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***1. Enhance responsiveness and service quality of emergency services.***

In the face of modern technological advancements, development, and population growth, the Comprehensive Plan aims to fortify the responsiveness and service quality of Police, Fire, and Ambulance Services. Current challenges for emergency responders include addressing fire safety concerns associated with Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), mitigating delays caused by traffic congestion, and navigating potential lapses in services due to inadequate funding and human resources.

Leveraging the recent relocation of Town Hall as a catalyst, the Town can thoroughly evaluate the spatial and resource needs of its departments to align them with the evolving needs of the community. The goal is to ensure that public services not only meet the present demands but also remain adaptable to the community's dynamic needs in the future.

This goal also recognizes the need to bolster volunteerism in the face of shifting demographics. An aging population and evolving work patterns necessitate a proactive approach to ensure adequate resources during crucial daytime hours. Strengthening collaboration through mutual aid agreements with neighboring fire districts further underscores the commitment to meeting operational requirements and optimizing emergency response capabilities in Riverhead.

#### ***1.1. Expand and renovate the Police Station and resources to meet the needs of a modern and growing police force.***

The recent relocation of Town Hall presents an opportunity for the police station to expand to address its needs. A renovation and additional space in the new Justice Court building (former Town Hall building at 200 Howell Street) may be required for efficient police and justice operations. Some of the priority needs of the Police Department are listed below:

**Handicap Accessibility or Ground-Level Detention Cells:** A ramp is needed at the front of the building to make the station accessible. Another alternative would be to provide detention cells at ground level (instead of the basement), potentially within the former Town Hall building. This would provide for a more efficient prisoner transfer to the courtrooms within the building.

**Secured Lot and Sally Port:** Most police cars are kept in front of the police headquarters in an outdoor, unsecured lot. A preferred solution would be to have a dedicated, secured police lot to protect police vehicles, and a sally port to provide a secure transition area for prisoners.

**Communications Center:** The communication center needs to be expanded. The staff of 11 dispatchers will grow to 16 in 2024 and may increase further in the next decade based on call volume growth.

**Impound Yard:** Impounded vehicles are currently stored in a portion of the municipal garage, which is not secured. Impounded vehicles are evidence and may be subject to damage when not stored securely.

**Storage:** The Police Department is using the Riverhead Armory for storage of equipment such as ATVs and boats. The Town is exploring the use of the Armory as a YMCA, which would require the Police Department to identify an alternative storage facility. The 210 Howell Building could potentially be expanded on the north side to accommodate this need.

**Property Room:** The Police Department needs a secure facility to store evidence and records. This could be a room within the former Justice Court building or an off-site facility.

**Training Room:** The Police Department can accommodate 18 people in the training room. A larger room would allow for more effective training and will be appropriate with the expansion of the police force, which will increase from 95 to 100 officers in 2024, with additional staffing increases recommended for coming years.

**Docking Facility on Long Island Sound:** The Police Department has difficulty assisting in water operations, as it does not have a safe harbor and is exposed to elements and storms. The Department currently uses a harness to hold a boat in the water at Northville. The Wading River Fire Department keeps its boats at a Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) station in Brookhaven. While this would be an ideal location, an agreement would need to be reached between Riverhead, Brookhaven, and LIPA to allow the Riverhead Police Department to use the facility.

**Emergency Operations Center:** While there is a communications center in the Police Department headquarters, a backup facility that could be used during a disaster, such as a hurricane, could provide a safe space for the Police Chief and Town leaders

to coordinate emergency response. The Emergency Operations Center should be equipped with landlines, satellite phones, radios, internet, a kitchenette, a bathroom, and a place to rest.

**Downtown Police Substation:** The Town is working to establish a substation in Downtown Riverhead in the parking garage or near Grangebel Park to address concerns about safety. While there is no immediate need for additional substations, the Town and Police Department should evaluate the need for facilities in places where police are posted for walking patrols.

**Technology and Equipment:** Technological advances in policing and Riverhead's unique waterfront location implicate additional near-term equipment needs, including body cameras, drones, a mobile command post, and a rescue boat.

#### **1.2. Identify a long-term strategy for Riverhead Town Volunteer Ambulance Corps facilities.**

The RTVAC and the Town should work together to develop a long-term strategy for expanding or replacing the Osborn Avenue headquarters. Although the site may not be able to accommodate an expansion, adjacent underutilized sites could potentially be purchased. Any needs at the Jamesport station should also be addressed. The RTVAC may also need additional substations, such as at EPCAL.

#### **1.3. Ensure that EPCAL has adequate police, firefighting, and ambulance services and explore methods to finance the construction of substations.**

When EPCAL is developed, police, RTVAC, and fire substations may be needed. The Town should work with the Police Department, RTVAC, and the fire districts to determine needs, financing, and appropriate locations (e.g., Grumman Boulevard). Developers

should contribute their fair share to mitigate the need for additional service and infrastructure. One possibility is the development of a fire brigade within EPCAL that could be drawn from volunteers who work at EPCAL businesses.

#### **1.4. Support the expansion or new construction of firehouses to accommodate new and larger firefighting equipment.**

New firefighting equipment and facilities are needed to service new development. For example, if tall buildings are built at EPCAL, the Riverhead and Manorville departments would need larger aerial devices and stations with larger bays.

#### **Jamesport Fire District**

The Jamesport Fire Station can accommodate current equipment, but future expansion could be needed, depending on community growth. The district recently acquired a parcel north of its existing facility that can accommodate future expansion. The district is in the planning stages of purchasing new apparatus in its upcoming budget; additional grant funding is needed for purchases.

#### **Wading River Fire District**

The district recently conducted a property assessment and estimates for facility upgrades that will cost between \$8 million and \$9 million. The Wading River Fire District headquarters was built in 1987, expanding upon the original 1947 firehouse. The district is remodeling staff and chief office spaces, storage and maintenance areas, and the board room and office. Parking is insufficient to accommodate existing needs, and the district is considering the purchase of a nearby lot for additional parking space. The district also noted that sidewalk improvements near the station would allow safer access from the nearby church parking lots, which visitors occasionally use.

The second Wading River District Station was built in 1982. It requires exterior and roof replacement and renovation, including asbestos remediation. The district foresees the need to add two to three additional bays to the existing building to accommodate apparatuses. There are also plans to build a maintenance and storage building on this property and a training facility.

The district has a contract for two apparatuses: a rescue and pumper and a tanker to replace the aging model. Funding came from the reserve account, a partial grant, and a partial lease. Next year, the district will apply for another grant to help replace the more than 30-year-old pumper. The cost of each purchase is estimated at around \$1.2 million.

#### **Manorville Fire District**

The Manorville fire station is in Brookhaven. The fire district needs to replace its tanker truck, which is over 30 years old, within the coming year. It also needs a new fire police vehicle.

#### **Riverhead Fire District**

Riverhead Fire Station 3 needs an expansion to accommodate an aerial device. There is room for expansion on the property.

#### **1.5. Plan for specialized training and equipment for modern firefighting challenges, such as Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facilities.**

BESS fires require nontraditional firefighting methods, training, and equipment. The Town must support fire departments to ensure firefighters are prepared. In addition, the Manorville Fire District identified the need for training and a water and ice rescue vehicle for coverage of the water park and ATVs for coverage of the Pine Barrens area. Specialized training may also be needed to provide service to new uses at EPCAL.

### 1.6. Ensure that water supply and pressure are sufficient throughout the Town for firefighting.

The Town, water district, fire departments, and developers are working together to provide better water pressure in the downtown area to meet the demands of new development. This work includes the repair or replacement of old infrastructure and dead ends. The Town must also ensure tanker trucks can access areas without public water.

### 1.7. Ensure that emergency vehicles can quickly and efficiently access all parts of Riverhead.

The fire districts and the Planning Board review site plans together to ensure that development is accessible by emergency vehicles and will not present fire hazards. However, in older areas of Town, there are issues that cause less-than-ideal response times:

- Narrow streets and driveways north of Sound Avenue and in South Jamesport are difficult to access. Private roads may also have access barriers.
- Sound Shore Club in Wading River: Fire vehicles cannot access the entrance and are forced to use the exit for access.
- Poor drainage and flooding issues should be addressed to enable ease of access (e.g. Creek Road).
- Calverton Meadows (703 Fresh Pond Avenue) – Private hydrants are unusable because the water mains are too small. These should be updated.
- Lack of tree trimming in Town causes damage to apparatuses. The Town should enforce tree trimming regulations and regularly inspect key locations.

- Beach/Water Access – The Fire Department is unable to launch boats in some waters of Town. Creeks could be dredged and be kept at an operational depth at low moon tide.
- EPCAL - The access road behind Wellbridge on Grumman Boulevard could be opened for the Fire Department to use. This would decrease response time to the Grumman facility, the water park, and the new ice rink, instead of having to respond via Route 25. The Town should investigate paved access roads in EPCAL for these locations.

### 1.8. Implement a preemptive signal program to allow police, fire, and ambulance vehicles to respond quickly in emergencies.

Preemptive signals prioritize emergency response vehicles over others at intersections during a time-critical situation. RTVAC has preemptive signals on Route 58 west of Roanoke Avenue. However, the Police and Fire Departments do not have this ability, and the service area could be expanded. The Town should work with emergency responders to identify priority intersections that are most congested and near the hospital or other emergency facilities. Funding sources, such as USDOT grants, could help pay for new signals, equipment within vehicles, and system monitors.

### 1.9. Ensure that the Fire Departments and RTVAC have adequate human resources.

All fire departments and the RTVAC are dependent on volunteers and do not have career service providers. Changing demographics, including an aging population, cost of living, and workers' business hours, present challenges to volunteerism. Riverhead's fire districts have mutual aid agreements to augment operational requirements. The Town should encourage

volunteerism and support efforts to recruit and retain volunteers, such as Junior Corps and Length of Service award programs. Affordable housing for volunteer firefighters could incentivize more participation. Full-time employees may be required in the future to ensure consistency of coverage.

## 2. Strengthen community well-being through enhanced programming and facilities for all ages.

Recognizing the unique demographic challenges and evolving community needs, the Comprehensive Plan aims to elevate programming and facilities for senior citizens, youth, and the broader Riverhead community. As the Town's population ages at a faster pace than the County, the focus is on enhancing services provided by the Senior Citizen Department, addressing transportation concerns, and expanding the offerings at the Senior Center. Beyond the senior demographic, the Plan also recognizes the growing and diverse population's needs for increased recreational programming, expanded youth services, and upgraded library facilities. There may be the need for additional programming and translation in Spanish, given the growth of this Hispanic community. By addressing these multi-faceted needs and modernizing facilities, the goal is to create a community hub that fosters inclusivity, engagement, and improved well-being for residents of all ages in Riverhead.

### 2.1. Expand the variety of social activities, programs, meals, and support services through the Senior Citizen Department.

The Town should enable the Senior Citizen Department to expand its services by providing additional resources. For example, the Senior Center

could increase the reach of the congregate meal program by providing a second location on the west end of Town. With additional staff and vehicles, transportation and Meals on Wheels services can reach more people. Enhancing accessibility to computers and tech assistance could broaden opportunities and services available to older adults, empowering them with valuable digital skills and resources.

#### **2.2. Establish a second senior center on the west side of Town.**

The Shade Tree Senior Center provides a wealth of services that are not easily accessible to seniors who live in western Riverhead. The Town and Senior Citizen Department should identify an appropriate location for a senior center in Calverton or Wading River. While the Henry Pfeiffer Community Center in Calverton was not successful when used as a senior center in the past, however, if repurposed appropriately, its proximity to new public amenities, coupled with a growing demand for this service, may warrant a reconsideration of this Town-owned facility.

#### **2.3. Help the Peconic YMCA identify a suitable site in Riverhead and advocate for needed amenities.**

The feasibility of establishing a YMCA at the Town-owned Armory is ongoing. Alternatively, the Town should proactively seek out another centrally accessible site, considering the potential advantages of co-locating with Veteran's Memorial Park at EPCAL. The YMCA and the Town should collaborate to determine the recreational amenities and programs provided to ensure this significant facility responds to community needs. It is anticipated that significant funding assistance would be needed for this project. Similar facilities in Westchester have received County and State funding.

#### **2.4. Explore the feasibility of establishing a Riverhead youth center.**

A youth center could provide a location for 4-H programs, information on youth services, mentoring or big-brother/big-sister programs, counseling sessions, summer classes and activities, sports outings, and social events. The Town should explore partnerships with the YMCA, JCC, Boys and Girls Club, and other organizations.

#### **2.5. Work with the Riverhead Free Library and Baiting Hollow Free Library to evaluate space and expansion needs.**

There is a need to expand the current footprint of the Riverhead Free Library and establish a storefront location to provide the spaces, technologies, and programs for the growing patron base. However, the town should study whether increased services will increase growth in patrons. Outposts, including a bookmobile or exchanges at the beach or parks, may be a more effective strategy to help collections reach a larger population. Additionally, the Town may consider co-locating a youth center at an expanded library.

### **3. *Support expansion of school district facilities to accommodate growing demand***

Riverhead CSD has experienced a consistent increase in enrollment over the past two decades, but critical aspects like classroom space have not been expanded to meet the rising demands. The closure of Mercy High School in 2018 and migration have contributed to the surge in enrollment at the middle and high school levels. With anticipated population growth and new developments in both Riverhead and the Southampton

area of the school district, future enrollment is likely to rise further. A proactive approach to identifying new facilities is essential to accommodate the evolving needs of the community, ensuring that the school district can effectively respond to increased enrollment and provide an optimal learning environment for students in Riverhead.

It is important to acknowledge that the school districts are autonomous entities separate from municipalities, and they operate independently under state regulations and guidelines. Nevertheless, collaboration between the Town and school district is essential to ensure alignment between residential development plans and educational needs. This could involve joint planning efforts, sharing demographic data, and coordinating infrastructure investments to accommodate growing student populations.

#### **3.1. Work with the school districts to identify appropriate sites for new schools and expansions.**

The Riverhead CSD should plan to accommodate larger class sizes by expanding existing schools or developing new facilities. The Town can identify vacant, underutilized, or publicly owned sites that could accommodate expansions or additional schools.

#### **4. Increase options for affordable and accessible childcare.**

Access to affordable childcare continues to be an issue in Riverhead. All efforts should be made to streamline the opening of childcare facilities and ensure they operate safely. The Town's zoning ordinance currently allows daycare facilities by special permit in most residential and commercial zones. Childcare facilities require licensing by the State.

##### **4.1. Clarify code language to be consistent with New York State Social Service Law which allows small daycare centers in single-family detached and two-family homes.**

Small daycare centers present less traffic than larger ones, lessening the need for special permitting. However, they still require compliance with State regulations, including licensing to ensure safety. Allowing in-home daycare can increase the available childcare services in Riverhead and relieve the shortage of facilities.

##### **4.2. Allow daycare centers in places of worship as an accessory use.**

Religious facilities often have community rooms and adequate parking to support a childcare facility, and many parents prefer the option of leaving their children in a faith-based facility. For the house of worship, having a daycare operator or tenant can supplement their operating budget and enhance their ability to fulfill their mission. The code should be clarified to ensure that daycare is accessory to the principal faith-based use. As with in-home daycare, such facilities would require State licensing.

##### **4.3. Incentivize or require large employers to provide onsite daycare to employees.**

Incentives may include zoning bonuses, such as increased floor area ratios or density allowances, for employers who integrate onsite daycare facilities into their business establishments. Simultaneously, zoning regulations can stipulate requirements mandating large employers to include onsite daycare facilities as part of their development plans. This could be tied to the scale of the business, making it a prerequisite for companies reaching a certain employee threshold. On-site daycare should be permitted as an accessory use.

#### **5. Strengthen the Town's capacity to address diverse community health and human service needs.**

This entails developing targeted strategies to confront healthcare challenges encountered by vulnerable groups, such as seasonal farm workers lacking health insurance and adequate medical care, while also addressing the language barriers faced by a growing population in Riverhead. Special attention is directed toward the unique needs of those recovering from addiction in the high concentration of sober homes. Recognizing transportation limitations, collaborative efforts are underway, including initiatives like Peconic Bay Medical Center's health services shuttle. This Plan advocates for a holistic response, encompassing the establishment of critical facilities like a detoxification clinic and addiction recovery agency. Moreover, it aims to enhance awareness and accessibility to essential programs offered by the Suffolk County Department of Social Services, spanning family and child services,

financial assistance, employment support, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and temporary housing assistance, among others.

##### **5.1. Work with Suffolk County to understand what role the Town can play in addressing community health and human service needs.**

Build on the partnership with Suffolk County to gain insights into the Town's potential role in addressing community health and human service needs. Ensure coordinated programming efforts with the County to guarantee that proposed solutions complement and enhance existing County resources. The Town can also help expand outreach to vulnerable populations to connect them with health and mental health services. Information about these services should be available in Spanish and other languages commonly spoken in Riverhead.

##### **5.2. Collaborate with Peconic Bay Medical Center to Enhance Community Health and Service Delivery**

The Town should be an active partner with PBMC, which plays a critical role in addressing community health needs. This strategic partnership should focus on developing and implementing initiatives that address specific health and service needs within the community. By leveraging PBMC's expertise and resources, the Town can enhance access to quality healthcare, promote preventive measures, and provide targeted services that align with the unique requirements of the Riverhead population.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 11 INFRASTRUCTURE AND UTILITIES

This chapter examines the existing infrastructure and utilities serving Riverhead. Utility infrastructure is critical to the health, safety, and welfare of the community. Water, sewer, electric, natural gas, and telecommunications facilities are relied upon by residents and businesses for day-to-date activity and contribute to the Town's economic wellbeing, and in supporting the health, safety, and welfare of the residents and the future demands of the residential, commercial, industrial markets. Each element of the community requires an adequate supply of clean potable water, energy, telecommunications including phone, internet access, and Wi-Fi connectivity, solid waste disposal and a sound sanitary infrastructure.

Utility services in Riverhead, much like the rest of Long Island, are predominantly supplied by a combination of public, private, and semi-private entities. Therefore, fostering collaborative partnerships with these stakeholders is paramount for enhancing and expanding service provisions.

Furthermore, there is a significant intersection between the Infrastructure chapter and the Sustainability and Resiliency chapter, particularly concerning stormwater management, energy supply, and emergency management. This underscores the importance of integrated planning and coordinated efforts to address overlapping challenges and opportunities effectively.

Water supply, sewers, and wastewater treatment are limiting factors with direct impact from increased population demands. Solid waste numbers are rising throughout both Suffolk and Nassau Counties and increases in transportation and fuel costs are driving higher municipal costs to taxpayers. By modeling Riverhead's systems and behaviors on successful programs and infrastructure around the State and Country, Riverhead can achieve a balance between use and demands with the goals of Zero Waste and a Circular Economy by 2040.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### ELECTRICITY AND NATURAL GAS

The Town has little control over the administration of electricity and natural gas services beyond the oversight process as to where the utilities might locate new services, such as substations, power lines, battery energy storage, solar arrays, gas mains and other elements that might be controlled through permitting and site plan approval processes.

Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) is a municipal subdivision of New York State that owns the electric transmission and electric distribution system serving all of Long Island and a portion of New York City (Rockaways). Since 2014, LIPA has contracted with New Jersey-based Public Service Enterprise Group (PSEG) to operate LIPA's electric infrastructure on LIPA's behalf. IPSEG Long Island provides electricity to 1.1 million customers in Nassau and Suffolk counties, including Riverhead. KeySpan still operates the natural gas infrastructure on Long Island. LIPA is planning to assume operation of the electric grid by acquiring command of SERVCO, which Public Service Electric & Gas (PSEG) utilizes to operate the electric grid.

LIPA does not own or operate any generation plants or retail natural gas assets on Long Island, although many generation plants are under contract to LIPA to meet its power supply needs. Most of Long Island's largest power plants are operated by National Grid, which owns three major steam turbine facilities originally constructed by the Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO) in the mid-20th century.

As of 2021, the South Fork Wind Farm and the Sunrise Wind projects are under construction, and the Empire Wind project is in planning, all of which are planned to connect to the Long Island power grid. While these

facilities will provide for a more resilient climate-friendly power grid, their specific impact on the Riverhead energy supply is speculative.

Virtually all of the electrical transmission lines in Riverhead are pole mounted overhead lines, which are susceptible to damage during weather events. As storms become more frequent, service interruptions can be expected to increase as well. It behooves the Town to coordinate with the electrical utilities to ensure a modern, resilient grid is available for present and future residents and businesses.

### SANITARY WASTE

#### *Sewer District Facilities*

Riverhead is served by two sewer districts that allow for collection and treatment of wastewater at two sewage treatment plants owned and operated by the Town. In addition, the Town operates a scavenger waste facility that accepts and treats wastewater from parts of Brookhaven and the five East End towns. There are also two small private sewage treatment plants in Riverhead.

#### *Riverhead Sewer District*

The Riverhead Sewer District treatment plant is located on River Avenue, off Riverside Drive just east of the downtown core. It was built in 1937, provided primary treatment, and used chlorine for disinfection. The plant was upgraded in 1959 to a secondary treatment plant, and again in 2000, when sequencing batch reactors and ultraviolet light were installed for disinfection. The plant has a capacity of 1.4 million gallons per day (mgd) and sees flow of approximately 1.05 mgd. A total of 12 pumping stations convey

wastewater to the treatment plant across 24 miles of pipe. The primary goal of the Riverhead Sewer District (RSD) is treating all the wastewater within its boundaries meeting all Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS) regulations and guidelines. The RSD boundaries, shown in Figure 29, mainly include the downtown core, Route 58 corridor, and residential properties between the two. The Town scavenger waste plant is located on the same site, which accepts septic waste from the eastern towns via private cesspool and septic system companies. The district charges a fee for processing this waste, which goes toward the operating budget of the scavenger waste district.

The RSD is conducting a flow study for Downtown Riverhead to determine if there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the additional flow expected from the proposed buildout of the additional residential units slated for the area.

The RSD is seeking bids for improvements to the treatment plant to condition sludge into Class A bio-solids, a standard that would allow its use in unrestricted forms such as compost that could be used on sod farms, nurseries, or farms where the material will not come into direct contact with the grown food item. Local reuse of this waste product would save money currently being spent to truck the waste product to sanitary landfills off Long Island. Cost reduction was estimated in 2022 to be on the order of \$260,000 per year.

Discussions with RSD staff during this Plan preparation indicate that a significant challenge facing the district is infilling positions to operate and oversee the treatment processes in the plants and collection systems. The



**FIGURE 29: SEWER DISTRICT FACILITIES**

Source: Suffolk County, Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, LKMA Engineering

#### Riverhead Sewer District

- Treatment plant on River Avenue constructed in the early 1937
- District serves downtown area and CR58 business district
- 12 pumping stations that convey wastewater to the treatment plant
- Flow study underway to meet needs of increased downtown residential development
- Scavenger Waste facility on-site
- Sludge conditioning project underway

Source: Riverhead Sewer District

#### Calverton Sewer District

- Formed in 1999 when the EPCAL property was transferred to the Town
- Treatment plant constructed in the early 1950s
- District consists of 550 acres which makes up the industrial core area
- Three pumping stations which transport wastewater to the treatment plant
- Boundaries to be extended when EPCAL property is sold for development
- Upgrade completed in 2021 to accommodate increased flow from EPCAL

Source: Riverhead Sewer District

NYSDEC has strict licensure requirements, and entry-level wages are not competitive. Pending retirements at the district could result in a shortage of qualified staff

#### Calverton Sewer District

The Calverton Sewer District (CSD) was formed in 1999 when the EPCAL property was conveyed to the Town. The CSD comprises the 550 acres in the EPCAL industrial core area. The treatment plant was built in the 1950s, and three pumping stations convey wastewater to the treatment plant.

The CSD plant was upgraded and went online in June 2021. The district has also completed a map and plan to extend the sewer district boundaries to include the EPCAL property that is for sale (beyond the current PIP District). Thus, sanitary waste from development of the EPCAL property will be treated at a modern facility. The extension of the district boundaries is expected to take place once the property is sold or leased.

#### Innovative Alternative Wastewater Treatment

While the sewer district serves to treat a significant amount of the sanitary sewage produced in the Town, apart from smaller private treatment facilities, all the remaining sanitary waste produced discharges to septic systems or cesspools, where it returns to groundwater and ultimately into surrounding waters, including the Peconic River. The nitrogen-rich effluent feeds algal blooms in the river, which have resulted in fish kills and other marine life mortality. Many of these parcels will never connect to a public sewer system due to infrastructure and funding constraints. This issue can be mitigated to an extent by the implementation of modern Innovative Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems, referred to as I/A OWTS or simply

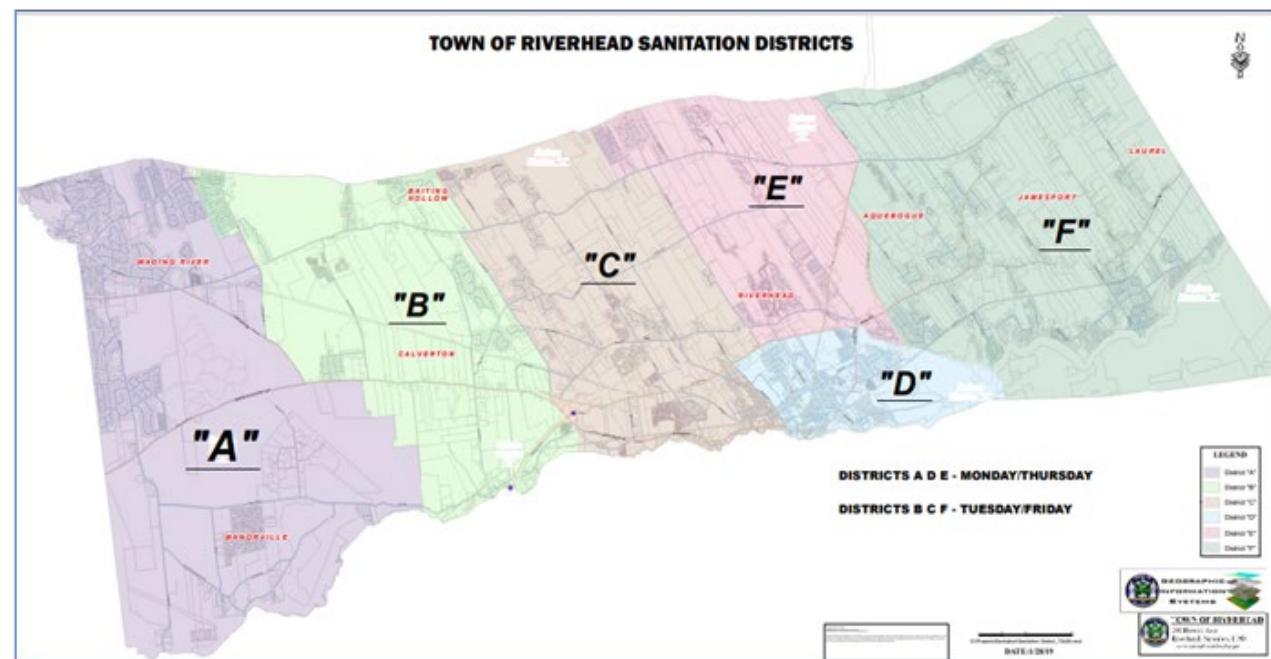
I/A systems. Suffolk County has launched the Reclaim Our Water initiative to regulate the use of I/A OWTS to ensure these advanced wastewater treatment systems continue to reduce nitrogen as they are designed to do. To make the cost of I/A systems more affordable for homeowners, the County has developed a grant program to make funds available to homeowners to upgrade their systems to I/A.

### Wastewater Reuse

In 2016, the County-owned Indian Island golf course in Riverhead became the first and only golf course on Long Island to use reclaimed wastewater for irrigation use. The Town partnered with the Suffolk County Parks Department to initiate the project, which can provide up to 450,000 gallons per day of reusable water to irrigate the adjacent golf course, which is next to the treatment plant. The project, which included the installation of 1,000 feet of force main piping between the treatment plant and golf course, was completed in time for the 2017 irrigation season. By diverting nitrogen from the Peconic River to the golf course, nitrogen discharge into the river is reduced. It can also reduce the amount of nitrogen fertilizer required to maintain the turf grass on the golf course.

### SOLID WASTE AND RECYCLING

Riverhead operated a municipal residential collection system and sanitary landfill until the mid-1990s. In 1993, the Town ceased accepting waste at its Young's Avenue landfill but continued to use the transfer station at this 40-acre facility. The landfill was capped in 2011 and the transfer station is now closed. At present, solid waste service within Riverhead is provided by the Town of Riverhead Refuse and Garbage District, which since 2012, is a unit of the Engineering Department. The district is divided into six sub-districts, as shown in Figure 30. The Town's solid waste management



**FIGURE 30: SANITATION DISTRICTS**

Source: Town of Riverhead, NY

program is subsidized by a sanitation tax for curbside solid waste collection and by the Town's General Fund through taxes.

Private carters under contract to the Town provide collection and disposal of residential waste, recyclables, yard waste, and bulk waste. The private carters are responsible for disposition of the waste at facilities outside Riverhead. The Town also provides for residential yard waste collection and residential yard waste drop-off with compost offered to residents. The yard waste facility is at the Young's Avenue site. Household hazardous waste collection is conducted twice a year under the Town's STOP program (Stop Throwing Out Pollutants).

Commercial property owners must contract for private waste collection services. Source separated/curbside recycling is mandatory in Riverhead for both commercial and residential properties. The Town requires cardboard and newsprint and commingled materials (plastics, metals) to be recycled. Riverhead completed and received NYSDEC approval for its 2020-2029 Solid Waste Management Plan.

All residential solid waste is delivered to the Brookhaven transfer station. At the Brookhaven Landfill, waste is consolidated into larger trucks and transported to an incineration facility in Hempstead. The ash by-product is returned to the Brookhaven Landfill.

Paper and cardboard are collected for recycling by Riverhead's contracted carter every other Wednesday and brought to West Babylon. Comingled recyclables are collected and delivered to Islip's Material Recovery Facility (MRF), while non-recyclable Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) is brought to Islip's Incinerator in Ronkonkoma. The refuse is incinerated, and the energy is transformed into electricity. The ash by-product is returned to the Brookhaven Landfill. Solid waste from all Town-owned offices, buildings and park facilities are collected by the Riverhead Sanitation Department and transported to Cutchogue.

As can be seen, the Town's solid waste system is intertwined at many levels with the Town of Brookhaven landfill, which is scheduled to close. The closure date was pushed back from 2024 to 2027-2028 to provide more time for towns to develop alternate ways to dispose of and recycle ash. The Closure of this facility will result in the need identify new means of disposal of much of the end product of Riverhead's solid waste, which in turn is likely to have significant impact on the cost of disposal. These cost increases will most likely be passed along to the Town of Riverhead. The Town already has achieved a substantial reduction in per capita solid waste production between 2009 and 2019, and the 2020-2029 Solid Waste Management Plan projects a continued decrease in per capita waste production, achieved through a variety of measures including educational programs, composting, and incentives. However, due to projected population growth, Riverhead's total amount of solid waste is still projected to increase. It is noted that NYSDEC has set reduction goals of 40% by 2030, and 90% by 2040.

## DRINKING WATER

The Riverhead Water district is approximately 44.7 square miles, with 234 miles of water main and 17 active groundwater wells at 10 separate sites (see Figure 31). The district services 35,000 customers with over 12,000 residential and commercial services, with many services feeding several customers (i.e., mobile home park or apartment buildings). Yearly revenue is dependent on water usage and will fluctuate dependent on wet or dry years, usually ranging from \$8 million to \$9 million dollars/year. Operating funds can vary up to 20% year to year since revenue is based on pumping demand. The district has a \$30 million capital improvement plan.

District representatives identified a need to plan for large-scale industrial complexes, EPCAL, and residential development. Representatives stressed the need to find new sources of water supply. In the past, the district has not required the large-scale developments to provide these sources, such as Splish Splash Water Park who uses 15 million gallons a month in the peak summer months and did not contribute to the water supply infrastructure needed. These costs were spread out among all the customers. The water district now works closely with the Planning Department to ensure developers provide the funding for increased water supply and fire protection infrastructure if required. The district has secured a \$3 million matching grant for manganese removal, and received a grant to remove PFOs (a newly found contaminant) which is estimated to cost \$2 million. The district is currently applying for a second grant to remove PFOs for a second well. The district considers historical release from the former navy facility in Calverton (EPCAL) to be a significant threat to the long-term water resources in the western half of Riverhead. The district is working with local and state regulators to have the navy address those issues but has had very little success. The \$400,000 installation,

### Riverhead Water District

- Created in 1916
- District may expand within the boundaries of the entire Town, but not all of Town is on public water
- 17 Active Wells drilled into Glacial and Magothy Aquifers
- Population served (2019) 35,000
- Water Drawn for Aquifer (2019) 2.4 billion gallons
- Conducts 1000+ tests per year for over 130 contaminants
- Quality generally excellent, but some areas of contamination exist

### Recent Upgrades

- 2-million-gallon concrete ground storage tank installed at Tuthill's Lane well field
- Will enable the District to better meet peak demands in the eastern portion of Town
- Installation of mixing system at Palane Road storage tank
- Upgrades to wells on Pulaski Street and Osborn Avenue

### Planned Upgrades

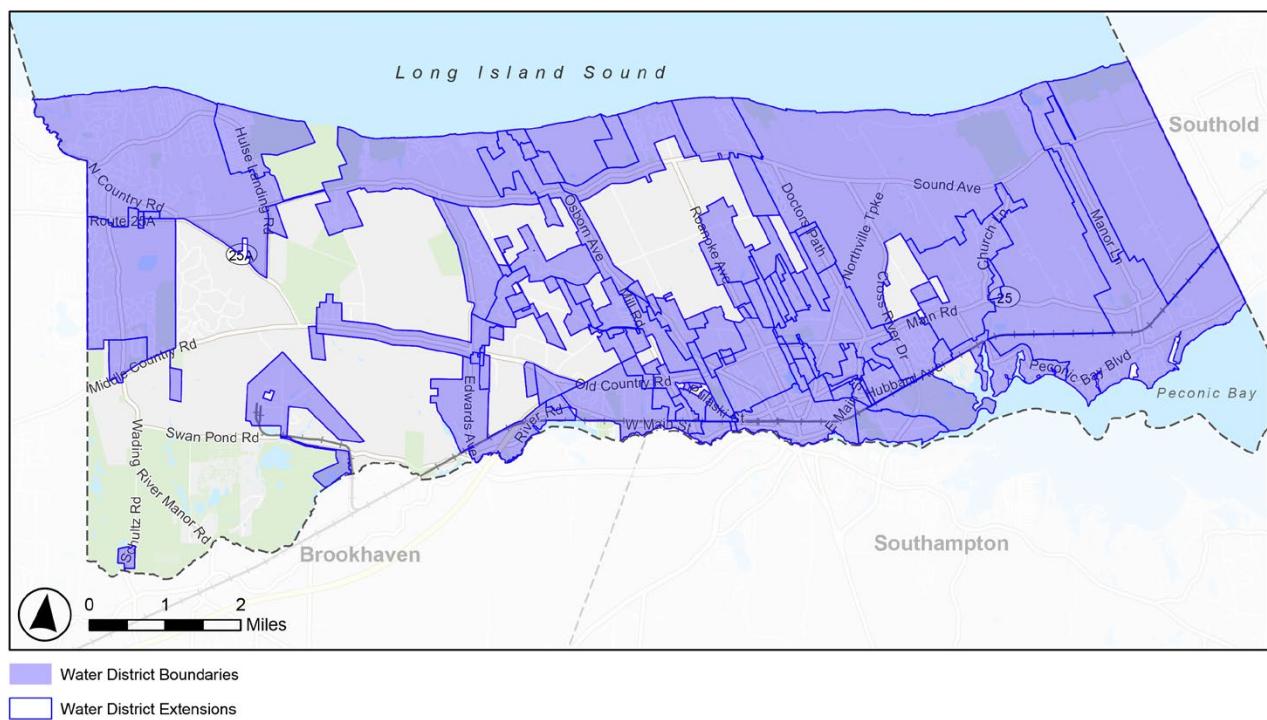
- Upgrade aging infrastructure at wellfields on Osborn Avenue and Columbus Street (underway)
- Installation of test wells, plant upgrades and media replacement for perchlorate filter.
- In the planning stage for a new ground storage tank in Wading River and a new well in Calverton and hopes to begin construction on these new facilities in the coming year.

in partnership with USGS and NYSDEC, of two 800-foot deep monitoring wells to monitor saltwater intrusion and help manage the overall water resources is underway.

A water district such as Riverhead requires NYSDEC approval for expansion of its infrastructure showing no opposition from SCWA and supply calculations and needs. However, there has not been an approval for expansion from NYSDEC in over 20 years. According to water district representatives, this approval process has been problematic, and has complicated the EPCAL redevelopment process. The Suffolk County Water Authority (SCWA) and NYSDEC are not in agreement on who should supply EPCAL, despite the fact that Riverhead has been serving the area since it was transferred to the Town. A solution must be developed for this situation so that the water district can continue to grow and operate.

Riverhead Water District staff also identified challenges emerging over the next several years:

- Many employees hired leave for other water agencies after they have gained experience, since the pay rate is much higher. Retention of staff is approximately 50%.
- Summer irrigation needs place a substantial load onto the system; controls or limits need to be in place to avoid overburdening the system.
- New York State has recently added oversight over water supply and has more stringent regulations than the EPA. Riverhead's Water District is fairly new, so it is yet to be seen what extra or necessary upgrades would be required as the district moves forward.
- The Town's water district does not have an automated "SCADA" system similar to SCWA. The SCADA system allows remote monitoring of conditions, while the existing system (manual) requires more on-hand employees.



**FIGURE 31: RIVERHEAD WATER DISTRICT**

Source: Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***1. Continue to meet emerging solid waste management challenges as disposal opportunities evolve***

#### ***1.1. Continue to work toward the NYSDEC goal of 40% reduction in solid waste by 2030, and 90% by 2040.***

While Riverhead generates higher amounts of residential waste than average communities, on a per capita basis, the Town has achieved reduction from 8.2 pounds per day to 5.15 pounds per day between 2009 and 2019. The Town can further reduce the amount of solid waste generated by encouraging recycling, expanding food scraps and composting programs, and encouraging home composting through education and distribution of composting bins. Composting is discussed further in Chapter 12: Sustainability and Resilience.

The Town currently pays a tipping fee of \$100 per ton for solid waste. Moving toward the NYSDEC goals could potentially reduce waste disposal costs significantly. The Town should establish alternative programs to divert food waste. The National Recycling Goal is to increase recycling to 50% by 2030. The EPA's 2021 National Recycling Strategy includes five objectives, which can be pursued by the Town:

- Improve markets for recycled commodities through market development, analysis, manufacturing, and research.
- Increase collection of recyclable materials and improve recycling infrastructure through analysis, funding, product design, and processing efficiencies.

- Reduce contamination in the recycled materials stream through outreach and education to the public on the value of proper recycling.
- Enhance policies and programs to support recyclability and recycling through strengthened federal and international coordination, analysis, research on product pricing, and sharing of best practices.
- Standardize measurement and increase data collection through coordinated recycling definitions, measures, targets, and performance indicators.

#### ***1.2. Work with regional communities to identify alternative transportation methods to dispose of ash in anticipation of the closure of the Brookhaven landfill.***

Riverhead's Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) includes investigation of alternative transportation methods to dispose of ash produced by incineration off of Long Island, to address the anticipated closure of the Town of Brookhaven's landfill when it reaches capacity, first for construction and demolition waste in 2024, and for ash by 2026. Riverhead has recently achieved successful reduction materials hauled out of town, largely through localized processing of yard waste for composting, and through expansion of conventional recycling. Emerging sustainable waste management processes and technologies are discussed in more detail in Chapter 12: Sustainability and Resilience. For example, Yaphank is implementing an anaerobic digester project for the region in 2025. Similar waste treatment methods for Riverhead will require thorough feasibility studies with public input

### ***2. Improve the efficiency of the existing Town water supply system and ensure its ability to expand to address future demand***

#### ***2.1. Complete the expansion of public water service to homes in Calverton and Manorville.***

In areas that do not have public water service, properties rely on wells, which may have been contaminated by the presence of PFOA/PFOS. To expand public water service to homes with contaminated wells, the Town should procure federal funding, and coordinate the effort with the SCWA.

#### ***2.2. Improve the infrastructure and efficiency of the public water system.***

Riverhead should use the \$20 million in the Water District's Capital Improvement Plan to meet NYSDEC regulations and replace antiquated components of the system. In addition, the Town should implement the SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) system, like that used by the SCWA, which includes remote monitoring of conditions in the district. The Town is constructing an additional storage tank in the "high zone" in Wading River, which will help improve pressure and service. Riverhead also requires significant private developments to extend water mains for water supply and fire protection to their developments.

### 2.3. Discourage unsustainable use of water resources.

One of the greatest uses of public water in Riverhead is the irrigation of private residential lawns during summer months. The Town should regulate the use of water during summer months to reduce strain on the system, and should also educate property owners about the unsustainable practice and encourage the use of rainwater harvesting and the planting of native species in gardens to reduce the demand for additional water. The Town should revisit code regulations that were proposed in 2023 to address this issue.

### 2.4. Ensure that the water system and resources can provide the quantity and quality of water needs in the future.

Long Island's sole source aquifer provides fresh water to the region. The long-term ability of the aquifer to provide clean water will depend on human activities and climate change. As discussed in Chapter 7, pollution of groundwater can impact properties that are on wells and also endanger the public water supply. Alternative water supply options such as trucking water and desalination are costly and unsustainable with emergency supply measures made unnecessary with public education and participation in wise use and practices.

The 2015 Suffolk County Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan analyzes these challenges for the region and set goals for groundwater resource management, drinking water supply, surface water resource management, and wastewater management.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, The 2020 Suffolk County Sub-Watersheds Wastewater Plan (SWP) provides further recommendations that apply to Riverhead.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/Health-Services/Environmental-Quality/Water-Resources/Comprehensive-Water-Resources-Management-Plan>

### 2.5. Clarify Town code with respect to water access.

Developers should be given clear understanding of what costs for water access will be before projects progress beyond conceptual stages.

### 2.6. The water and sewer districts should establish procedures and guidelines for working with regional partners.

It is important for the Town and these districts to establish procedures and guidelines for working with regional partners on projects to ensure the protection of and fortification of Riverhead's natural and infrastructure assets, notably its aquifer, critical environmental areas, water supply, and infrastructure and mitigate negative impacts to residents and rate payers within those special districts. An example of such a need for intermunicipal cooperation is SCWA's project to install a new water main within Riverhead to supply the North Fork. As proposed, the project has the potential to negatively impact critical environmental areas such as Peconic Bay and its tributaries, as well as cause substantial traffic-related Impacts during construction. The project's alternative routes must be reevaluated in regard to its location within Peconic Bay Boulevard, a narrow two-lane roadway that has limited shoulders and is in many areas near State- and Town-regulated wetlands, with preference to the utilization of the Town of Riverhead Peconic Bay Blvd interconnection and the establishment of a "pump and pay" agreement established between the Riverhead Water District and SCWA.

## 3. Continue to protect groundwater through modern wastewater treatment strategies

### 3.1. Improve the efficiency of the Town's sewer systems and ensure the ability to address future demand.

Calverton and Riverhead are served by a public sewer system. Infrastructure ages and requires ongoing maintenance and investment to prevent groundwater contamination and continue adequate levels of service. As Riverhead grows, developers are connecting to the system and the Town may decide to extend sewer lines. The Town should monitor the capacity of the wastewater treatment facility and plan for expansions before capacity is met.

### 3.2. Continue to invest human resources to better manage wastewater systems.

Riverhead needs to attract and retain qualified Wastewater Treatment Operators (WTOs) through competitive salaries and other benefits. At present, an anticipated shortage in human resources could have an impact on operations.

### 3.3. Upgrade the pump stations in the Riverhead Sewer District.

The Town should ensure that it includes sequential upgrades to the 12 pump stations in Riverhead Sewer District in the annual budget. A capital improvement plan should identify priorities and costs.

### 3.4. Support the use of Innovative Alternative (I/A) Wastewater Treatment options in areas where sewerage is not feasible or appropriate.

As discussed in the Natural Resources Chapter, Suffolk County's Septic Improvement Program and the State's Septic System Replacement Programs provide homeowners with low-interest financing options to transition to Innovative and Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (I/A OWTS or I/A). The Town should inform and encourage property owners about these grants. Riverhead may also consider establishing its own grant program to supplement these programs, as some other East End towns have. Community Preservation Fund (CPF) funds may be available for water improvements in Riverhead after 2030. The Town could waive or reduce permit fees for the installation of I/A systems to incentivize their use.

The Town should ensure that in all areas where wastewater is discharged to the ground (i.e., septic systems, constructed wetlands, and package treatments plants) are built with the appropriate densities and are designed to prevent nitrogen contamination of groundwater or surface water.

## 4. Coordinate with electric, natural gas, cellular telephone/wi-fi, cable TV, and internet service providers

### 4.1. Improve coordination with private companies that provide electricity, natural gas, and other services.

Private companies provide electric service, natural gas service, cellular telephone/Wi-Fi, cable TV, and Internet services to Town residents and businesses. While it is the best interest for residents to have more options and more reliable options, utility companies have been non-responsive to requests for information about their short- and long-range improvement plans.

### 4.2. Investigate engaging an additional Internet service provider, to help address a significant need to provide improved service within the Town.

Broadband and digital access is becoming a more critical issue for the public because of increased work-from-home models, greater reliance on the internet for information, and online schooling during extreme weather or other events (e.g., COVID-19). The Town should continue to monitor such services on a regular basis and meet with Internet service providers (ISPs) annually, with the goal of encouraging competition which will help to lower prices and improve service. The increasing ability of cellular and satellite companies to deliver internet should be monitored for any opportunities for alternative service.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 12 SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

From environmental concerns to economic vulnerabilities, Riverhead faces a complex web of challenges that demand strategic planning and innovative solutions for renewable energy, sustainable waste management, flood management, sea level rise, and climate change.

One of the foremost issues is the escalating impact of climate change, manifested through rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and shifting ecological dynamics. These changes pose a direct threat to the natural environment, the integrity of infrastructure, and the overall quality of life for residents. The urgency to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change is paramount. Energy initiatives supported by this Plan aim to reduce energy consumption, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance the community's sustainability.

Additionally, economic uncertainties and fluctuations have exposed vulnerabilities in the Town's financial resilience. Climate change has the potential to significantly impact the agriculture and tourism industries. Striking a balance between fostering economic growth and preserving Riverhead's unique character requires thoughtful planning and community engagement.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Flood Risk Management

Riverhead's location between Long Island Sound and Peconic River and Bay makes it prone to coastal flooding. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) designates areas with flood hazard risks, as shown in Figure 32. Approximately 3,000 acres, 7% of Riverhead's total land area, fall within a 1% annual chance, also called the 100-year floodplain (A, AE, AO, VE). Almost half of these areas are along the coast and at risk of storm-induced velocity wave action (VE). Nearly 700 additional acres are within the 500-year floodplain and have a 0.2% annual chance of flooding (X-shaded). A moderate estimate puts 600 residential units and 500 jobs within these areas at risk of flooding.<sup>1</sup>

As shown in Figure 32, the downtown and areas along the Peconic River and Bay are especially at risk of flood events.

The Army Corps of Engineers studied the current and future impacts of flooding on Downtown Riverhead, finding that a 100-year flood could cause floodwaters to reach over 12 feet. The largest storm recorded in the report, a 500-year flood, could result in floodwaters rising to almost 16 feet. Both scenarios could flood the riverfront and sections of Main Street. The preliminary recommendations of the 2021 Army Corps of Engineers Riverhead Flood Plain Management Study have already begun to be implemented and are discussed later in this chapter.

### Storm Surge Risk

As shown in Figure 33, Riverhead faces the risk of storm surges during hurricanes and extreme weather events. In the event of a Category 1 storm in Riverhead, the Town could see up to 10 feet of storm surge in the wetland areas in its northwest corner on Long Island Sound and up to 9 feet in the downtown.<sup>2</sup> In the event of a Category 4 storm, the Town could see up to 20 feet of storm surges along Long Island Sound and up to 18 feet of storm surges along the Peconic River in Downtown Riverhead. Areas along the Peconic River and Bay could see flooding reach inland past Route 25. The likelihood of a Category 4 storm in this region is increasing with climate change, and the severity of impacts is likely to increase when combined with rising sea levels, and high tide and full moon conditions as occurred during Hurricane Sandy. These significant impacts serve as a stark reminder that, without adaptation or changes in approach to climate, such flooding events could become more frequent and devastating and are exacerbated by the lack of absorption by vegetation lost to impervious surfaces and building coverage.

### Flood Damage Prevention

Chapter 233 of the Town Code establishes guidelines for new developments in flood-prone areas to minimize potential flood damage and ensure structural resilience. For subdivision proposals, there are standards to minimize flood damage, position utilities to reduce damage, and provide adequate drainage to lessen exposure to flood damage. The guidelines outline elevation criteria based on different flood zones to ensure structures are built above specified flood levels. They provide detailed construction and

structural design requirements for residential and nonresidential structures, manufactured homes, and recreational vehicles in these flood-prone areas.

### Emergency Management

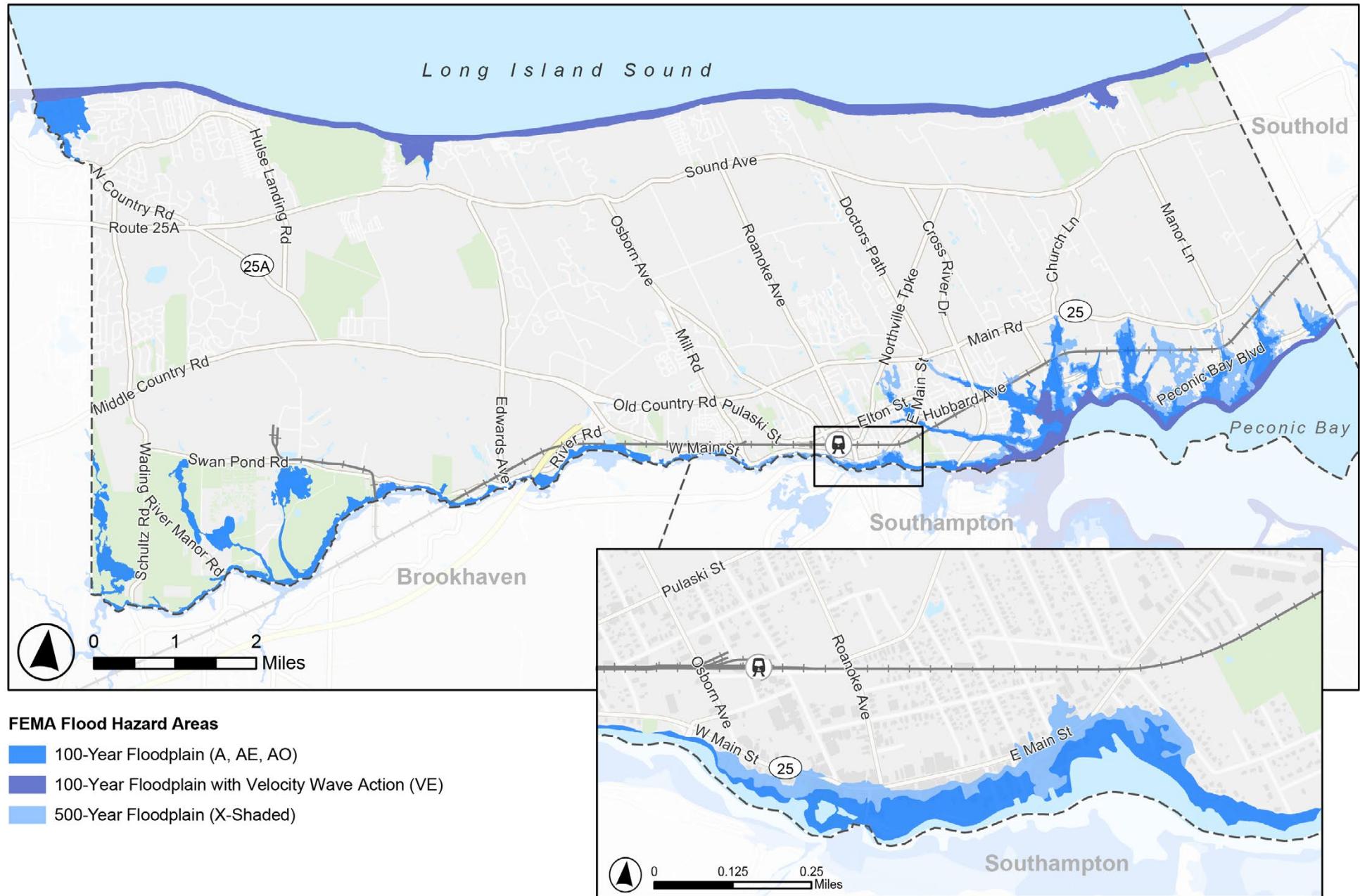
The Riverhead Police Chief is head of the Town's emergency management functions. The Town elected officials, Police Department, Fire Departments, and other agencies contribute to the functional response activities. Emergency response activities follow Riverhead's Hurricane/Severe Storm Response Plan, the Suffolk County Hazard Mitigation Plan Riverhead Annex, and the New York State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP). Riverhead coordinates emergency responses with the County and State through an Incident Command System. Public resources for emergency preparedness are available on the Town's website. Additional information about emergency management is discussed in the Community Facilities chapter.

### Suffolk County All-Hazards Mitigation Plan

The Suffolk County All-Hazards Mitigation Plan (HMP) is a comprehensive strategy developed by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000). This plan ensures eligibility for pre-disaster mitigation grant funds following federally declared disasters. While immediate recovery assistance is available regardless of plan participation, the DMA 2000 enhances the disaster planning process by requiring hazard mitigation planning; documentation of the planning process; and identification of hazards, potential losses, and mitigation needs. The plan specifies eight

<sup>1</sup> Urban Footprint Risk and Resilience Analysis, <https://help.urbanfootprint.com/methodology-documentation/risk-and-resilience-analysis#output-metrics>

<sup>2</sup> NOAA, National Storm Surge Risk Maps, Version 3, <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/nationalsurge/>



**FIGURE 32: FEMA SPECIAL FLOOD HAZARD AREAS**

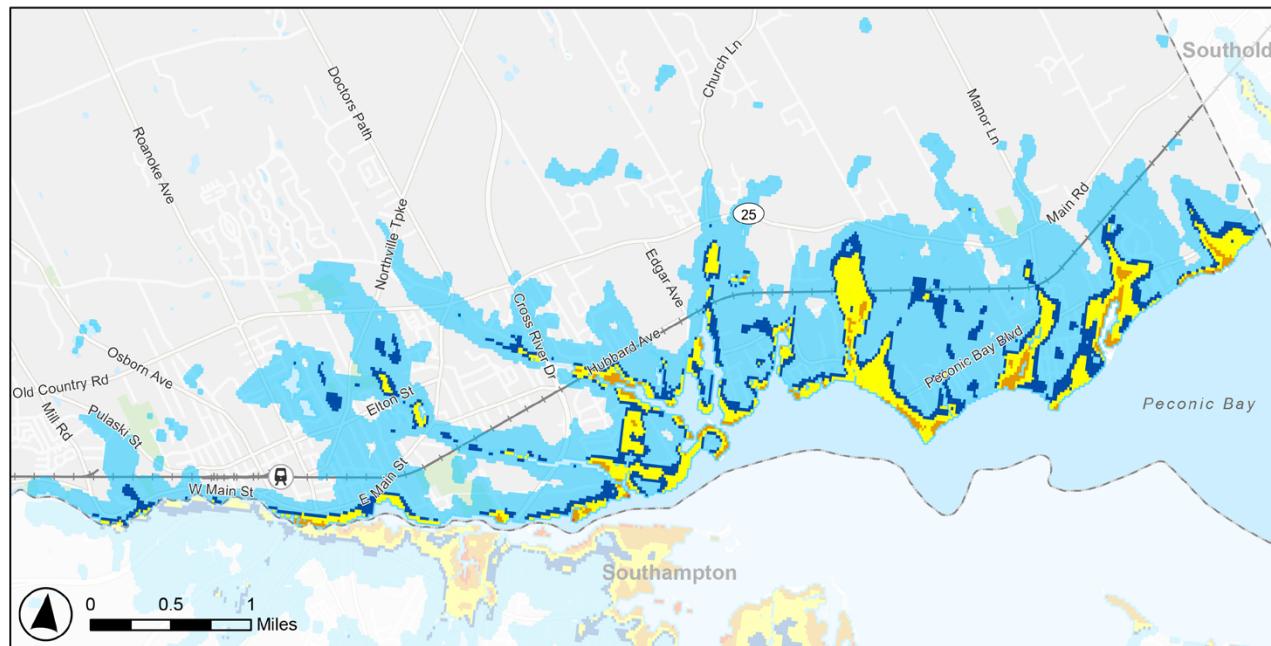
overarching mitigation goals, including saving lives, minimizing property damage, reducing risk exposure, and maintaining economic viability after a hazard event. The 2020 update considers hazard events since 2014, hazard profiles, vulnerability assessments, and input from the County and jurisdictions. Amendments integrate the plan with other planning mechanisms and support mitigation by protecting and preserving natural systems.<sup>3</sup>

## Climate Change

Riverhead is already encountering significant climate change effects, which are projected to increase.<sup>4</sup> All data in this section come from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) report, *Observed and Projected Climate Change in New York State: An Overview*.<sup>5</sup> The average temperature will increase between 2 and 4 degrees Fahrenheit over the coming decade. By the 2050s, expected changes include:

- **Elevated Average Temperature:** an increase between 3 to 7 degrees.
- **Increased Hot Days:** a doubling of days surpassing 90°F and more than a twofold increase in heat waves.
- **Decrease in Cold Days:** 14 fewer days below freezing.
- **Rise in Severe Storms:** An increase in extreme precipitation events.

The impacts of climate change in the Long Island region also include humidity, droughts, wildfires, heavier rainfall during storms leading to flash flooding, hail, tornadoes, and degraded water and air quality.



Source: NOAA, NYS GIS, Town of Riverhead, USGS, BFJ Planning

Category 4 Storm Surge Hazard Area

Category 1 Storm Surge Hazard Area

- 1-2 feet
- 2-5 feet
- 5-8 feet
- 8-10 feet

FIGURE 33: STORM SURGE RISK

The substantial release of greenhouse gases (GHGs), including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, into the atmosphere has accelerated planetary overheating. The severity of climate change impacts depends on society's ability to reduce GHG emissions.

Increasingly, municipalities are being held responsible for not just the town's buildings and transportation fleets, but with the New York State CLCPA (Climate

Leadership and Community Protection Act) will be required to inventory all industrial, commercial, and residential energy usage in the 'Greenhouse Gas Inventory Rollup.' Many opportunities for meaningful work exist in the programs of retrofits and installation methods with grant opportunities at federal, state and private levels.

3 [https://www.southamptontownny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/24181/\\_Executive-Summary](https://www.southamptontownny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/24181/_Executive-Summary)

4 *Observed and Projected Climate Change in New York State: An Overview*, Department of Environmental Conservation. [https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration\\_pdf/ccnys2021.pdf](https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/ccnys2021.pdf)

5 Ibid.

## Increasing Water Temperatures

The Long Island Sound Study reported a 1% increase in water temperatures across the Sound between 1960 and 2022.<sup>6</sup> Both long-term annual and winter temperatures consistently increased at all monitoring stations. During this period, winter temperatures increased by 5.7%, or at a rate of about 1°F per decade, exceeding the global average of 0.32°F per decade.<sup>7</sup> Fluctuations in Long Island Sound's water temperatures have caused observable changes in fish populations, favoring warm-adapted species over cold-adapted ones, such as a decline in cold-adapted fish like Atlantic cod and an increase in warm-adapted fish like striped bass. Such shifts also impact the benthic community, contributing to the decline of American lobsters, and are believed to affect the broader marine ecosystem, altering food web dynamics and hindering the growth of various marine life stages.

## Ocean Acidification

Ocean acidification occurs when the ocean waters absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This leads to a decrease in the pH levels of the ocean, making it more acidic over time. The Long Island Sound Study reported increased acidity in the Sound, which can harm marine life, particularly shell-forming creatures and coral reefs. The ocean's pH has dropped by approximately 0.1 units from its pre-industrial levels, signifying increased acidity.<sup>8</sup> While there has been an average oceanic pH decrease of 0.06 since 1985, Long Island Sound is experiencing more accelerated acidification, with a 0.04 decrease

per decade, as reported by UConn Marine Sciences.<sup>9</sup> Researchers at Stony Brook University found a method to address ocean acidification by cultivating shellfish and seaweed kelp, offering potential benefits to local marine environments, shellfish farmers, and economies. Reducing the amount of fossil fuels burned is a significant step in reducing direct emissions into the air and our bioregion's waters, and ultimately help in bringing down the temperature of our overheated planet.

## Sea Level Rise

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) maintains coastal stations that continuously monitor daily tides and long-term average sea levels. The Montauk Station, established in 1947, has documented a rise of 9.5 inches since that time, while the New London, CT station has seen a rise of 8.6 inches since 1938.<sup>10</sup> Of more significant concern, the rate of sea level rise measured from 2005 to 2019 was double the rate during the entire 20th century.

In 2014, Governor Cuomo signed the Community Risk and Resiliency Act into law to provide a shared basis for planning and regulation in New York State. The law intends to ensure that state permits and expenditures consider climate risk, including sea-level rise, and that projections are based on the best available science. The result is 6 NYCRR Part 490, Projected Sea-level Rise, which establishes projections for sea level rise for three geographic regions.<sup>11</sup>

In the Long Island Region, sea levels are predicted to rise by 1 foot to 2 more feet in the next century. Considering a low-medium projection, which is a likely scenario, the sea level could rise by 11 inches by the 2050s and 21 inches by 2100.<sup>12</sup> A medium projection scenario estimates a rise of 16 inches by the 2050s and 34 inches by 2100. A high projection scenario, which is "very unlikely," would see 6 feet of sea level rise by 2100. Figure 34 shows areas at risk based on these various scenarios.

The rise in sea level will most impact low-lying areas in Riverhead that are already subject to flooding. Figure 34 shows how rising sea levels could inundate the riverfront downtown and harm docks, marinas, businesses, and residences along the Peconic Bay.

As sea levels rise, areas like beaches, marshes, and mud flats are affected because nearby developed areas prevent them from shifting and adjusting to sea levels as they would in natural shorelines. Marshes, for instance, usually move further inland as the sea rises, but if manmade structures or steep land prevent this movement, they flood permanently. This flooding can lead to the loss of plants and animals that rely on coastal habitats.

6 Long Island Sound Study. <https://longislandsoundstudy.net/ecosystem-target-indicators/water-temperature/>

7 Annual 2022 Global Climate Report, National Centers for Environmental Information. <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/access/monitoring/monthly-report/global/202213>

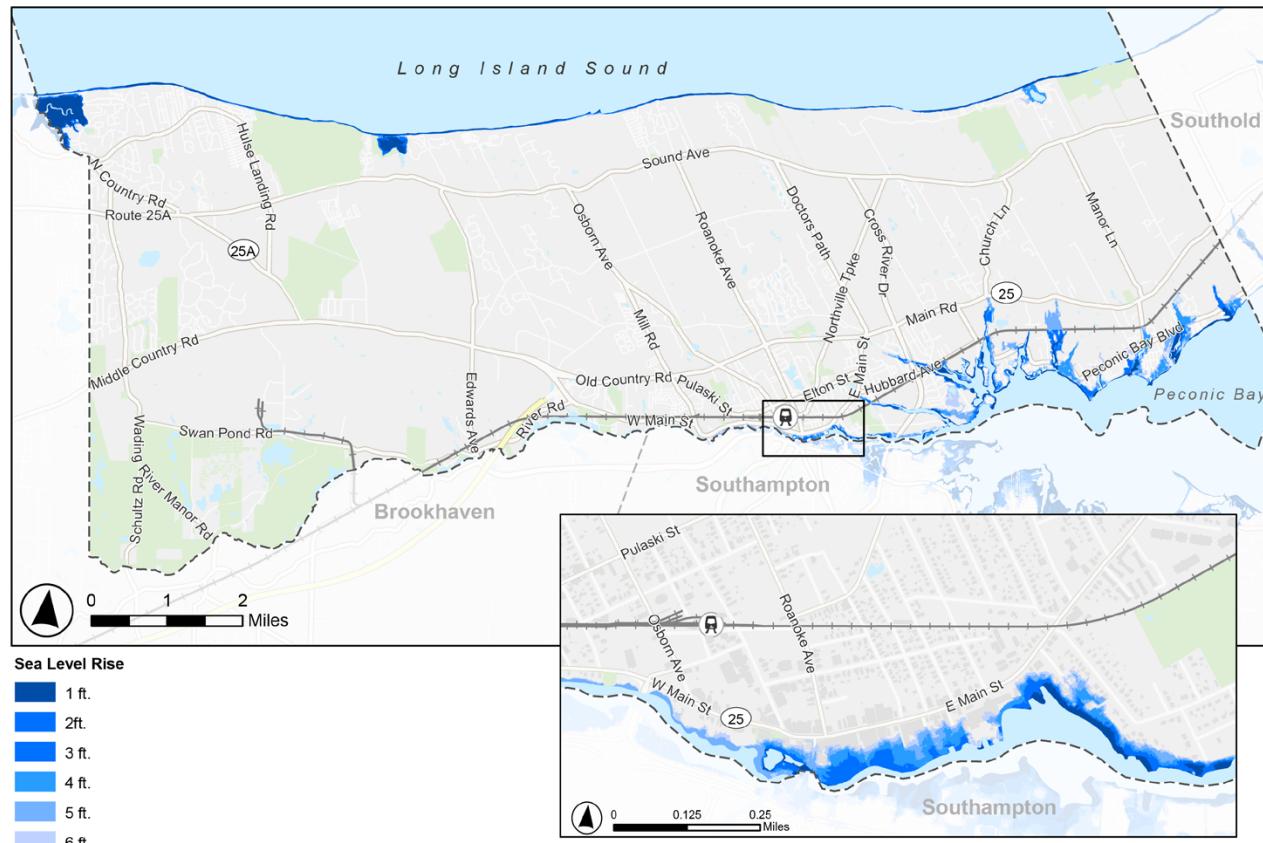
8 Long Island Sound Study and School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at Stony Brook University. [https://longislandsoundstudy.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Chris-Gobler\\_LISS-OA-talk-9.17.15.pdf](https://longislandsoundstudy.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Chris-Gobler_LISS-OA-talk-9.17.15.pdf)

9 Marine Sciences, University of Connecticut. <https://marinesciences.uconn.edu/2022/12/02/surveying-ocean-acidification-on-the-northwest-atlantic-shelf/>

10 Coastal Sensitivity to Sea-Level Rise: A Focus on the Mid-Atlantic Region, Environmental Protection Agency. <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPURL.cgi?Dockey=P100483V.ThT>

11 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Regulations and Enforcement. Part 40: Projected Sea Level Rise – Express Terms of the Climate Change Regulatory Revisions. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/103877.html>

12 New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Regulations and Enforcement. Part 40: Projected Sea Level Rise – Express Terms of the Climate Change Regulatory Revisions. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/103877.html>



**FIGURE 34: PROJECTED SEA LEVEL RISE**

Source: NOAA, NYS GIS, Town of Riverhead, USGS, BFJ Planning

### Renewable Energy

New York State has positioned itself at the forefront of the fight against climate change through initiatives such as the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) and Reforming the Energy Vision (REV). Enacted in 2019, the CLCPA establishes aggressive targets for carbon neutrality by 2050 and 100% clean electricity by 2040, emphasizing environmental justice. CLCPA requires State agencies, authorities, and entities to direct 40% of the benefits

of spending on clean energy and energy efficiency programs to disadvantaged communities. The State's Climate Justice Working Group used 45 indicators to identify disadvantaged communities. Indicators consider proximity to land use and facilities such as remediation sites and oil storage facilities, potential climate change risks such as flooding and extreme heat, and potential pollution exposure such as vehicle traffic density and particulate matter. A full list of indicators can be found in DEC's Disadvantaged

Communities Fact Sheet.<sup>13</sup> About a third of the State's area has been designated as "disadvantaged" including a large portion of Riverhead (see Figure 35).

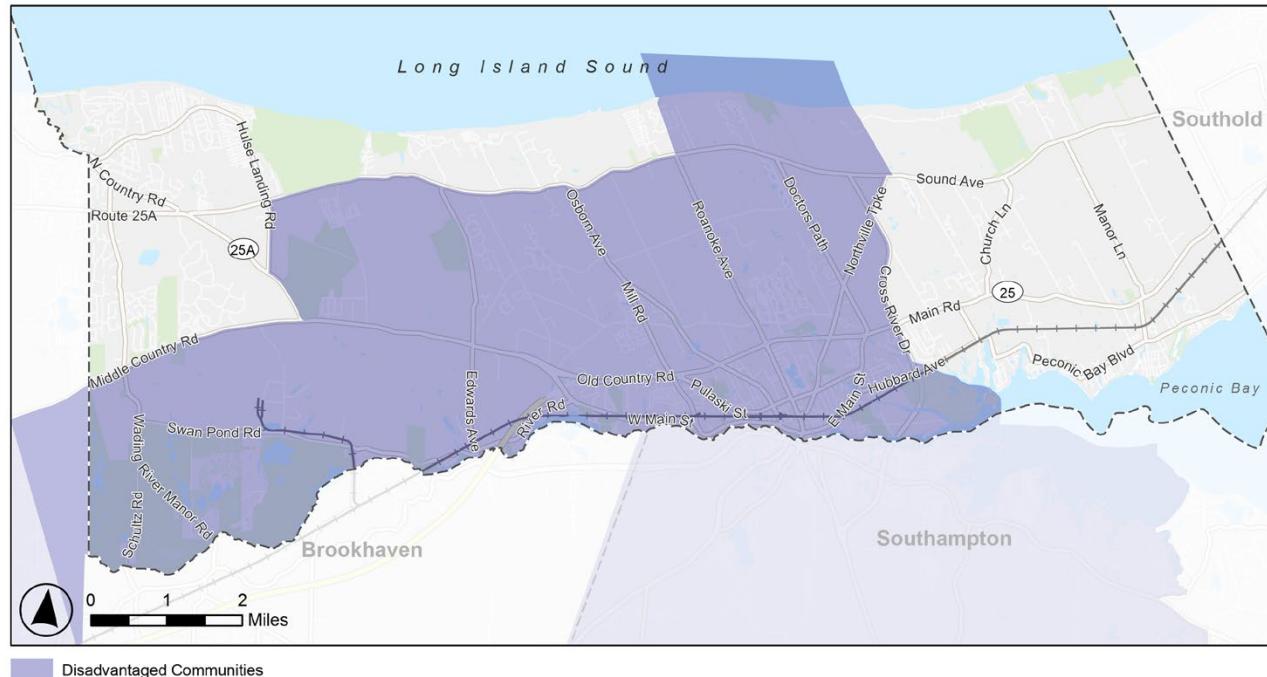
Simultaneously, the REV initiative, launched in 2014, has been driving the transformation of the state's energy sector toward decarbonization, resilience, and sustainability. REV provides a renewable energy mandate of 70% by 2030 and 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040. Together, these initiatives showcase New York's commitment to promoting renewable energy and working with municipalities, offering a comprehensive framework that integrates environmental responsibility, economic development, and technological innovation.

### Solar Energy

Riverhead promotes solar energy system installation on residential and commercial buildings. In 2019, the Town launched a Solarize Riverhead campaign, which provided residents with resources to help them install solar panels on their properties. The Town has also worked to streamline the permitting process for solar installations and reduce barriers to entry for homeowners and businesses.

Commercial solar facilities are currently limited to industrially zoned lands. In October 2021, the Town Board adopted a 12-month moratorium on commercial solar energy applications. The moratorium was extended by one year and expired in October 2023. The State's current agricultural policies allow solar on agricultural properties when it is considered on-farm equipment and when the total amount of energy generated by solar is limited to 110% of the anticipated annual electricity needs of the farm.

<sup>13</sup> [Disadvantaged Communities Criteria - New York's Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act \(ny.gov\)](https://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/130000/disadvantaged-communities-criteria-new-york-s-climate-leadership-community-protection-act.html)



**FIGURE 35: DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES**

Sources: Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

### Sustainable Waste Management

Riverhead's Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) promotes sustainable waste management practices to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste and prevent hazardous materials from presenting danger to the natural environment and community. The SWMP and waste management are discussed further in the infrastructure chapter.

Riverhead's approach to recycling includes dual-stream recycling, yard waste collection, e-waste recycling, household hazardous waste collection, and recycling education. The Town also provides educational resources and outreach to promote

emissions and adapt to climate change. Municipalities who take the pledge can choose to complete a suite of actions, organized under "pledge elements," that help them adapt to climate change and earn points toward levels of certification (bronze, silver, gold). Certification opens grant opportunities. Riverhead adopted the State's CSC Pledge in 2020 and, as of 2024, has yet to achieve a certification level.

### Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC)

The EAC was established in 2018 to advise the Town Board on preserving, developing, and using the natural and constructed environment. It aims to protect and enhance the beauty, quality, biological integrity, and

other environmental factors and mitigate threats posed to environmental quality. The EAC's mission is to facilitate conservation and environmental stewardship by the Town and its residents through education, government policies, and incentives, but is increasingly concerned and involved with addressing interrelated social, economic, and environmental elements.

### Climate Smart Community (csc) Task Force

A subcommittee of the EAC, the CSC Task Force seeks to achieve bronze certification by 2025, followed by silver certification in the long term. Bronze certification requires at least 120 points and completion of at least one action under four pledge elements, two mandatory actions, and three priority actions. Silver certification requires 300 points.

From 2020-2021, the CSC Task Force focused on attaining 80 points in the energy elements of the program, including consumption benchmarking, employee training, and vehicle fleet assessments. From 2022 to 2023, the CSC Task Force focused on using climate-smart materials elements of the program. These actions address organic waste, recycling, reuse, construction and demolition refuse, and other waste management topics. For example, the CSC Task Force and EAC partnered with the Engineering Department, the Greater Calverton Civic Association, and the North Fork Environmental Council to plan and implement a Food Scraps-to-Compost (on-farm) pilot program. The program yielded a metric ton of vegetative organic resources, which diverted 2,200 pounds of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) from the solid waste stream and was introduced back into on-farm soil as an organic content amendment. The CSC Task Force and EAC have partnered with Long Island Organics Council and the Riverhead School District to further this work.

14 <https://riverheadny.municipalone.com/files/documents/RiverheadLandfill-TownbenefitsSummaagenda215111510042122-091650AMd.pdf>

## GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Embrace renewable energy sources to achieve the State's targets of 70% renewable sources by 2030 and 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040.**

The Town is already encountering significant climate change effects, which are projected to increase. The severity of climate change impacts depends on society's ability to reduce GHG emissions. New York State has set ambitious targets, to limit annual GHG emissions to 60% of 1990 levels by 2030 and to 50% of 1990 emissions by 2050.

The State has also mandated a significant increase in its electricity that must come from renewable sources, as part of Reforming the Energy Vision (REV), requiring 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040. In Riverhead, these programs have helped to bring four solar farms. Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) is another technology that can help to integrate renewable energy while enhancing grid stability. While these projects offer numerous environmental benefits, their implementation can sometimes be met with local apprehensions and safety concerns. Addressing these concerns involves transparent communication, community engagement, and a proactive approach by local authorities and property owners. Riverhead has been proactive in keeping abreast of sustainable technologies and should continue to do so. This Plan is a living document, and the Town should continue to evaluate the appropriateness of technological advancements toward a sustainable future.

#### **1.1. Achieve Climate Smart Communities (CSC) certification and continue to act on the CSC pledge elements.**

NYSDEC's CSC program provides a framework for municipalities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change by acting on pledge elements. Riverhead adopted the State's CSC Pledge in 2020 and is working to achieve bronze status in 2025, followed by silver status in the longer term. Several recommendations that follow include actions that can help Riverhead accomplish this goal.

#### **1.2. Create a Greenhouse Gas Inventory**

Creating a GHG inventory is one of the first steps toward CSC certification. The CSC Program recommends that inventories adhere, where feasible, to Local Governments for Sustainability's (ICLEI) U.S. Community Protocol for Accounting and Reporting of GHG Emissions.<sup>15</sup> This includes both Scope 1 and 2 (direct burning and sourcing) for municipal, industrial, commercial, institutional, and residential sectors for both buildings and transportation.

#### **1.3. Establish a Climate Action Plan and partner with neighboring communities on a regional plan.**

A Climate Action Plan could be developed in cooperation with other East End towns and partner institutions, such as the Peconic Estuary Partnership. The plan would evaluate current conditions, assess climate change vulnerability, identify grants, and create an actionable priorities matrix. These actions

can include elements of the CSC Program, the Clean Energy Community Program, and other initiatives to set measurable targets.

#### **1.4. Ensure that renewable energy programs are equitable and promote climate justice.**

The CLCPA (Climate Act) requires State agencies, authorities, and entities to direct funding in a manner designed to achieve a goal for disadvantaged communities to receive 40% of the overall benefits of spending on clean energy and energy efficiency programs. Three disadvantaged census tracts in Riverhead have been identified in the U.S. 2020 Census Tract publication.<sup>16</sup>

New York's Climate Justice Working Group has developed reports and recommendations to address disparities in the effects of climate change, transition, and mitigation measures on disadvantaged communities. This is one resource the Town can consult to understand how to ensure more equitable outcomes.

#### **1.5. Become a regional and state leader by taking more actions in NYSERDA's Clean Energy Communities program.**

Riverhead is a NYSERDA Clean Energy Community (CEC). This program outlines actions communities can take to earn points. The program makes grants available for member communities.

<sup>15</sup> [https://climatesmart.ny.gov/fileadmin/csc/documents/GHG\\_Inventories/ghgguide.pdf](https://climatesmart.ny.gov/fileadmin/csc/documents/GHG_Inventories/ghgguide.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://climate.ny.gov/Resources/Disadvantaged-Communities-Criteria>

### 1.6. Transition Riverhead's utilities to clean energy sources.

NYSERDA's Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) program allows local elected officials to choose clean energy sources for their community (e.g., wind, solar, etc.). Grants, like the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Transitions Initiative Partnership Project, are available to help communities transition to cleaner energy.

### 1.7. Revise solar regulations and incentives to ensure they are compatible with surroundings.

Commercial solar operations, or solar farms, should continue to be limited to industrially zoned lands. Tightening special permit requirements for solar farms, such as requiring additional buffers and landscaping and their maintenance, would mitigate some of the negative visual impacts of solar farms and subject them to the same zoning standards as other land uses and can provide a level of predictability and conformity with established development patterns.

The Town should encourage rooftop solar in all zones, whether on industrial, commercial, residential, or public buildings. A requirement that commercial or industrial developments of a certain size must consider available rooftop space for solar generation may be implemented. This could reduce demand for ground-based installations and help decentralize installations outside a single hamlet.

### 1.8. Monitor battery storage safety and technology and revise the code as appropriate.

Riverhead should continue to work to ensure that proposed battery storage facilities are compatible with surrounding land uses, do not have significant visual impacts or impacts on groundwater, and address emergency and fire safety issues. The Town should

follow State guidelines regarding safety protocols and emergency procedures as they become available and should continue to monitor this technology to assess its effectiveness in meeting renewable energy goals. Riverhead intends to modify the Town Code to meet forthcoming State Fire Code guidelines, as appropriate.

## 2. Promote sustainable building practices, landscaping, and design.

Buildings are the top emitter of greenhouse gases through energy use, heating and cooling, and construction. Riverhead is a growing community, with more opportunities for future development. The community would like to see buildings built today last into the future and reduce environmental impacts through effective design and sustainable construction and building practices.

### 2.1. Strengthen the Town's Building Code with green building standards and improved energy requirements.

This could include a green building permitting process and incentives to promote energy efficiency, waste reduction, and other sustainability practices. The code should establish a threshold for the size and type of project that triggers additional requirements. For example, for small commercial uses, the requirement could be to use energy-efficient materials and systems, whereas a requirement for a significant industrial/commercial application could be to be U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) LEED-certified or equivalent. The Town should consult the USGBC and the National Association of Homebuilders Green Building Initiative.

The NYStretch-Energy model code provides readily adoptable enforceable language that helps municipalities jump-start energy improvements through more stringent requirements than the State Building Code currently requires. It is anticipated to become standard practice in the foreseeable future, based on NYSERDA's projected schedule. Adopting the NYStretch Code at the municipal level is one of the 13 high-impact actions of the Clean Energy Community program.

### 2.2. Encourage nature-based solutions, eco-friendly landscaping, and green infrastructure.

Nature-based solutions can help mitigate many of the impacts of climate change and are more sustainable in the long term. Requiring stormwater management, reducing impervious coverage limits, and promoting green infrastructure and native landscaping can reduce flooding and heat island effects, ensure cleaner air and water, and conserve ecosystems. These ideas are discussed further in the Natural Resources chapter.

### 2.3. Reduce energy and water demand in publicly owned properties and facilities.

Riverhead should explore sustainability measures on municipal properties, including installing solar panels, retrofitting municipal buildings with energy-efficient windows, natural heating and cooling features, LED lights, and water and energy-conserving fixtures. The Town should continue to monitor new technologies and state incentives for energy and water conservation measures. NYSERDA and NYSDEC provide funding opportunities to help municipalities reduce energy and water usage. A NYSERDA grant has already helped Riverhead install LED lighting downtown.

Increased installation of solar would reduce electrical costs, reduce heat island effects, and showcase the technology to the public. A feasibility study should

be conducted to identify buildings that are a better fit for rooftop solar, as well as to identify potential sites for solar canopies in parking areas and ground-mounted solar installation. NYSERDA's Community Solar program, partnered with PSE&G, provides incentives for municipalities and private property owners to identify properties in their community that are underutilized and could be good candidates for a local solar power resource. The Town should consider identifying potential underutilized properties for the NYSERDA and PSE&G Community Solar program. The closed Town landfill site is one example.

#### **2.4. Cooperate with regional institutions and nonprofits on sustainable practices.**

These institutions have a wealth of climate change and resiliency expertise. One recent initiative includes a pilot project by Cornell Cooperative Extension and Stony Brook University to engage high school students in addressing resiliency and erosion mitigation projects along the coastline. In addition, Brookhaven National Lab has pilot programs to install heat pumps in residences.

#### **2.5. Educate the public about sustainable practices and incentives for sustainability initiatives on private properties such as solar panels, electric vehicles, and green infrastructure.**

A public education campaign (pamphlets, website, and programming) can highlight opportunities and benefits of energy efficiency and clean energy measures. The campaign should include information about sustainability incentives and programs for property owners. NYSERDA, PSE&G, National Grid, and other grants are available to homeowners and private property owners interested in installing solar panels. Likewise, NYSERDA and the IRS provide financial incentives for purchasing an electric vehicle.

Additional grants are available to homeowners to install green infrastructure, rain barrels, and I/A systems on their properties.

### **3. Promote sustainable transportation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.**

Automobiles are a leading emitter of greenhouse gases. The MTA has completed the First Mile/Last Mile Pilot Study for Riverhead, which aims to encourage travelers to use alternative modes other than single-use automobiles to access the station. The study recognizes that a significant portion of households within the downtown area (including part of Riverside) have fewer than one vehicle on average. The Town is implementing recommendations from the study, including Complete Streets and Safer Routes for All, through grant funding. Both of these programs are also part of Climate Smart Communities program elements.

#### **3.1. Promote alternative transportation.**

Public transportation, biking, and walking are excellent alternatives to cars, as they reduce traffic congestion and emissions. Complete Streets policies and emerging programs, such as the last mile pilot program, are examples of how Riverhead can promote alternatives. The Transportation and Mobility Chapter provides concrete recommendations to improve bike and pedestrian infrastructure and to advocate for improved public transportation in Riverhead.

#### **3.2. Promote infrastructure for Electric Vehicle (EVs).**

Riverhead could add requirements for EV charging stations at new developments of certain sizes or densities. The Town should continue to seek grants for EV charging stations and infrastructure, including NYS Charging Station Programs and the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program, and USDOT Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Program funding.

#### **3.3. Adopt a green fleet plan for Town-owned vehicles and equipment.**

Following New York State and Suffolk County's example, Riverhead could transition its vehicle fleet to hybrid, electric, and other more sustainable alternatives through a phased plan. In the short term, the Town could address easier targets like transitioning the vehicles used by code enforcement officers and building inspectors, other small cars, and electric maintenance and landscaping equipment (e.g., snow blowers, lawnmowers, hand-held tools). Heavier and more specialized equipment and vehicles, such as police cruisers and DPW trucks, can be replaced as technology improves. NYS REV2030 and NYSERDA programs provide generous grants for the greening of municipal fleets.

Other ways to reduce the impact of Town vehicles include ensuring that trips are efficient, car-sharing, using appropriately sized cars for the job, and educating staff about more eco-friendly habits (e.g., not idling).

## 4. Reduce waste and promote circular economy waste management practices

With the closure of the Brookhaven landfill and the environmental impacts of waste, Riverhead needs to explore alternative solutions to waste management. Solid waste disposal has impacts ranging from pollution to emissions to exhaustion of resources to expensive tipping fees and hauling contracts. For example, plastics break down slowly and release Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) into the environment, organic waste trapped in landfills releases methane gas into the atmosphere, trucking waste to faraway landfills or processing facilities is costly and contributes to GHG emissions, and recycling uses excessive water and energy.

### 4.1. Implement recommendations of Riverhead's Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) for more sustainable practices.

Sustainability measures are recommended in the SWMP, such as reducing the volume of glass in the solid waste stream through the promotion of bottle redemption and recycling and encouraging practices that minimize the use of film plastic, which is difficult to recover. The Town's SWMP can maintain and exceed compliance levels and timeline targets of the CSC Program. The SWMP should be updated on a regular basis and should follow or exceed NYSDEC's

State Solid Waste Management Plan. Solid waste management is discussed in further detail in Chapter 11, Infrastructure and Utilities.

### 4.2. Reduce the use of single use plastics and other wasteful practices.

Single-use plastics are an especially harmful consumer product that can be regulated. The State has banned single-use plastic bags and foam take-out containers. However, other products, including plastic cups, cutlery, straws, and packaging, are still in use. The State is working on legislation to ban the use of single-use plastics by any entity that receives funding from the State. Riverhead should discontinue single-use plastics in Town facilities and enact regulations to reduce or eliminate their local use and sale.

In addition, the Town and the public should be mindful of their consumption habits and work to reduce waste volume. To meet this goal, an educational component teaching the public about impacts and sustainable choices is essential.

### 4.3. Continue to provide and promote a recycling program.

The Town's SWMP encourages the expansion of the recycling program. Recycling is a critical practice to keep resources in productive use and to keep tons of waste out of the solid waste stream. Reduction and reuse are still paramount, as recycling can be costly, require lots of water and energy, and can have byproducts.

### 4.4. Implement and expand a Town-wide composting program.

Food Scrap Generators are required since January 2022 to donate usable food and find a composting facility within 25 miles to dispose of remaining food waste. There is a phase-in of all food scrap generators, including K-12 schools and private residences, on a published timetable.

The CSC Task Force and Riverhead have implemented a food scraps program to divert waste from government offices and the senior center and are seeking grant funding to expand. The CSC Task Force partnered with the community on a successful pilot program to enrich farm soils with compost. Continued research should ensure that composting does not introduce outside elements that could harm farm production or contaminate well water, particularly Perfluorinated Chemicals (PFCs).

### 4.5. Explore alternative modes of waste disposal that generate renewable energy and useful byproducts.

The region is exploring biological waste management solutions, including newer technologies such as anaerobic digesters for biodegradable wastes and pyrolyzers for construction and demolition waste.<sup>17,18</sup> Additionally, non-destructive practices through the industry of deconstruction are becoming financially viable, potentially providing jobs and business opportunities. Riverhead should continue to monitor evolving waste processing technologies and regional solutions.

<sup>17</sup> Anaerobic digesters break down organic waste, including agricultural debris, food waste, sewage sludge, and manure. The system is sealed to create an oxygen-free environment where anaerobic microorganisms thrive and break down the organic waste into its component parts. Methane and carbon dioxide are released and can be captured as biogas, which is used primarily to fuel heat and electricity. The remaining solids can be used as a rich fertilizer, but care must be taken to monitor for the presence of PFCs.

<sup>18</sup> Pyrolyzers, like anaerobic digesters, use an oxygen-free environment to break down waste. However, pyrolyzers incorporate heat and can process additional materials, such as plastics. High heat used in the pyrolysis process breaks down materials into their component parts. The output includes gases, liquid bio-oil, and solid bio-char. Each of these can be used as fuels or additives in various applications, including soil amendment, reduction of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, water filtration, and as an additive in construction materials. Pyrolysis technology is still being tested, including at a facility in Stony Brook.

#### 4.6. Promote the reuse of rainwater for irrigation and other purposes.

Rainwater harvesting is another sustainable option to help reduce the use of freshwater resources. Gutters, rain barrels, and catchments direct stormwater to storage tanks where water can be filtered and pumped for uses including gardening and lawn irrigation and is already being researched in various departments of the Suffolk County system.

#### 4.7. Explore innovative methods to repurpose graywater.

Graywater is lightly used water that is not suitable for consumption but can still be used for other needs. For example, water used for handwashing could be reused in toilet bowls. More research is needed to determine whether graywater is safe to use in irrigation.

### 5. Promote a green economy and green finance, technology, and jobs.

Riverhead should invest in training and skill development for green jobs, through strategic partnerships with educational institutions, businesses, and workforce development programs. This initiative not only addresses the pressing need for skilled professionals in renewable energy, environmental conservation, and sustainable practices but also bolsters the local economy by fostering job growth in emerging green industries.

#### 5.1. Promote EPCAL and industrial sites to green technology and finance companies.

The IDA and Town should be strategic about the development of EPCAL by promoting the site to green technology companies that could provide quality jobs and tax revenues, reduce climate impacts, and attract investment from related companies and into infrastructure.

### 6. Mitigate the effects of flooding, sea level rise, and storm surge.

Floodplain maps indicate many areas along the Peconic River, including Downtown Riverhead, are flood-risk areas. Flooding and erosion from storm events are of great concern along Long Island Sound, particularly near the bluffs. With anticipated sea level rise and increased storm intensity and frequency, responses to flooding and coastal erosion will only become more pressing. Residents have experienced roadway flooding during heavy rain. Some roads identified include Sound Avenue, Mill Road, Fresh Pond Avenue at Route 25, and Creek Road in Wading River. This issue is especially problematic in the winter when freezing causes safety hazards.

#### 6.1. Continue to implement infrastructure improvements to mitigate future flood impacts.

The 2021 Army Corps of Engineers study provided recommendations for downtown that the Town has begun to implement, including elevating the river bulkhead, riverfront parks, and buildings, and improving stormwater interventions. The study found that the bulkhead along the river should be raised to an elevation of 7 feet, the riverfront parks should be elevated to 9 feet, and the minimum finished

floors elevation should be at 12.61 feet to ensure the longevity of downtown structures. Catch basins and other stormwater improvements should ensure flow out of the Peconic River. These measures should continue to be implemented west of the Town Square, including raising parking areas.

Riverhead should also consider updated flood level projections for municipally owned sites. There are various sources the Town can use to estimate projected inundation levels, including flood elevation data illustrated in NYSERDA's Sea Level Rise Viewer. The Town can use this information to be more proactive about mitigation measures on public property.

Numerous grants are available for resilience projects, including FEMA (BRIC, Flood Mitigation Assistance Program, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, etc.); NYS DHSES (Emergency Management Performance Grant Program); NOAA (Coastal & Marine Habitat Restoration Project Grants, Marine Debris Removal Project Grants), NYSDEC Grants for Climate Action, and NYSDEC Grants for Water Protection.

#### 6.2. Mitigate flood impacts and coastal erosion in flood-prone areas on Long Island Sound, Peconic River, and inland, through nature-based solutions.

Naturally occurring features, such as floodplains, wetlands, and riparian buffers, can mitigate flooding, wave action, and erosion and should be leveraged for their positive impacts. Preserving and restoring these natural barriers along the waterfront will help protect people, property, critical infrastructure, and the environment from damage caused by rising sea levels and storms.

Features built near the coast or waterbodies intended to prevent erosion or reduce storm surge or flooding, such as bulkheads, seawalls, breakwaters, and impoundments, are costly and often exacerbate

damage to neighboring properties and should be used only when necessary, and after full consideration of alternatives.

### 6.3. Develop a resilience plan to assess vulnerability by location and identify context-specific solutions.

Riverhead should assess flood risk and vulnerability of critical infrastructure and the shoreline, research tailored approaches and tools, identify coastal assets and resources that require special protection, and establish an implementation strategy to prepare and adapt to the impacts of climate change. One of the initial steps should be to establish the anticipated degree of sea level rise and the period to be considered for future planning (e.g., the 2050s). This plan can help the Town prioritize resilience measures, which can be costly.

The Town should involve the Peconic Estuary Partnership, Long Island Sound Study, and other regional partners who study climate change and sea level rise and work on mitigation initiatives in the planning process.

---

## **7. Ensure the safety of Riverhead residents, employees, and visitors in emergencies and strengthen the Town's emergency preparedness.**

---

One of the key climate change issues facing the Town is the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, tropical storms, and heavy rainfall. These events can cause flooding, damage to infrastructure, and disruptions to businesses and residents. In recent years, Riverhead has experienced several significant storms, including Superstorm Sandy in 2012, which caused widespread damage and flooding. In response to these events, the Town has been developing emergency response plans and investing in infrastructure improvements to enhance its resilience to future storms.

### **7.1. Promote the Hazard Mitigation Plan.**

The Town should ensure that residents and businesses are aware of Suffolk County's Hazard Mitigation plan by providing a prominent link on the website and print copies in Town Hall, the Library, and other accessible locations.

### **7.2. Update the Town of Riverhead Hurricane/Severe Storm Emergency Response Plan.**

The Town's Hurricane/Severe Storm Emergency Response Plan was last updated in 2006. An update can incorporate new information and ensure the plan is sufficient to respond to increasingly severe storm events and projections.

---

### **7.3. Enhance the Town's ability to provide important notifications and increase the public's awareness about emergency preparedness.**

---

In an emergency, Riverhead should notify the public by text or phone calls (e.g., Suffolk County Reverse 911 system), announcements on local TV and radio, and the Town's website. Messages should include evacuation orders and routes, locations of emergency shelters, and where to find services such as medical care or food and water. The Town should improve the accessibility of emergency preparedness educational materials by including translations and graphics available in both English and Spanish.

Town of

# RIVERHEAD

## Comprehensive Plan Update



# 13 FUTURE LAND USE

The Future Land Use Chapter is a critical component of the Comprehensive Plan, in that it provides guidance for how the land use and zoning policies and strategies will be put into action. Land use and zoning recommendations are interspersed throughout this plan, as they can relate to many different topic areas. This chapter consolidates those recommendations into one place, with an emphasis on specific action steps and responsible parties, ensuring a systematic approach to achieving the Plan's objectives and translating the outlined strategies into tangible results.

The key tool to implement land use changes is the zoning code. Zoning is a set of regulations that control land use within specific areas. In some cases, proposed changes would include changes to the zoning code. Implementation can also include other regulatory changes, policies, and capital expenditures. While some recommendations could be enacted relatively easily, others would require further study to determine a specific course of action. The Town should continue to monitor progress of recommendations to ensure the plan's objectives are being met.



## ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Zoning Approach Map shown on the following page provides a high-level overview of the land use approach and potential zoning designations for different parts of the Town. Each of the identified areas is described in the section below. The recommendations include administrative changes, revisions to existing regulations, or potential changes to the zoning map. Some recommendations will require further study. Many of the zoning concepts are interwoven with TDR recommendations, which are also discussed within in this chapter. Additionally, the Zoning Approach Map identifies actions that could happen in the near term. Recommendations with red caption boxes are those that appear to be mature enough to be adopted by the Town after this comprehensive plan is complete, while recommendations with blue caption boxes are those that would require further discussion, study, and consideration by the Town.

## INDUSTRIAL AREAS

Industrially zoned areas are primarily in the southwest quadrant of Riverhead. The following recommendations have been crafted to optimize land use, promote sustainable growth, and overall quality of life for residents and businesses alike. Figure 37 provides an overview of proposed zoning changes, offering a clear roadmap for informed decision-making and strategic implementation.

### **Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL)**

In light of several prior unfulfilled development proposals at the Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL), the Town should revisit zoning regulations for the Planned Development (PD) district. The existing

district is fairly liberal with regard to land uses, and it may be appropriate to limit some activities which the community did not support such as a cargo airport. Recognizing the community's desire for a collaborative planning approach, a comprehensive study involving residents, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and other stakeholders should be initiated. This study would formulate a collective vision, identify desirable economically viable uses, explore subdivision plans, and address environmental considerations. This approach would also enhance eligibility for grant funding. Since potential zoning changes are unknown, and any potential future development is speculative, the Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) cannot assess potential changes at this site.

### **Planned Industrial Park (PIP):**

This district provides for industrial and office development within a thoughtfully planned environment to attract private investment, boost the Town's tax base, and create employment opportunities. PIP encourages single campus-like development under a comprehensive development plan (CDP). This district has been a victim of its own success, in that development has been maximized under the CDP; however, there is high demand from existing tenants to expand their activities. It is recommended that the Town revisit the CDP with NYSDEC to determine whether FAR and/or lot coverage of existing buildings could be increased from the baseline with the use of transfer of development rights (TDR). To amend the CDP, the Town would also have to revisit the filed subdivision map, covenants, and restrictions. Preservation credits may be used

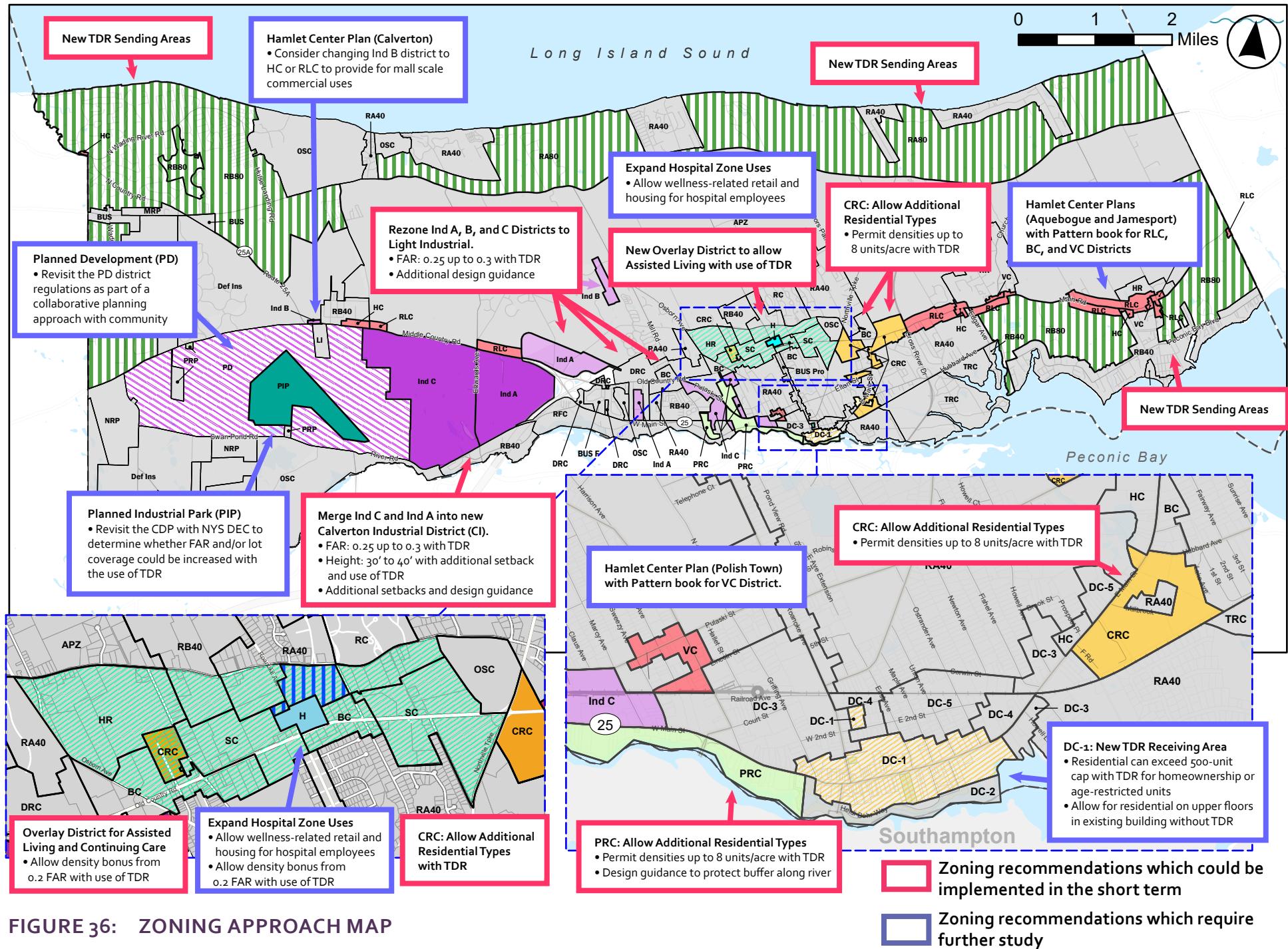
to increase lot coverage and/or floor area ratio for existing privately. This change would require further study and conversations with NYSDEC.

### ***Create a new Calverton Industrial District (CI) for IND A and IND C areas in Calverton.***

Many residents expressed concern about the impacts from industrial development in the Industrially zoned areas of Calverton (IND A and IND C) generally south of Middle Country Road, north of the Long Island Expressway, and bound on the west by the PD district. It is also important to recognize that Riverhead's industrially zoned areas provide job opportunities and a source of tax revenue that supports public services, infrastructure development, and quality-of-life amenities that benefit both industrial and residential residents.

The zoning approach for this area is to create a new zoning district that essentially combines the IND A and IND C districts. Alternatively, the Town could use IND C and modify it to achieve the same goal. The new district would be based off of allowable uses in IND C but not heavy industrial uses allowed in IND A. It would require a larger front yard setback of 100 feet to help protect the rural appearance and to minimize views of development from adjacent roads. Proposed dimensional regulations are provided in the table below:

The new zoning district would reduce the permitted FAR from 0.4 to 0.25, with the potential to increase to 0.3 with the use of TDR credits. Reducing the FAR would help to encourage more efficient and compact



**Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update**

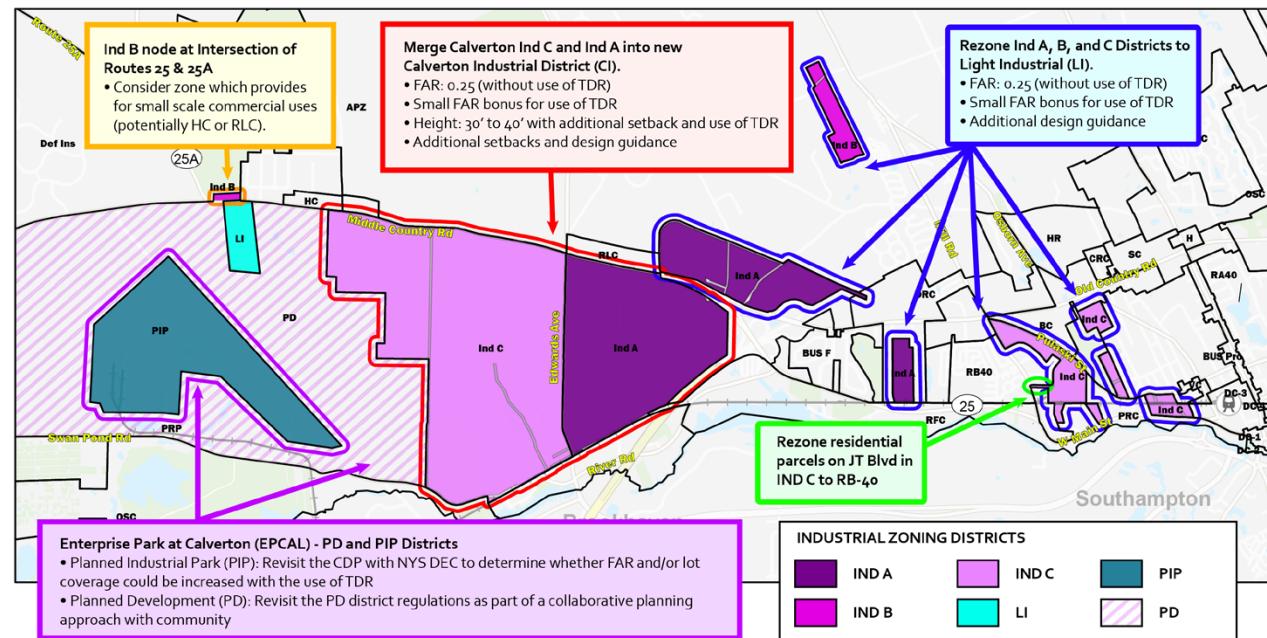
developments with more land used for setbacks and open space. It would also help to mitigate negative impacts such as traffic, noise, and pollution.

### Building height

Many industrial uses require building heights that are greater than the currently permitted 30 feet. This height is less than the 35 feet that is permitted in residential areas. Many modern industries are evolving and require innovative spaces. Allowing for slightly taller buildings can attract a wider range of businesses, including those that require more vertical space for advanced manufacturing, research and development, or storage facilities. Permitting taller buildings also encourages a more efficient use of available space, accommodating a greater number of businesses and activities without expanding the building footprint. The Town should consider increasing building heights to 40 feet with the use of TDR. Each TDR credit would provide for 5,000 SF of the area which exceeds 30 feet in height.<sup>1</sup> TDR bonuses for height or density should not be permitted if a user is not identified in the land use approval process (i.e., a spec building).

In order to address the potential for visual impacts, this district should include a pyramid height law, which limits the scale of a building as it approaches property lines. The plan would limit the visual impact of tall buildings by ensuring they taper inward as they rise, reducing shadowing, preserving sunlight access to streets open spaces, thereby helping to minimize voreshadowing of neighboring areas. The zoning would include a maximum allowable slope at which a building's roof can intrude into the sky. The figure on the following page shows a pyramid slope of 0.3. In this scenario, a 40-foot-tall building would need to be set back 133 feet.

<sup>1</sup> The amount of extra developable space you could achieve with TDR would be based on the TDR transfer formula which is discussed later in this chapter.



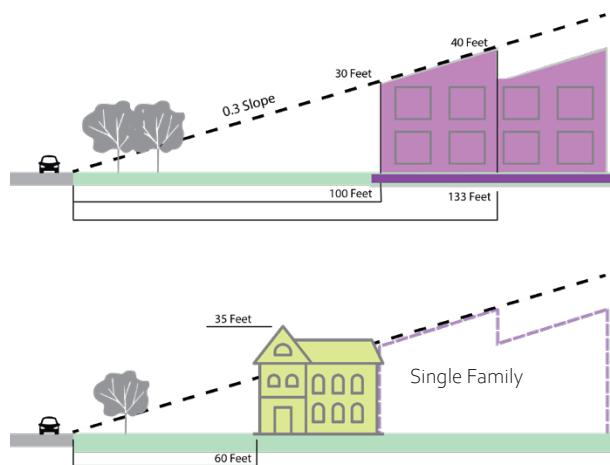
**FIGURE 37: ZONING APPROACH - INDUSTRIAL AREAS**

Source: Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning

	IND A (Existing)	IND C (Existing)	CI (Proposed)	LI (Proposed)
Min Lot Area (sf)	80,000	80,000	80,000	80,000
Min Lot Width	200	300	300	100
Max Building Coverage	40%	40%	30%	25% (30% with TDR)
Max FAR	0.4	0.4	0.25 (0.3 with TDR)*	0.25 (0.6 with TDR)*
Impervious Coverage	70%	60%	60%	60%
Yards (Front/Side/Rear)	100/50/75	30/30/50	100/30/50	50/20/50
Max Height	30 feet	30 feet	30 feet (40' with TDR*)	35/2 stories

**Table 15: Proposed Dimensional Regulations in CI and LI Districts**

\* - Additional setbacks would apply



**Example of Pyramid Law with slope of 0.3**

Regarding the use of TDRs to achieve additional height, a solution could involve establishing a uniform floor height for all structures within the receiving district. For instance, a standardized floor measurement of 30 feet could be applied, particularly for single-story buildings. Any floor area exceeding this 30-foot threshold would necessitate additional TDR credits. This approach ensures clarity, fairness, and a consistent method for computing and transferring development rights to the receiving district. Alternatively, the Town could adopt a volumetric calculation to ascertain the TDR credits needed for space above 30 feet. For example, one metric might entail assigning one credit for every 100,000 cubic feet extending beyond 30 feet in height. However, implementing this metric poses challenges, particularly in accurately determining the cubic space of a building.

#### **Non-disturbance buffer**

It is recommended that this district include a non-disturbance buffer on road fronting properties. This would be a 50-foot transition yard from the property

line that is landscaped with the exception of signs, lighting, a driveway, and sidewalks. Parking areas should not be located within this transition yard.

#### **Outdoor storage**

Outdoor storage is not currently permitted in Industrial C areas. It would be reasonable to allow these as accessory uses in CI provided that proper screening is provided to mitigate visual impacts and ensure storage areas are visually appealing. The Town should develop clear and specific zoning regulations that outline the types of outdoor storage allowed, the dimensions of storage areas (including height), the type of materials that can be stored, and the requirements for screening. Regulations can define the conditions under which outdoor storage is permitted to prevent misuse or excessive clutter. The area of outdoor storage could also be limited to a percentage of the land area.

#### **Summary of zoning recommendation**

Figure 38 shows an example of potential development in the proposed new industrial zoning district, both as-of-right and using TDR. In the example of a 4.5-acre parcel, the permitted size of a building would decrease significantly, and the front yard setback would increase to 100 feet. With the use of TDR credits, a building could achieve more vertical space, provided the building is set back even further from the street. In the scenario shown, TDR credits would be required to achieve the equivalent of an additional 68,250 square feet, which equates to 14 TDR credits at 5,000 SF per credit.

#### **Ind B properties at intersection of Routes 25 and 25A**

There are two Industrial B properties at this location. One of the parcels is currently a gas station. It may be reasonable to rezone both parcels to HC or RLC, recognizing that a small-scaled commercial use serving Calverton may be more appropriate and locally supported than industrial uses. This small commercial node would be especially important if EPCAL were to be redeveloped. Zoning for this area could be further analyzed as part of a hamlet study for the Calverton area.

#### **Scattered IND A, IND B, and IND C sites beyond Calverton**

In response to the evolving landscape and the need to balance industrial activities with the character of developed areas, it is proposed to rezone industrial parcels in more developed areas as Light Industrial (LI). This existing district allows for indoor industrial or office operations and encourages harmonious building design within previously zoned industrial areas. LI guidelines should be strengthened to provide design guidance on elements that harmonize with the built environment, such as facades, materials, and landscaping to limit visual impact from roads.

The zoning change to LI would reduce the baseline zoning from 0.4 to 0.25 – the same reduction as what is proposed in the Calverton core area. With the use of TDR credits and a 30% building coverage maximum, a 1-story building could achieve 0.3 FAR or a 2-story building could achieve 0.6 FAR. A 2-story building would still be less bulky and would cover less land than what is currently permitted in IND A and IND C. Allowing for 2-story buildings with TDR promotes more efficient and compact developments with more



4.5 acre parcel in IND A (300' x 650')

Dimensional Regulations	Existing Zoning		Proposed Zoning	
	IND A	IND C	As of Right	With Use of TDR
Min Lot Area (sf)	80,000	80,000	80,000	
Min Lot Width	200	300	300	
Max Building Coverage	40%	40%	25%	30%
Max FAR	0.4	0.4	0.25	0.6
Impervious Coverage	70%	60%	60%	
Yards (Front/Side/Rear)	100/50/75	30/30/50	100/30/50 + 50' non disturbance buffer + 0.3 slope sky exposure plane	
Max Height	30 feet	30 feet	30 feet	40 feet/ 2 stories

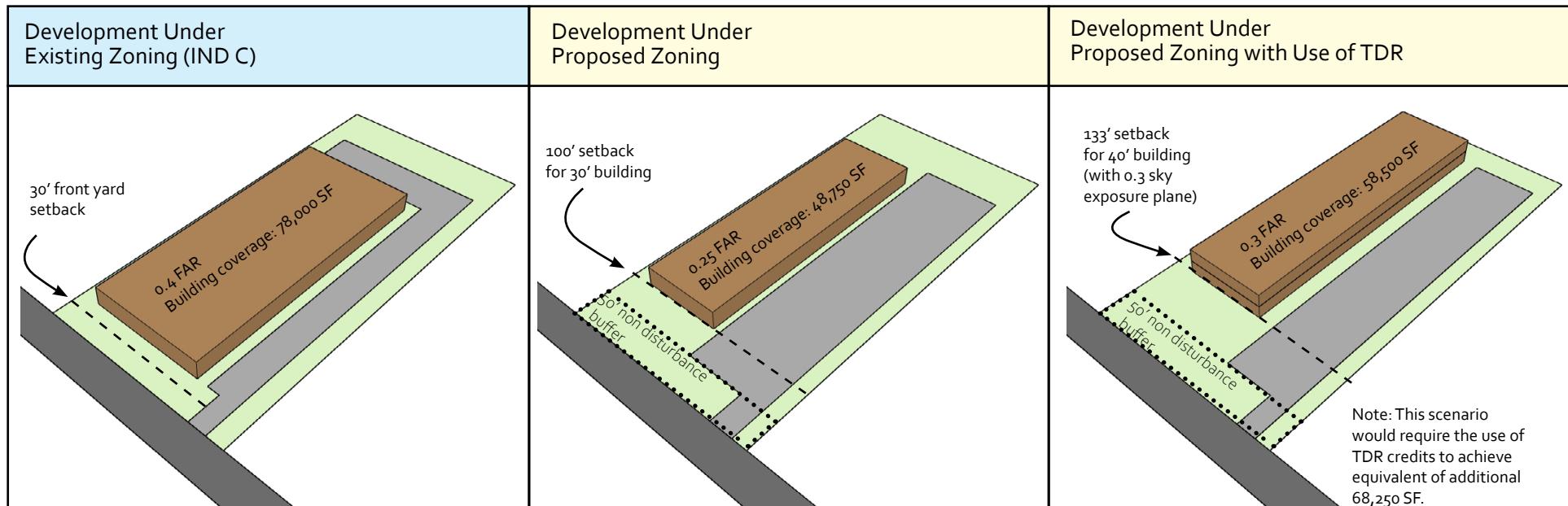


FIGURE 38: INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS IN CALVERTON - DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO WITH PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES

land utilized for setbacks and open space. Proposed dimensional regulations are provided in the table below:

### Performance Standards in LI

Performance standards in LI could be strengthened to ensure that industrial activities are conducted in a manner that is safe, environmentally responsible, and compatible with surrounding land uses. This could provide specific guidance for topics such as noise control, buffers from sensitive areas, odors and emission control, waste management, traffic management, site design, site maintenance, safety measures, energy efficiency, stormwater management. There are also other elements in the LI district's provisions that seem to apply to specific areas in Town. The zoning text should be reviewed to ensure it isn't unnecessarily restrictive with regard to where LI can be placed.



*Examples of desirable building types for light industrial uses*

### Uses in Industrial Districts

Industrial properties currently permit, and should continue to permit, various non-industrial uses including agricultural, equestrian, recreational, and golf uses. The Town should consider allowing assisted living and continuum of care residential facilities in industrial zones, potentially by special permit. This Plan also recommends these uses be allowed by special permit in any district. Allowing these facilities can be reasonable because it provides alternative redevelopment options with community-serving uses which meet the growing demand for senior housing without displacing residential neighborhoods or overwhelming existing infrastructure.

## DOWNTOWN:

### DC-1 District Development Cap and TDR

The greatest density and housing growth has been focused, appropriately, in Downtown Riverhead. In the next five years, a wave of new development is anticipated in this area, which is expected to exhaust the 500-unit cap on residential use in the DC-1 district, which was implemented to maintain controlled growth. The Plan is not recommending removing the cap. It is recommending that the Town conduct a study to reassess the 500-unit cap. This planning effort could incorporate the following related topics:

### Provide opportunities for homeownership and age-restricted living

This zoning recommendation seeks to offer a mechanism for exceeding the cap through the responsible use of TDR credits, while requiring that the additional units only be for homeownership or

age-restricted opportunities. This recommendation simultaneously addresses housing needs, encourages housing stability, and supports controlled growth.

### Provide for adaptive reuse

It is also recommended that buildings be permitted to exceed the cap when redeveloping existing upper floors of historic buildings for housing. This change would promote the preservation and rehabilitation of existing historic buildings.

### Reassess the 500-unit cap

It would be reasonable for the Town to reassess this cap on a regular basis, given the significant demand for development, and the continued need to meet other housing, economic, and community development goals. The 2021 Market Study for the Town Square by Streetsense recommends the removal of the 500-unit cap. With a strong push for development and a Federal Opportunity Zone in play, investors and developers need predictability in the process and to know whether they can or cannot build. This recommendation includes two actions.

- The first would be to conduct economic and fiscal cost-benefit analysis of impacts of new development on the downtown and the Town overall. This will provide a fiscal understanding of the benefit of any potential increases of the cap.
- Regulations for the cap should also be cleaned up. Currently, the conditions on when the cap threshold would be reached is based on certificate of occupancy, which creates issues related to implementation and enforcement. There are several alternatives to consider. For example, one option would be to not accept new applications after a building permit is issued for the 500<sup>th</sup> unit.

### Pattern Book

The Town has developed a pattern book for the downtown area, which has proven to be a useful tool helping to guide the development of recent projects. It is recommended that the Pattern Book be formally included in the zoning code, so it is required to be considered during the site plan approval process by developers, land use boards, the Town Board, and Town staff.

It is recognized that there are some inconsistencies between the pattern book and the Town Code. It is recommended that the Town revisit the standards provided to avoid confusion. The Pattern Book provides revised dimensional standards that help to minimize the bulk of new buildings. Current DC-1 zoning permits 5-story buildings with up to 80% lot coverage (applicants may apply for 100% lot coverage). Community surveys revealed that many residents prefer buildings to appear smaller in scale, in keeping with the historical fabric. Five-story buildings along the length of Main Street could create a canyon-like effect and cast shadows on streets, sidewalks, and outdoor dining, creating an undesirable condition for pedestrians.

The Pattern Book recommends several changes to dimensional standards that would minimize the bulk of new buildings and address concerns that Main Street would be redeveloped with 5-story buildings. For example, the existing DC-1's existing FAR is 4.0 with a maximum height of 60 feet/5 stories. The Pattern Book recommends a FAR of 3.5 with a maximum height of 50 feet/4 stories, with a setback on the fourth story. Proposed design standards are shown to the right.



One hypothetical proposal shown above for the DC-1 Zoning Use District.

## COMMERCIAL AND MIXED-USE DISTRICTS

### Route 58

#### Design guidelines

The Route 58 commercial corridor plays a crucial role in shaping Riverhead's image and serves as a gateway for residents and visitors alike. Design guidelines will provide a clear and cohesive vision for the corridor's development, promoting a harmonious and attractive streetscape that aligns with our community's desired scale and aesthetic. The guidelines would promote the use of landscaping to soften the built environment, enhance walkability, and contribute to a more inviting

atmosphere. They would also address parking lot design to minimize the visual impact of large parking areas.

#### Parking Requirements

Several areas within the Route 58 commercial corridor have a surplus of parking spaces compared with actual demand. This results in vast expanses of underutilized asphalt, which not only disrupts the visual appeal of the corridor but also poses environmental challenges from stormwater runoff and excessive heat. Parking requirements appear to be high and should be revisited using empirical data rather than assumptions. Town can also allow for more flexibility in meeting parking requirements, including the ability to share parking facilities among businesses. Business should also be permitted to reduce their required amount, provided



#### Potential urban design concepts for Route 58 to address with Design Guidelines

a lesser need is demonstrated with a parking study which assesses the actual parking need for their proposed use.

#### Pedestrian and Bicycle Access

It is also important to improve walkability within lots. This includes promoting safe bicycle and pedestrian cross-access between properties and parking lots. Incorporating landscaping and pedestrian-friendly features in existing parking lots can transform them into inviting spaces, contributing to a more sustainable and attractive environment.

#### Hamlet Centers

##### RLC Districts

It is recommended that these districts incorporate design guidelines to ensure that commercial uses are harmonious and contextual with the surrounding rural and single-family scale. This would include guidelines

that specify architectural styles, materials, and building heights that resonate with the rural setting. It may also include standards for signage, landscaping, and building/parking placement.

#### HC and VC Districts

Within these districts, the Comprehensive Plan recommends the implementation of square footage limits for individual commercial uses as well as limits on the number of commercial uses that can be located on one lot. The purpose of these changes is to limit strip commercial uses and ensure that the scale of any new development is compatible with the surrounding rural context. Banquet facilities and/or catering facilities are an example of principal uses which could be removed from these districts.<sup>2</sup> These measures would ensure that future development contributes to the overall quality of life in hamlet centers. Design guidance

<sup>2</sup> The Town's code does not currently have a definition for banquet facility, only a catering facility.

should be provided to ensure that new development is compatible with the surrounding residential context. This could include vegetated buffers (at least 25 feet) where HC and VC districts abut residential districts.

#### Hamlet Studies

It is recommended that the Town work with residents in several hamlet areas such as Aquebogue, Jamesport, Calverton, and Polish Town, to develop hamlet studies with design guidelines or a pattern book for new development. Once developed, pattern books and/or design guidelines should be adopted into the Town Code. These guidelines will serve as a valuable tool to guide and regulate development, ensuring that it aligns with the community's scale and aesthetic. By providing clear and specific guidance for architectural design, landscaping, and urban planning, these resources will promote aesthetically pleasing, sustainable, and context-sensitive development that enhances the overall quality of life for residents and visitors.

#### BUS F - Manufacturer's Outlet Overlay Zone

The BUS F district includes Tanger Outlets at Riverhead and another adjacent property. While Tanger Outlets is a popular shopping destination for the wider region and an important economic driver for the Town, the retail industry is subject to changing market trends, first and foremost being competition from online retail. Retailers often need to innovate and diversify their offerings to stay competitive. It is important to provide some flexibility in the zoning code to enable businesses to experiment with new concepts, such as pop-up shops, restaurants, experiential retail, or mixed-use developments that include office spaces. In February 2024, the Town amended this district to allow for several new uses which would complement the existing district including manufacturers' outlet

and retail sales center, interior design showroom and trade center, and specialty grocery, food stores and market center.

This flexibility should be extended to the vacant parcel between Tanger I and Tanger II campuses, to reduce barriers to the creation of a more unified shopping center with complementary adjacent uses. The Town may also consider rezoning the non Tanger-owned parcel as BC or DRC.

In providing zoning flexibility in BUS F, Riverhead should strike a balance between supporting adaptation and ensuring that any changes align with broader land use goals and do not compromise public health, safety, or welfare. This typically involves engaging with property owners, businesses, and the community to create zoning regulations that encourage innovation and revitalization while maintaining a well-planned and cohesive environment.

## HOSPITAL ZONE, ASSISTED LIVING, AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT DISTRICTS:

### Hospital District

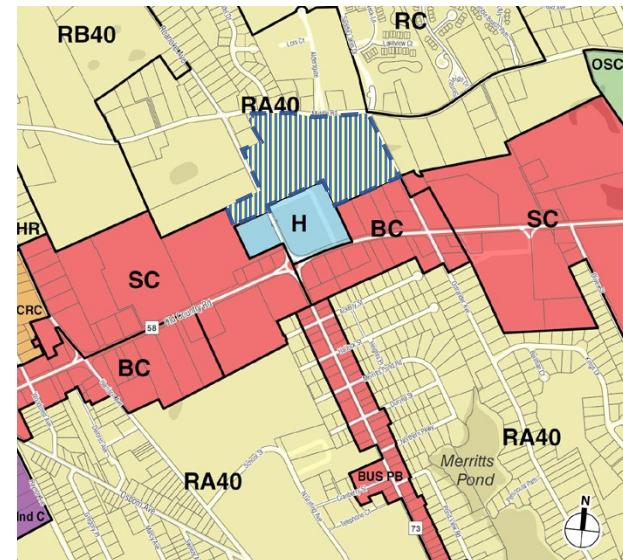
It is recommended that the existing hospital zone be expanded to encompass adjacent properties owned by the Peconic Bay Medical Center (PBMC). The Hospital District should also be amended to permit a wider variety of wellness-related uses such as fitness centers, wellness-related retail, health foods, physician offices, childcare, etc. The district should also provide for housing for hospital staff. The H District's 1.5 FAR may not be appropriate for these expanded areas because they neighbor residential districts which are significantly less dense. The Town may consider establishing a second Hospital District with a lower density to provide for a transitional area and ensure compatibility with surroundings. This

could include a mix of 1-, 2-, and 3-story buildings in a campus like environment that are built close together, so they are easier to access for pedestrians. These recommendations align with the PBMC's expressed long-term vision and the Town's desire to support this essential institution and promote accessibility to quality healthcare services. However, specific plans have not been presented to the Town. It is anticipated that any zoning changes would be developed at a later point once plans are proposed for the Town to review.

### Assisted Living and continuing Care

Riverhead has an aging population and needs to address the evolving needs of seniors. Assisted living facilities and continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs) provide specialized care and support services for seniors, allowing them to age in place with dignity and comfort. As discussed in the TDR recommendations, these uses are proposed to be allowed in parts of Route 58 near the PBMC. The existing FAR of 0.2 in this area is not sufficient to provide for this development type. A slight increase in FAR with use of TDR may be appropriate in areas that are sewered; however building coverage should be capped at 30%. This zoning change would provide for a mix of 1-, 2-, and 3-story buildings in a compact campus-like environment. Residential density for these facilities should be capped, potentially at 30 beds per acre, provided sewer infrastructure is in place.

Senior housing generates a greater need for emergency response services than non-age-restricted housing. Thus, it makes sense to locate senior housing in places where emergency response services and medical facilities are more concentrated. Ideal locations for senior housing are in downtown and hamlet centers and near the hospital, while other locations, such as within HC or RLC districts, should allow assisted living and CCRCs by special permit. Densities could be in the range of 15-30 units per acre if public sewer infrastructure is in place. Lower densities would be



**Areas to be considered for expanded hospital and wellness related uses**

appropriate in areas without sewer infrastructure. The Town may also consider establishing the minimum site size for the development of such facilities. Assisted living and CCRC facilities should also be defined uses in the zoning code.

Figure 39 provides a development scenario where assisted living uses, with the use of TDR credits, could achieve a 0.75 FAR at 30% building coverage. In the scenario shown, on a 3.6-acre lot, a developer could build a mix of 2- and 3-story buildings, capped at 108 units. The extra square footage required would require the use of 27 TDR credits.

### Community Benefit District

CBD is in effect a floating zone which would permit clustered multifamily dwelling units tailored to address the housing needs of underserved demographics, such as young professionals, families, and seniors. Permission for use of this district requires the concurrent construction of on-site community

center and nonresidential use(s). The Town may reconsider the existing residential density cap of 10 units per acre, with the possibility of a higher density limit determined by the Town Board on a case-by-case basis. Factors influencing this decision include existing infrastructure, amenities offered, the quality of housing, and the overall site plan. The primary purpose of this change would be to facilitate projects that would bring substantial community benefits.

## RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

### Minimum Home Size in Residential Districts

Some residential zones have a 1,200-square-foot minimum home size. Building code standards already ensure the safety, structural integrity, and habitability of residential structures, making additional minimum size requirements redundant. Eliminating such restrictions allows for greater flexibility in housing design, promotes innovation, and facilitates the development of diverse and affordable housing options that better meet the evolving needs of the community.

### Short term rentals

The code currently has a minimum rental period of 30 days to limit the impacts of short-term rentals on the housing market and the associated noise and neighborhood impacts that can occur with these rentals. Balancing the economic benefits of tourism with the needs and concerns of permanent residents requires careful consideration and community engagement. Regulations for short-term rentals should also be regularly reviewed and adjusted as necessary to address changing market conditions and community priorities.

## AGRICULTURAL USES

### Vertical Farming

#### *In Industrial Zones:*

Vertical farming should be a permitted use in all industrial districts. Vertical farming allows for the cultivation of crops in a vertically stacked system, reducing the footprint needed for agriculture. Allowing vertical farming in industrial zones can diversify land use, promoting mixed-use development that combines industrial, agricultural, and commercial activities. This can contribute to more vibrant and resilient communities.

Industrial zones often have vacant or underutilized buildings and spaces. Permitting vertical farming can encourage the adaptive reuse of these structures, revitalizing underused areas and putting vacant industrial properties to productive use.

#### *In APZ and Other Districts*

Allowing vertical farming on farmland with development rights intact can offer several advantages and align with modern agricultural practices and the need to support the agriculture industry. Vertical farming can complement traditional farming methods by allowing for year-round cultivation of crops and crop diversification. This can significantly increase a farm's overall productivity, providing a consistent supply of fresh produce. Diversifying a farm's production through vertical farming can open up new revenue streams and income opportunities for farmers, potentially increasing their economic stability.

One of the biggest concerns about vertical farming is the visual impact of these structures. The Town should consider clear guidance for the total size, setbacks, landscaping, screening, and design, etc., to minimize the visual impact of these structures.

The Town would need to establish exactly how these would be regulated – potentially as an accessory use when farming is the principal use. The Town could consider areas where vertical farming may or may not be permitted such as on prime agricultural soils. Some flexibility could be provided for a hybrid model where plants are transferred from the vertical farming structure to the adjacent agricultural land. Additional standards could apply. Flexibility could be provided for the adaptive reuse of agricultural buildings such as when these facilities are integrated into existing farm infrastructure

### Renewable Energy

Solar facilities for commercial energy production are currently only allowed in industrial zoning districts. For agricultural properties in other districts, New York State's current agricultural policies allow solar, limited to 110% of the anticipated annual electricity needs of the farm. It may be reasonable to provide some flexibility in allowing farmers to incorporate renewable energy facilities (i.e., solar or wind) beyond the 110% threshold provide solar as an accessory use to the primary agricultural use. This dual-purpose utilization not only supports the financial stability of farmers but also fosters the integration of renewable energy.

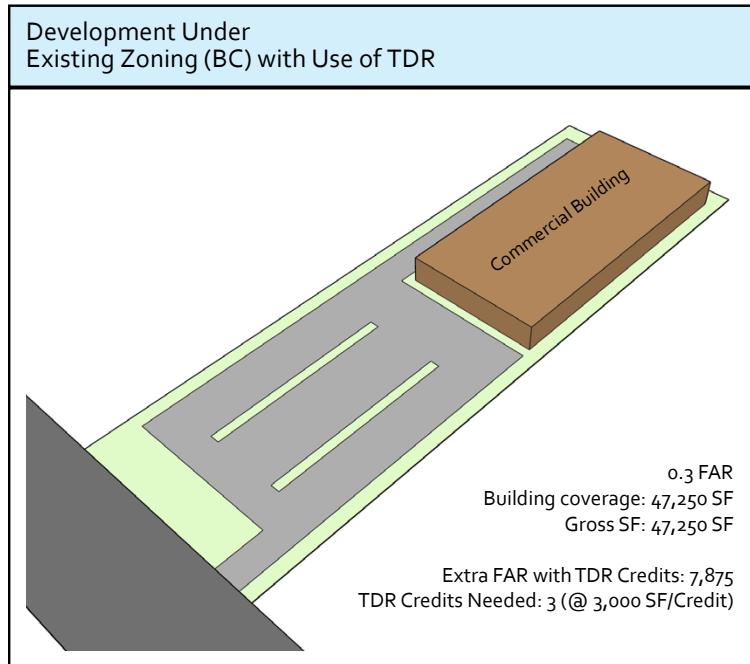
This recommendation could be addressed with the creation of a special permit by the Town Board for solar or wind as an accessory use to the principal agricultural use. This mechanism would provide the Town Board with discretion to ensure that visual and other impacts are addressed. The Town Board may also consider



3.6 acre area (2 parcels) in BC (225' x 700')

Dimensional Regulations	Existing BC Zoning		Proposed Assisted Living Overlay + TDR
	BC	With Use of TDR	
Min Lot Area (sf)	20,000		
Min Lot Width	100'		
Max Building Coverage	25%	30%	
Max FAR (with sewer)	0.2	0.3	0.75
Impervious Coverage	75%		
Yards (Front/Side/Rear)	50'/15'/25'		
Max Height	35feet	35 feet 50 feet with TDR credits	
Max Residential Density	N/A	30 units/acre	

Development Under Existing Zoning (BC) with Use of TDR



Development Under Proposed Assisted Living Overlay with Use of TDR

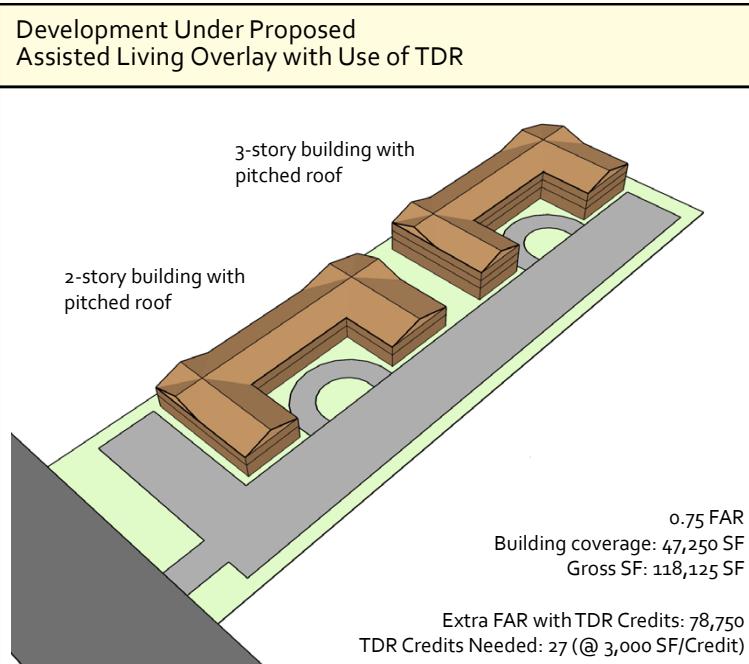


FIGURE 39: ASSISTED LIVING OVERLAY - DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO WITH PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES

whether development rights have been previously extinguished (e.g., through the TDR program, PDR, easements). The Town Board could also provide flexibility for agrivoltaic projects, which provide for a dual use with the production of vegetables or other crops. This approach allows for the prioritization of a site's continued agriculture use, as the project may be designed to maximize both renewable energy production and crop yields.

## Farm Operations

The APZ is currently the only zone that allows "Farm Operations" as an accessory use on properties whose principle use is farming. Farms in other zones are not permitted that use under the current zoning. For example, the RA-80 district and APZ district are very similar with regard to permitted farming operations. However, there is one difference. APZ allows for "Farm Operations" as an accessory use, while this use is not provided for in RA-80. It is recommended that farms throughout riverhead be treated with the same regard to farm operations. The Town should consider allowing farm operations as an accessory use in any zone where farm production is occurring.

## Agritourism

It is important for the Town to address and balance the benefits of agritourism with the potential impacts on agricultural production and operations, public safety, and the surrounding community. The challenge lies in striking a balance between supporting local farmers while minimizing impacts from larger commercial enterprises, particularly events like weddings and tasting rooms which may lack the same regulatory framework as other commercial areas.

The NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets provides resources on agritourism, including existing definitions that the Town could add to its code. The

Town should work closely with the farm community to ensure that definitions and regulations are not overly restrictive, which could harm the viability of farming operations. The Department of Agriculture and Markets protects agritourism activities where the principal purpose is marketing of the farm's products, not recreation. The law also sets thresholds for the size of events and share of the farms income that can come from admissions and fees for events or rentals. Resources available through New York Ag and Markets and Cornell Cooperative Extension can guide the Town in determining how to ensure health and safety while allowing agritourism to benefit farmers.

Events and activities that do not meet the agreed upon definition of agritourism could be limited with a permitting process or imposing size restrictions. The permitting process can help to identify traffic and safety concerns and provide a funding mechanism for traffic control when needed.

In addition to permitting for events, the Town should develop more transparent regulations that address event space. Limiting the capacity of these spaces can help manage traffic and mitigate safety risks. When developing such regulations, it's important to engage with stakeholders, including farmers, residents, and event organizers, to strike a balance that allows agritourism to thrive while addressing local concerns and maintaining the integrity of agricultural operations and rural communities.

## Conditional Use Permits

To accommodate the evolving nature of the agricultural industry, zoning should offer flexibility to adapt to changing demands and technologies, which may not be considered under the current zoning regulations. This would be a helpful tool considering the Town cannot predict future innovations in the farming industry. The Town may consider allowing for

conditional use permits, which would be evaluated by the Town Board on a case-by-case basis, considering impacts like traffic and noise, with conditions imposed for mitigation. These permits, inclusive of definitions provided in NYS Dept. of Ag & Markets Law Section 301, should be collaboratively developed with the Town's Agricultural Advisory Committee, ensuring alignment with accepted agricultural definitions and practices.

## SOUND AVENUE

In line with preserving the scenic and historic character of hamlet center areas, the Scenic and Historic Resources chapter recommends the development of pattern books for specific corridors, including Sound Avenue. The development of a pattern book requires a planning study and public outreach to determine specifications. These pattern books will establish design standards, defining criteria for massing, size, roof slope, and subjective terms like "rural appearance". Additionally, the extension of design standards to subdivisions and site plans aims to provide clarity and predictability for applicants while safeguarding scenic views and historic resources. The design standards could be incorporated into an overlay zone for the corridor. Pattern books should be adopted into the Town Code.

## NON-CONFORMING USES

Zoning regulations do not always perfectly align with existing land uses. Sometimes the existing uses are non-conforming, which means that the use was legally established and in compliance with zoning regulations at the time it was established but no longer conforms to the current zoning ordinance. This situation typically arises when zoning laws are updated, revised, or changed over time, leading certain existing uses to become non-conforming.

There are occasions when zoning changes may be needed to recognize and accommodate existing land uses that contribute positively to the community fabric. This Plan recommends strategically looking at places where existing non-conforming uses should be allowed to continue and does not advocate for the continuation of all non-conforming uses, some of which may have negative impacts on the community. Such evaluations are essential to ensure that zoning regulations remain relevant and beneficial, balancing the need for development with the preservation of community character and property owner rights.

Several examples of areas where existing uses should continue, with reasonable limitations on expansion, are identified below. The examples are meant to be illustrative of types of inconsistency issues that may exist in other areas of town.

#### Marinas

Some marinas along the Peconic Bay are in residentially zoned areas which do not list marinas as a permitted use. It is important to support these non-conforming uses, which are key stakeholders in the local economy. It is recommended that the Town work with property owners to help them establish conformity should they wish to do so. This could be done with an overlay zone or a floating zone which property owners would have to opt-in to.

#### Residential Area on JT Boulevard

The south side of JT Boulevard has four single-family homes but is zoned Ind C. Residential use appears to be more appropriate than industrial or business given the surrounding built context – there are single-family homes on both sides of the street. This area could be rezoned to RB40 to match the nearby residential parcels.

#### Commercial Node on Edgar Avenue

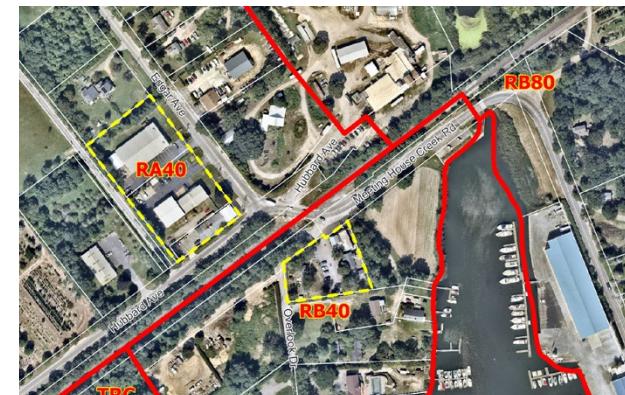
There is a small node of properties on the northwest corner of Edgar and Hubbard Avenues that contains light industrial uses. This area has become a locally serving commercial node and should remain, even though the underlying zoning is residential. The Town should determine the most appropriate designation, which could be light industrial or one of the smaller scale commercial districts. Additionally, the Lighthouse Market property just south of the railroad tracks is another historical use that should remain, even if the property were to be redeveloped. The Village Center (VC) district could be considered for this parcel.

#### Commercial Node on Tuthills Lane

Another commercial node that should be supported is the Vinland Commons property on the northwest corner of the intersection of Main Road and Tuthills Lane. The property is developed with a commercial shopping center, but the existing RLC zoning makes this use non-conforming. Rezoning the area as Hamlet Center (HC) would permit low-intensity commercial uses comparable in size with the existing shopping center.



Residential Area on JT Boulevard



Commercial Node on Edgar Avenue



Commercial Node on Tuthills Lane

## TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHT (TDR) RECOMMENDATIONS:

TDR is a valuable tool used to manage land use and promote sustainable development. In a rural town like Riverhead, TDR can be particularly useful for preserving farmland, natural resources, and open spaces while allowing for controlled growth in designated areas. Although use of this tool has widespread support within the community, the market dynamics are not in place to support its success. Recommendations below seek to make this program work better by improving the value of TDR credits through revisions of the transfer formula and by opening new receiving areas where some increased development can be accommodated.

### Adjust transfer formula

The transfer formula quantifies how development units in the sending district are realized in the receiving district. The current transfer formula is a one-to-one basis, meaning that one TDR credit is equal to one residential unit in a receiving district regardless of unit size or type. A TDR credit is equal to 1 acre of land preserved. The TDR Toolbox developed by NYSERDA recommends a more dynamic approach. If the transfer occurs from a low-density area to a higher-density area, there may be a need to establish a transfer formula that equates the development right from one single-family home to more than one multifamily unit, because the proportional infrastructure cost impacts of a multifamily unit are lower than for a single-family dwelling in a low-density area.

Market conditions play a significant role in the success of TDR programs. If there is not enough demand for TDR credits, the existing TDR ratio may need to be adjusted to make the TDR financially feasible and to adequately compensate the property owner in the sending district for selling their development rights.

	Existing Ratio (Unit per TDR Credit)	Proposed Ratio (Unit per TDR Credit)
Single Family	1 Unit per TDR Credit	1 Unit per TDR Credit
Attached (< 600 GFA)	1 Unit per TDR Credit	3 Units per TDR Credit
Attached (600-1,200 GFA)	1 Unit per TDR Credit	2 Units per TDR Credit
DC-1 Multifamily	N/A	4 bedrooms per TDR Credit
Age restricted Living (<600 GFA)	1 Unit per TDR Credit	4 Units per TDR Credit
Age restricted Living (600-1,200 GFA)	1 Unit per TDR Credit	3 Units per TDR Credit
Assisted Living, Nursing Home, and Continuing Care	1 Unit per TDR Credit	3,000 SF per TDR Credit
Planned Recreational Park	1,500 SF per TDR Credit	3,000 SF per TDR Credit
Commercial	1,500 SF per TDR Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commercial – 3,000 SF/credit</li> <li>Hotel – 3 keys/credit</li> <li>Office – 4,000 SF/credit</li> <li>Industrial – 5,000 SF/credit</li> </ul>

Table 16: Proposed Transfer Formula for TDR Credits

The TDR Toolbox suggests that the transfer formula could be based on the average sizes of single-family homes versus the average sizes of apartment units, or comparative traffic generation rates. Sanitary sewer demand is another metric to consider.

The Comprehensive Plan has proposed a transfer formula that considers both wastewater flow and traffic generation. The ratios incorporate feedback from the development community about the overall market for TDRs and what ratios would be reasonable from a financial perspective. It is acknowledged that potential projects may also require the purchase of

Pine Barrens sanitary credits, which impacts the overall financial viability of new development. It is recommended that the transfer formula be revisited in consultation with the TDR committee every five years, or as market conditions change, to ensure that they are appropriately calibrated to both maximize the use of TDR credits without overburdening potential projects.

## PROPOSED SENDING AND RECEIVING DISTRICTS

Meetings were held with the TDR Committee to identify additions to the TDR sending and receiving areas. The maps below show the existing TDR sending and receiving areas and the proposed areas, inclusive of pre-existing areas. The proposed areas aim to direct growth away from areas with unique natural value and to areas that can better manage growth and density. By designating specific zones for more intense development, Riverhead can ensure that growth occurs in a planned and controlled manner, preventing sprawl and preserving open space. The new receiving districts, along with the proposed zoning changes discussed earlier in this chapter, would help to concentrate new development and jobs in the receiving areas while creating a more robust market for TDR credits.

### ***Single-Family Districts***

The Town should consider designating sending areas in all RB-80 and RA-80 districts (includes Laurel and Jamesport south of Main Road, Baiting Hollow, Northville, and Riverhead north of Sound Avenue, and in Wading River), as these areas have large tracts of agricultural lands that should be eligible for preservation through the TDR program.

Currently, areas in RA-80 north of Sound Avenue are only designated as receiving districts, meaning that property owners can buy additional development rights from farms in the APZ to develop their property with bonuses. Properties in RA-80 have a 2-acre minimum lot size, however, with the use of TDR they can achieve a 1-acre minimum lot size. This transaction also results in the preservation of land in TDR sending areas.

However, there are many agricultural properties in RA-80 north of Sound Avenue that do not have the same ability to protect their farmland through the TDR program. This Plan proposes to also designate the RA-80 zone north of Sound Avenue as a sending area, allowing owners of these properties to sell their development rights through the TDR program and preserve their lands. While these areas would also remain receiving districts, the sending district designation will provide the opportunity to preserve some land while allowing reasonable development on other lands at densities consistent with existing development patterns. Cluster regulations still apply to the RA-80 Zone which requires any new development to preserve 70% of farmland or open space.

Designating additional sending areas in residential districts that contain agricultural lands would provide flexibility for property owners and developers depending on their needs and the market demand.

### ***Industrial areas (IND A, IND B, IND C)***

This Plan contemplates a slight reduction in FAR for these areas, with an allowance for a slight increase with TDR credits. While the precise FAR is still to be determined, it could potentially be a reduction to 0.25 FAR as a base density with an increase to 0.3 with TDR. credits would also be required to achieve heights over 30 feet to a maximum of 40 feet (either for single-story or 2+ story buildings that exceed 30 feet). Buildings over 30 feet would need to be set back further from the property line. Development guidelines would be slightly different for areas in Calverton (proposed to be rezoned CI) and those industrial areas closer to downtown (proposed to be rezoned LI). TDR

### ***DC-1 (Core Downtown Area)***

Consider allowing buildings to exceed the 500-unit cap only if TDR credits are provided for additional housing units. Under this recommendation the housing

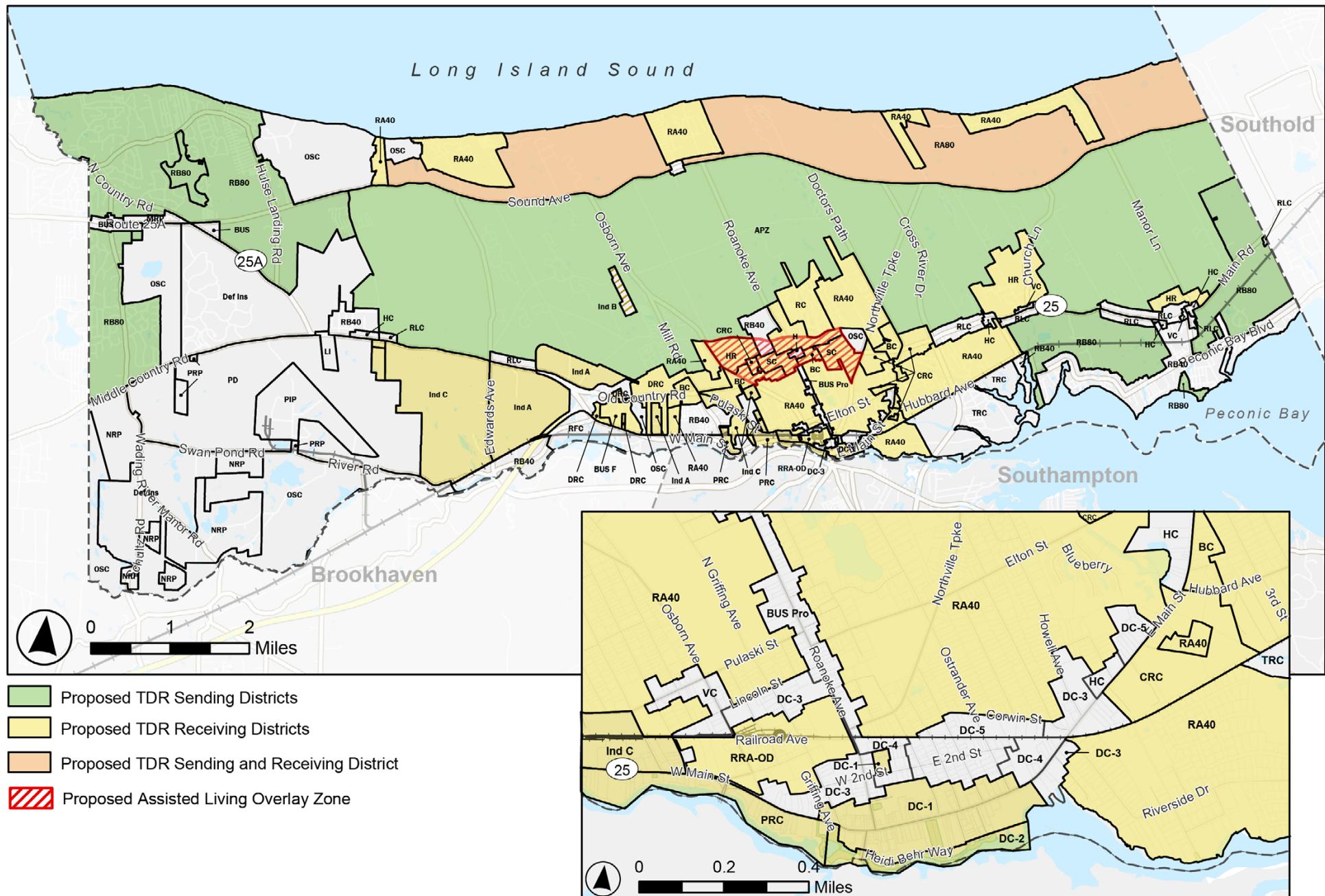
units achieved with TDR would be required to be for homeownership opportunities or for age-restricted living. A future study would be required.

### ***Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area Overlay District***

In 2021, the Town adopted the Railroad Avenue Urban Renewal Area Overlay District (RRA-OD) to revitalize blighted areas documented in the 1990 Urban Renewal Plan, the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, and the 2015 Brownfield Opportunity Area Step II Nomination Study. The district provides for a higher-intensity mix of uses, with ground-floor offices and retail and residential on upper floors for larger sites within the area. It also provides for various bonuses with the provision of community benefits, such as a density increase or parking reduction. One community benefit is the use of TDR, where each credit allows for an additional 3,000 square feet of floor area – up to a maximum determined by the property size. However, the TDR Map was never formally updated to be consistent with the adoption of RRA-OD. Therefore, it is recommended that the TDR map be updated to recognize the inclusion of TDR in this area.

### ***Assisted Living Overlay Zone***

Consider a new assisted living overlay zone within the boundaries of CR58, Middle Road, Northville Turnpike, and Osborn Avenue, excluding the Hospital District. A slight FAR increase may be reasonable for assisted living, given that the 0.2 FAR in BC and SC districts is potentially insufficient for a reasonably sized facility. The overlay district could allow assisted living facilities at the underlying district's as-of-right base density, with the ability to increase FAR with the use of TDR. The proposed area, equipped with sewer infrastructure, supports higher density and building intensity. The overlay district's standards would promote compact development with diverse



**FIGURE 4o: PROPOSED TDR**

*Source: Town of Riverhead, NYS GIS, USGS, BFJ Planning*

building heights and ample open space. Assisted living facilities, having lower parking demands, contribute to a sustainable, walkable environment.

### CRC Zone

The CRC Zone is intended to allow for a variety of housing types; however, the existing zoning standards only permit one dwelling unit per acre (single-family). It would be reasonable to accommodate slightly higher densities in this area, given their proximity to the downtown core. While the precise density is yet to be determined, it is reasonable to consider a range of densities, such as 4-12 units per acre, depending on whether infrastructure is in place and if TDR credits are used. This would allow for the development of townhouses. The MRP district could be looked at as a comparable for recommended development types and densities. The bulk criteria for the CRC zone may need to be revised to ensure that the property can accommodate these housing types. It is acknowledged that sanitary requirements set by SCDHS may limit the development potential on sites without supporting infrastructure. It is unlikely that properties could achieve densities greater than 4 units per acre without access to sewer infrastructure or an on-site treatment system. The Town may also consider the use of TDRs for a density bonus when the development is of homeownership units.

### Peconic River Community (PRC) Districts:

The PRC Zone is intended to allow for "an array of residential, commercial and recreational uses." However, no residential uses are specifically provided for in the zoning. This Plan recommends allowing for residential uses at 4 units per acre, bonusable to 8 units per acre with the use of TDR, provided that infrastructure is in place. None of the existing PRC zones are currently adjacent to sewer infrastructure, therefore, it is unlikely that any existing districts could achieve densities higher than 4 units per acre given the

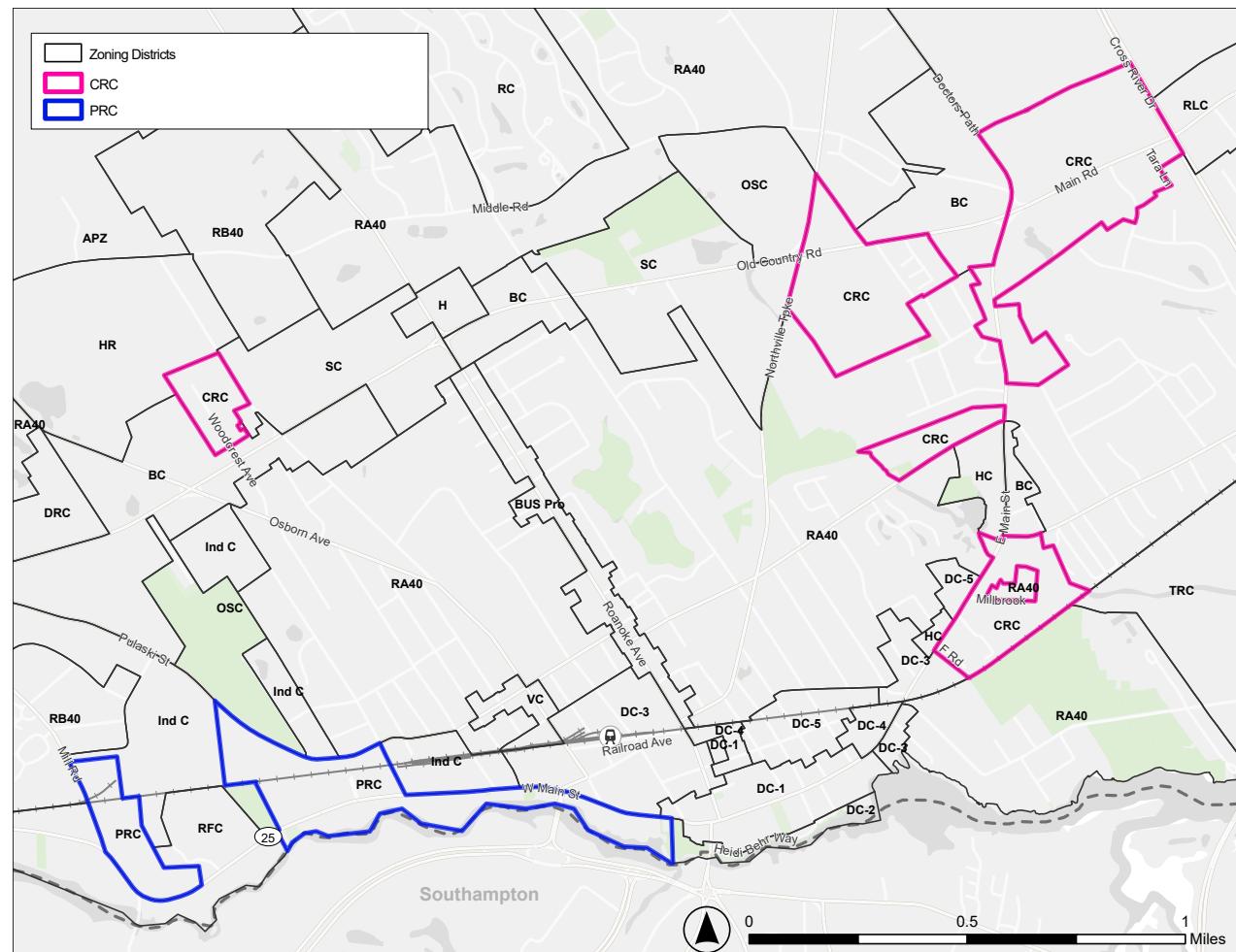


FIGURE 41: CRC AND PRC DISTRICTS

density standards for non-sewered areas established by Suffolk County Department of Health Services. This would allow for the development of “missing” middle-housing typologies such as townhouses. It is recommended that design guidance be put in place to push buildings away from the Peconic River and ensure that riparian areas are maintained and enhanced. Development in this district is further controlled by NYSDEC.

### Golf Cottages

Consider allowing for “Golf Cottages” as an accessory use on golf courses (in any zoning district) with the use of TDR credits. This would be an accessory use on or adjacent to a golf course. Golf cottages would be intended to provide convenient lodging for golfers or visitors who want to stay close to the golf course for a short stay; they are not meant to be used for long-term housing. Each golf cottage would require one TDR credit and would be limited to one bedroom per unit with kitchenette, not to exceed 600 square feet. (SCDHS Standards equate this to 150 gallons per day of sanitary flow). It is acknowledged that sanitary requirements set by SCDHS may limit the development potential on sites without supporting infrastructure. Cottages would need to be suitably screened from surrounding areas.

### Agritourism Resort

The demand for hotel space remains high on the North Fork as the tourism market continues to expand, which presents an opportunity for the Town to support the burgeoning tourism industry. The Town’s 2003 Comprehensive Plan recommended encouraging cottage accommodations, bed-and-breakfast accommodations, motels, country clubs, resorts, spas, and banquet facilities in picturesque settings throughout Riverhead, particularly adjacent

to waterfront areas; open space preserves; or popular recreational attractions like beaches, marinas, hiking trails, and equestrian facilities.

Agritourism resort uses could be supported in appropriate locations, subject to design, development, and environmental standards, as a way to balance support for agritourism, conservation, and the active preservation of agricultural lands. An agritourism resort combines elements of agriculture with tourism activities. It typically offers accommodations, recreational activities, and educational opportunities centered around agricultural experiences. Additionally, it may offer amenities such as farm-to-table dining, nature trails, agricultural workshops, and accommodations ranging from rustic cabins to upscale lodges, catering to a wide range of preferences and interests.

The Town should leverage demand for these facilities to preserve farmland and/or capture TDR credits. For example, an agritourism hotel should only be allowed where a substantial portion of land (70% minimum) is preserved in perpetuity for agricultural production. Any provisions to allow for an agritourism resort should require a substantial redemption of TDR credits, for example, utilizing TDR to achieve floor area or number of rooms.

### Planned Industrial Park (PIP):

Many property owners in the PIP district have expressed interest in expanding their businesses within the existing district. During the public outreach process, there was community support for permitting the expansion of current industrial activities “inside the fence,” aligning with the designated economic development purpose of this district. The Town should study the possibility of permitting a small FAR increase in the PIP district with the use of TDR credits. The PIP district is regulated by a comprehensive development plan (CDP) which was established with

NYSDEC. Therefore, the Town would need to work with NYSDEC to determine whether they are open to revisiting the CDP and the filed subdivision map (Burman subdivision).

### Review the Cap on Use of TDR for Residential

The Town should review Part D of Town Code §301-209, which sets a 500-unit limit on redemption of preservation credits at residential properties. This cap may inhibit the intent of the suggested TDR program revisions to expand the market for and use of TDRs. The Town could consider changing or eliminating the cap as this threshold is approached. Changing this cap would need to be balanced with land use, environmental, and infrastructure considerations. Review of the 500-unit cap should occur on a regular basis, at intervals determined by the Town Board.

## OTHER TOWNWIDE ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

### Provide a Use Schedule

The zoning code should incorporate a clear and comprehensive list of permissible land uses for each zoning district. This table would provide clarity and consistency, helping property owners, developers, and the public understand what types of activities are allowed in different areas, promoting predictability in land use decisions. The zoning use table could include groups based on use intensity to categorize and regulate different types of land uses according to their impact on the environment, infrastructure, and surrounding areas. These use groups help ensure that land uses are appropriately situated within different zoning districts, promoting compatibility and efficient land use.

### Define Land Uses That Are Not Addressed

There are some uses that are not specifically defined in the zoning code, which can lead to confusion and lack of consistency. Having specific definitions provides land use boards and Town staff a reference point with which to measure compliance and to establish consistency. The Town can refer to the Standard Industrial Code (SIC) classifications for guidance. Some examples of terms which could be better defined include:

- Agritourism – The Town should consider using definitions and guidance from New York Agriculture and Markets. Section 301 Definitions of AGM Chapter 69, Article 25-AA defines “Agriculture Tourism” as “activities, including the production of maple sap and pure maple products made therefrom, conducted by a farmer on-farm for the enjoyment and/or education of the public, which primarily

promote the sale, marketing, production, harvesting or use of the products of the farm and enhance the public’s understanding and awareness of farming and farm life.”

- Non-nuisance industry
- Wholesale business
- Winery (however, there is a definition of “micro-winery”)
- Banquet facility
- Convenience Store – definition exists but needs more clarity
- Shopping center – definition exists but needs more clarity. There should also be a different definition for a neighborhood-oriented shopping center and a large shopping center. For example, neighborhood-oriented shopping centers might limit the number of uses that can exist on one lot. This limit may not be needed for larger shopping centers (i.e. in districts along Route 58).
- Warehouses and Distribution Centers – these uses have important differences that affect building design, transportation and truck traffic, and employment and should be defined in the code. The Institute of Transportation Engineers provides definitions for Warehouses, types of High Cube Storage, and High Cube Fulfillment Centers that could guide the Town’s zoning.

### Split-Zoned Lots

There are lots throughout Riverhead that are within more than one district. This can create interpretation issues if the code isn’t explicit. The Town should clarify which regulations would prevail in split-zoned lots, or it should look to eliminate those parcels.

### Review Dimensional Regulations

The Town should periodically review and amend zoning regulations where necessary to ensure that the dimensional requirements support and are not a barrier to the types of development intended to be provided for in each district. An example of the misalignment between dimensional regulations and the overarching intent of zoning districts can be observed in the CRC, PRC, and DC-3 zones. While these zoning districts are intended to support a variety of housing types, current dimensional restrictions hinder the development of townhouses. This incongruity not only undermines the intended purpose of the zones but also restrains the fulfillment of broader community goals to provide more “missing middle” housing typologies.

### Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

#### Revise or remove the three-year certificate of occupancy provision.

Within the Accessory Apartment code, there is a requirement that applicants have three years of a certificate of occupancy (CO) in an accessory building before an accessory unit can be approved. The intent of this provision was to allow accessory units in existing buildings but not to promote a wave of new development. The regulation is burdensome for applicants and could be remedied by changing the

three-year CO period to apply to the principal building and not the accessory building or by eliminating the three-year period entirely.

### ***Consider reopening the amnesty program to encourage illegal accessory apartments to become legal.***

When Chapter 105 Article I was adopted to the Town Code enabling Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), there was an amnesty period for the first 250 owners of preexisting ADUs to legalize their units with a waived fee. Reopening this amnesty provision could help legalize additional illegal units. Legalizing the units will benefit the Town and residents because owners of the properties will have to comply with the full provisions of the Town Code, including requiring the owner to occupy either the principal or accessory unit, and comply with building, fire, and health codes, making them safer for residents, while bringing in additional taxes.

### ***Eliminate the restriction on the minimum floor area of the ADU and consider adjusting the maximum size.***

The code currently establishes a minimum area for the ADU of 300sf and a maximum area of 650 sf, not to exceed 40% of the principal building area. If the Accessory Dwelling Unit and Principal single-family use are compliant with fire and safety codes, a restriction on the lower limit does not need to be stated. Regarding the upper limit, The Town should consider eliminating the 650sf maximum and limit the size of the accessory unit to 40% of the principal dwelling. These adjustments may enable additional property owners to create accessory dwelling units more easily. ADUs are limited to one bedroom.

### ***Reduce the off-street parking requirement from two to one off-street parking spaces for the accessory unit.***

Off-street parking requirements are a barrier to homeowners who want to add an ADU on their property because they are costly, take up space, and can add to impervious surfaces.

### ***Childcare Facilities***

As discussed in the Community Facilities chapter, access to affordable childcare remains an issue. The Town should review the zoning code for opportunities to reduce barriers for childcare facilities while ensuring that operation is safe and compatible with surrounding neighborhoods. One option is to allow in-home daycare as a home occupation use in single-family districts. The code could be clarified to ensure that daycare is a permitted accessory use to religious facilities. Lastly, there are several residential districts, such as CRC, RLC, and PRC, which could include childcare facilities as a permitted use.

### ***Cluster Regulations***

Chapter 6 recommended that the Town should comprehensively review subdivision and cluster regulations to enhance open space requirements. While the Town currently mandates developers to allocate open space for subdivisions, flexibility should be considered, such as allowing developers to make in-lieu payments into a parks fund when they do not have sufficient suitable land to justify a preserved set-aside. To further address the preservation of natural features and encourage interconnected open spaces like wildlife corridors, the Town should permit subdivisions to contribute a portion of required park space as a linear greenway, meeting established standards and fitting into the adopted greenway plan. Additionally, developers could utilize in-lieu

fees to acquire or enhance greenway easements near subdivisions, thereby reinforcing the greenway system and providing access for subdivisions lacking neighborhood parks.

The zoning code is vague on when cluster development is required. It is currently encouraged in APZ, RA80, RB80, and HR. The Town should consider using this tool for larger projects that have sufficient land for a set-aside. It would be reasonable to require cluster subdivisions for major subdivisions and have it be at the discretion of the Planning Board for minor subdivisions. The Planning Board should also be allowed to request a cluster development alternative in RA40 and RB40 to protect unique natural features and open space.

### ***Accessible Design Standards***

Update and establish comprehensive accessible design standards to integrate into the Town Code, providing a framework to foster an inclusive environment to support the needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities. These standards, seamlessly incorporated into the Town Code, aim to guarantee equal access and participation for all. Encompassing various aspects such as physical infrastructure, signage, public transportation, and technology, the code will also delineate the application of these standards across diverse uses and building types.

### ***Revisit Housing standards***

The Town should review Chapters 217 and 263 of the Town Code to ensure housing standards alignment with the NYS building code. Revisions could include stronger permitting requirements for rentals and enhanced inspection protocols. The proposed code includes a saturation limit for sober homes in the downtown area. Opportunities also exist to strengthen construction quality and sustainability standards,

ensuring compliance with current codes and aligning with sustainability goals, detailed in the Sustainability and Resilience chapter.

## Solar Facilities

Where solar is permitted, there has been some discussion about how much solar should be allowed on any given property. Limiting solar facilities to established setbacks and coverage areas (defined as the maximum impervious coverage area), can provide a level of predictability and conformity with established development patterns. This also ensures that solar projects are subject to the same zoning standards as other land uses, promoting uniformity and clarity. Solar should also be limited to previously disturbed/cleared lands rather than on existing wooded areas.

As discussed in the Agricultural Lands chapter, the Town should consider allowing for some commercial solar production on existing farms to provide farmers with an additional revenue source. This could be achieved with a special permit for solar as an accessory use, which would provide the Town Board with discretion to address visual and other impacts. Regulations would need safeguards in place, such as the maximum amount of solar that could be provided, to ensure that agricultural production remains the principal use of the site. The Town Board could also provide flexibility for agrivoltaic projects, which provide for a dual use with the production of vegetables or other crops. The Town may consider ways to encourage solar facilities on rooftop locations. For example, for projects of a certain size, there could be a requirement that developments must consider available rooftop space for solar generation. A similar policy has been implemented in New York City. This could result in less demand for ground-based installations, and decentralize installations outside of a single hamlet.

## Battery Storage Facilities.

Riverhead must continue to ensure the compatibility of proposed battery storage facilities with the surrounding land uses, minimizing visual and groundwater impacts, and addressing emergency and fire safety concerns. Adherence to State guidelines for safety protocols and emergency procedures, as they evolve, is crucial. Ongoing monitoring of this technology is essential to evaluate its efficacy in aligning with renewable energy goals.

## Green Building

The Town should enhance its Building Code by incorporating green building standards and heightened energy requirements; implementing a green building permitting process; and introducing incentives to foster energy efficiency, waste reduction, and other sustainable practices. The code should establish project-specific thresholds, such as requiring energy-efficient materials for small commercial uses and mandating U.S. Green Building Council LEED certification or equivalent for significant applications. Consideration of the NYStretch-Energy model code is encouraged, as it offers enforceable language to expedite energy improvements beyond current State requirements, aligning with the Clean Energy Community program's high-impact actions.

## Strengthen Enforcement of Tree Clearing

The Town has guidelines for permissible tree clearing; however, the regulations are sometimes ignored when properties are redeveloped. Improved monitoring and enforcement is needed to ensure compliance, promote sustainable development practices, and to maintain Riverhead's forest.

## Wetlands Inventory

The Town's wetland inventory was last updated in the 1970s and needs to be redone. Wetland inventories provide accurate and up-to-date information about the location, extent, and type of wetlands in a given area. This inventory contributes to effective wetland management, conservation, and land use planning. It also allows for the assessment of changes in wetland conditions over time. This information is valuable for understanding trends related to wetland loss, degradation, or restoration efforts. Regularly revisiting and maintaining this inventory ensures that it remains a valuable resource for both conservation efforts and responsible development practices.

## Other Zoning Tools to Promote Community Benefits

There are several tools the Town can utilize to ensure that new development appropriately addresses the need to provide community benefits and mitigate impacts. The use of TDRs is one example, which is discussed elsewhere in this Plan. Another example is incentive zoning, authorized under New York Town Law §261-B, which typically allows for the increase the density or size of a project in exchange for providing certain public benefits. This zoning tool has been used in other municipalities across New York State to achieve various community goals, including affordable housing, open space, and infrastructure improvements. With this zoning approach, details need to be explicit and transparent to ensure consistency in how incentives are applied. There also needs to be a clear rationale between a development's impacts and the provided benefits.