



THE CITY OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND  
PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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August 19, 2024

Mayor Khamsyvovavong and Members of the City Council  
43 Broadway  
Newport, RI 02840

RE: Recommendation to City Council regarding amendments to the Housing Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, and the related ordinance

Honorable Mayor and City Councilors:

At the August 5, 2024 Planning Board regularly scheduled meeting, the Board reviewed the proposed new Housing Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, which would supersede the existing chapter if adopted; select amended pages from related Comprehensive Plan chapters, updated to be made consistent with information presented in new Housing Chapter; and the proposed amendment to Code of Ordinances Chapter 14.04 Comprehensive Plan to formally adopt the plan amendment.

The Board found the proposed amendments to be supportive of the following stated goals of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act:

- To promote an economic climate which increases quality job opportunities and overall economic wellbeing of each municipality and the state.
- To promote the production and rehabilitation of year-round housing and to preserve government subsidized housing for persons and families of low and moderate income in a manner that: considers local, regional, and statewide needs; housing that achieves a balance of housing choices, for all income levels and age groups; recognizes the affordability of housing as the responsibility of each municipality and the state; takes into account growth management and the need to phase and pace development in areas of rapid growth; and facilitates economic growth in the state.
- To provide for the use of performance-based standards for development and to encourage the use of innovative development regulations and techniques that promote the development of land suitable for development while protecting our natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources, and achieving a balanced pattern of land uses.
- To promote consistency of state actions and programs with municipal comprehensive plans, and provide for review procedures to ensure that state goals and policies are reflected in municipal comprehensive plans and state guide plans.
- To ensure that adequate and uniform data are available to municipal and state government as the basis for comprehensive planning and land use regulation.
- To encourage the involvement of all citizens in the formulation, review, and adoption, or amendment of the comprehensive plan

Local comprehensive plans and amendments are reviewed and approved by Statewide Planning. Each required chapter of the Comprehensive Plan must meet the applicable standards as



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presented in the [\*RI Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual\*](#). The Board found the proposed amendments to be consistent with the State standards for Planning For Housing:

1. Provide an overview of the existing housing context by including specified data points.
2. Identify existing housing patterns and conditions.
3. Include specified data points related to cost-burdened households.
4. Assess existing and future housing needs, including the need for affordable housing.
5. Demonstrate how one of the mandated low- and moderate-income thresholds will be met.
6. Include a statement as to whether the municipality has an inclusionary zoning ordinance.
7. Include goals that embody the state's goals for housing and policies to support each goal.
8. Include implementation actions within the Implementation Program that align with specified standards.

The Planning Board voted to forward a positive recommendation to adopt and incorporate the proposed Housing Chapter into the City's Comprehensive Land Use Plan with the following recommendations:

1. That information be provided regarding cost-burdened households; (this has been incorporated)
2. That a definition of Dark Houses be included in the Key Definitions section of the chapter; (this has been incorporated)
3. That Goal H-1 be amended to read "Meet Projected Demand and Protect Existing Housing" and to add language regarding preserving existing housing units to the goal description; (this has been incorporated)
4. That Action H-4.3B – "Cap the number of non-owner-occupied short-term rentals (STRs) allowed in the city" – be removed from the Goals and Policies section.

The motion was unanimously approved by Chair Jeffrey Brooks and Board members Adam Moore, Margaret Polski, Theresa Stokes, Anand Toprani, Richard Cromwell, Paul McGreevy, Patricia Antonelli, Jarrod Pimentel.

Sincerely,

Patricia G. Reynolds  
Administrative Officer  
Newport Planning Board

CC: P. Fay

NEWPORT, RI  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
HOUSING CHAPTER



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August 2024

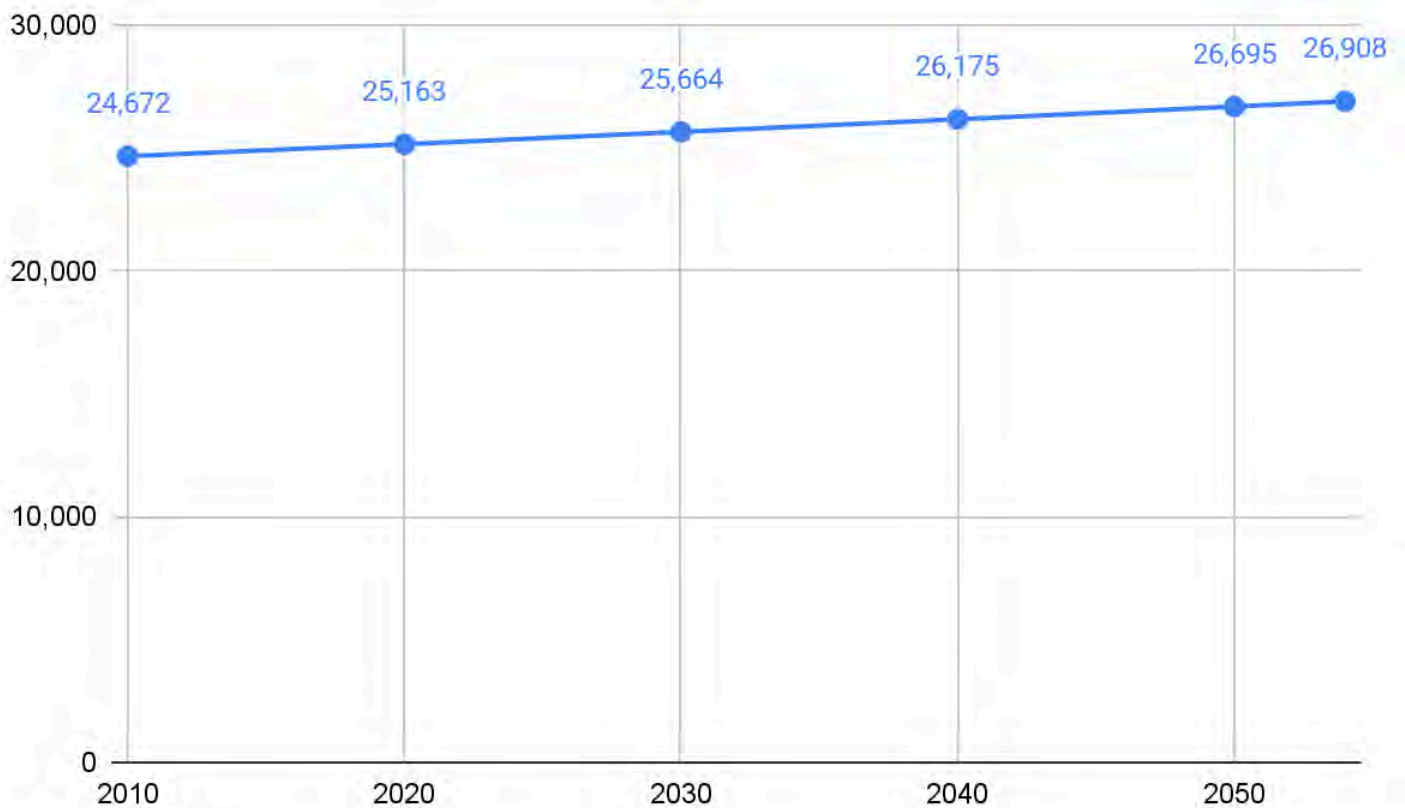
Description of amendment: Newport’s population forecasts were proven incorrect by the 2020 Census. Remove inconsistent text. Replace Figure 1-2 – Trend in Population Decrease with new Figure 1.2 – Population Projection, below.

**Demographics**

Newport’s population showed a slight increase in population between the 2010 and 2020 decennial Censuses. Projecting a steady rate of population growth over the next thirty years shows an increase in population of almost 2,000 individuals. Additional year-round residents will bolster Newport’s local economy and enliven its streets in winter months. Newport must plan proactively for its new residents, most critically through the construction of additional housing units.

The city sees increases in population on a seasonal basis due to various industries as can be seen in Table 1-1. Tourism, the Navy and Salve Regina University are all sectors that generate fluctuations in Newport’s nonresidential population.

Figure 1-2 – Population Projection



Description of amendment: Replace third row in Table 1-3, highlighted below.

Table 1-3 City of Newport 2036 Issues

Managing Sea Level Rise	Empirical physical evidence shows that the oceans levels are rising and that coastal environments are already experiencing the impacts of sea level rise. Newport's geology, topography, cardinal orientation and location at the end of a peninsula all have relevance to how this issue should be evaluated and managed.
Diversifying the Economy	Newport's seasonal tourism based economy creates unique challenges including tremendous variability in the demand for public safety and sanitation, potable water, sanitary sewer use, and implications on the housing market.
Population Growth	Newport has begun a trend of increasing population. Increased investment in the city, particularly in the form of additional occupied housing units, is needed to support the growing population.
Changing Demographics	Newport's median age is rising in almost all respects. Aging populations require different services and facilities than young populations do.
Community Preservation	The city's unique character, landscape, and community shape help make Newport a desirable place to live. A balance will need to be struck on shaping the future and preserving the past.
Aging Infrastructure	A great deal of Newport's street network, building footprints, land subdivision, and other physical features trace their origins to the colonial periods. As such, the costs of updating the city's public services and resources are substantial.
Public Education and Human Capital	A tourism based economy typically does not require high skilled or highly compensated labor. As a consequence, wages and salaries are lower compared to those in economic sectors which require specific technical skills or training.

3. Location: Chapter 3 - Land Use  
Page 3-4

*Description of amendment: The first two paragraphs on page 3-4 incorrectly refer to full buildout in the context of Newport's population decline. Replace these paragraphs with the following ones:*

Newport was once significantly more populated. Smaller households and more spacious accommodations have put a much smaller population in the same area. In order to house its growing population, Newport must add more occupied housing units. Much of this can be done within Newport's existing built square footage, but some new construction will inevitably ensue.

Newport faces the additional challenge of increased demand during attractive summer months, when the city's microclimate, recreational activities and touristic attractions draw thousands of visitors every day. Newport's utility infrastructure largely holds up to the demand, with most repairs successfully completed during off-peak

periods. However, natural gas was thrust into the forefront following the 2019 outage. This issue is expected to be resolved with the installation of a new pipeline across the Sakonnet River in the near future. Transportation capacity remains an issue. Extensive development along Newport's freshwater ponds, coupled with climate change, has led to an increase in beach closures in Newport, affecting tourism and quality of life.

4. Location: Chapter 3 - Land Use  
Pages 3-16 - 18.

*Description of amendment: The future land use designations do not adequately support housing growth. The text for the future land use designations are updated to reflect the language of Appendix 2, the 2024 Housing Update. Table 3-3 is deleted.*

### **Development Standards**

Requirements for development unit intensity are set by the Rhode Island Minimum Housing Code.

### **Land Use Designations**

The Newport Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map (FLUM) includes residential, commercial, industrial, and other land use designations that depict the types of land uses that will be allowed within the city.

#### **ER Estate Residential**

The Estate Residential land use includes areas primarily in the southern portion of the city and areas of multi-acre vegetative consistency reflective of the preserved open space and area's history of estates for wealthy residents. The intent of this land use category is to limit ecological impact in this sensitive micro-environment, which faces exposure and isolation during storms, to protect the important history of this area, and to maintain scenic vistas enjoyed by all who visit. Multiple dwelling units per lot that do not degrade the environmental or historic quality of the property are permitted. Open space and limited recreation that does not diminish historic and/or environmental resources is also permitted in this land use designation.

#### **LDR Low Density Residential**

The low-density residential land use includes areas at Newport's urban fringe that drain into ecologically sensitive watersheds and intact historical homesteads at risk of destructive alteration. The intent of this land use category is to limit ecological impact of intense development on these sensitive ecological environments, particularly Newport's frequently-closed beaches, and protect Newport's important residential history, respectively. Multiple dwellings per lot are permitted provided that stormwater quality or historic structure and site integrity is not degraded. Open space and limited recreation that does not diminish historic and/or environmental resources is also permitted in this land use designation.

#### **MDR Medium Density Residential**

The medium-density residential land use represents the majority of Newport's residential neighborhoods. The intent of this land use category is to allow for manageable growth within these neighborhoods. Compatible commercial activities may be permitted with serious restrictions on use to protect neighborhood quality of life. Multiple dwellings per lot are permitted, with zero lot lines in certain circumstances. Detached single-family homes on sites greater than 5,000 square feet are not permitted in this land use designation. Public active recreation sites in service of primary residential uses are also permitted in this land use designation.

#### **HDR High Density Residential**

The is restricted to areas well serviced with sufficient infrastructure for intense development: transportation, utilities, and community infrastructure. It may include elevator buildings on zero lot lines. This land use. Detached single-family homes are discouraged in this land use designation. Commercial activities and open space that can harmoniously co-locate with intense residential use may be permitted.

**LC** Light Commercial

The Light Commercial land use is Newport's neighborhood commercial designation. It consists of a more limited range of commercial uses than those found in general commercial areas in order to limit commercial activity and protect nearby residential land use designations. This land use category establishes less intense commercial uses that meet neighborhood needs, rather than those citywide or focused on tourism. Detached single-family homes are not permitted in this land use designation. Open space, recreational, and residential uses unimpaired by the neighborhood commercial activities are also allowed in this land use designation.

**GC** General Commercial

The General Commercial land use is Newport's central business district land use designation. It is located downtown and exists to protect and support Newport's historic downtown. Open space, recreational, and residential uses supportive of Newport's historic downtown are also allowed in this land use designation.

**LI** Light Industrial

The Light Industrial land use is an area designed to support the operations of Newport and Naval Station Newport. The intent of this district is to concentrate such activities in an area where the transportation system is adequate for this purpose and there is limited infringement upon the character of other established neighborhoods and Newport's other historic and ecological assets. This land use designation is solely located off Training Station Road and Coddington Highway. A mix of uses and zoning districts are permitted in this area. Care is needed to prevent conflicts.

**MUW** Mixed-Use, Waterfront

The Mixed-Use, Waterfront land use is located along the eastern side of Newport Harbor, west of Thames Street and on Goat Island. The challenge for this land use is limiting development to prevent a "wall" of buildings that cuts off the rest of the city's connection with the Newport Harbor. This area is historically mixed-use and this development pattern is promoted for the future. Historic waterfront industrial uses have disappeared over the years and are unlikely to return, but should be promoted whenever possible. Other uses must be limited to preserve as much of Newport's historic working waterfront as possible. Detached single-family homes are not permitted in this land use designation. The only zoning districts permitted in this land use category are Waterfront Business and Open Space.

**MUI** Mixed-Use, Innovation

The Mixed-Use, Innovation land use designation is located in Newport's North End, surrounding the Pell Bridge approach. The intent of this land use category is to support the development of incubator/accelerator type businesses focused on resilience/climate change, ocean, alternative energy systems, defense (underwater, maritime and cyber security) and digital industries, their support sub-sectors, associated training and job creation, as well as ancillary financial, commercial and retail/hospitality support services. High density residential uses are permitted if supportive of businesses in this designation. The only zoning districts permitted in this land use category are Urban Innovation Village District and Urban Innovation Floating Zone District and Open Space and Recreational.

**TM Traditional Maritime**

The Traditional Maritime land use is intended to provide a location for maritime-related activities, public access and recreational uses of the waterfront in an attractive environment which supports the historic character of the city and the traditional values associated with a working waterfront. All residential uses are prohibited in this district for public health and safety reasons. The only zoning district permitted in this land use category is Traditional Maritime.

**POS Parks and Open Space**

The Parks and Open Space land use includes significant areas offering natural, recreation (passive and active), and historic value to the public. Examples include local and state parks, urban parks, natural resource protection areas, beaches, golf courses, and islands. Permitted zoning districts in this category include Recreation and Open Space. Significant existing, permanently-protected outdoor recreational areas can be found on Map 9-7, which are also reflected in the on the Future Land Use Map as an overlay.

**INST Institutional Overlay**

The Institutional Overlay consists of uses such as schools, universities and colleges, government functions (local, state, and federal), hospitals, museums, cemeteries, and non-profit community organizations. Institutional land uses in the future will continue to be located throughout Newport. Development on these parcels requires submission of an up-to-date institutional master plan that demonstrates how the alterations will meet the institution's needs and conform to the City's goals as demonstrated in its Comprehensive Plan.

**Zoning, Land Use 2025 and FLUM Consistency**

Zoning is a primary regulatory tool for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Because of this, state law requires that the City's Comprehensive Plan be consistent with the City's zoning ordinance and the State's land use plan, Land Use 2025. This means the zoning ordinance must be consistent with the goals, policies and land uses specified in the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use 2025. Referring to the Rhode Island State Land Use Policies and Plan "Land Use 2025", Newport is entirely within the Urban Services boundary. Generally, the Southwest portion of Newport is within the Urban Development category while the rest of Newport is within the Sewered Urban category. Newport anticipates meeting or exceeding Land Use 2025's minimum densities in every urban development future land use category and zoning district. However, as is mentioned throughout this Comprehensive Plan, development is intended to be limited in sensitive historic and ecological areas for environmental, cultural, and economic preservation.

5. Location: Chapter 5 - Housing  
Page 5-0 (new page)

*Description of amendment: Subsequent to the adoption of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan, Newport's housing market did not unfold as predicted. Short-term rentals proliferated and seasonality increased with increases in remote work and retirement following the Covid-19 pandemic. Rental and home purchase availability plummeted and home prices increased dramatically. Newport City Council Resolution # 2023-09, passed unanimously, calls for "comprehensive efforts to increase housing accessibility and affordability in Newport." In furtherance of that request, it was determined that an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan was needed in order to enable corresponding zoning ordinances in support of housing accessibility and affordability.*

*Add new page– 5-0 at the beginning of Chapter 5, as follows:*



NEWPORT, RI  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
HOUSING CHAPTER



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August 2024

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DRAFT DRAFT

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Newport Single Family Residential Neighborhood in RI0A zone.

# INTRODUCTION

## HOUSING AVAILABILITY IS NOT MEETING DEMAND

Since adopting its Comprehensive Plan in 2017, the population in the City of Newport has not decreased as was projected. For this and other reasons, housing availability in Newport is not meeting demand. To address this issue head on, the City of Newport sought technical assistance from RIHousing and its consultant, Libra Planners, to create a new housing chapter that is more consistent with current conditions. This will allow Newport to perform the necessary policy shifts to address its growing housing crisis. This Housing Chapter complies with the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act. The Goals, Policies and Actions outlined in this Housing Update are in line with the vision of the 2017 Newport Comprehensive Plan, the North End Urban Plan and state housing planning requirements. This Housing Update also considers recent state legislation that was enacted to encourage new housing development.

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# HOUSING AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## NEWPORT'S VISION

While some of the Comprehensive Plan needs to be updated, much of it remains a compelling vision for a livable city. The vision statement of the Comprehensive Plan promotes a beautiful city, with a strong cultural heritage and a robust, innovative commercial environment. Both policy goals require adequate housing to support these endeavors. The Comprehensive Plan asserts that the city's beauty is shaped by a stunning natural landscape and a rich architectural legacy. At the same time, Newport commerce is characterized by a vibrant waterfront commercial district as well as new possibilities for economic diversification in the City's North End. The North End Urban Plan, a recently adopted area plan which augments Comprehensive Plan goals, projects an environment that is hospitable to both green and blue economic development. It also promotes a small-scaled walkable urban neighborhood that is familiar to Newport residents. New housing policy should continue to support the broad goals of the existing Comprehensive Plan and the North End Urban Plan. It should also support Newport's economic development goals in a way that protects and enhances the city's physical assets. New housing should affirm the high quality of life city residents have come to expect.

*NEWPORT SHOULD CREATE NEW HOUSING IN A MANNER THAT COMPLEMENTS THE EXISTING URBAN FORM. THIS WILL REQUIRE AN ATTITUDINAL SHIFT AWAY FROM NEWPORT'S MID-20TH CENTURY SUBURBAN-STYLE ZONING, TOWARD FORM-BASED CODE, WHICH ALLOWS MORE HOUSING UNITS WITHIN EXISTING HOUSING PATTERNS.*

## THE HOUSING UPDATE

### AN OVERVIEW

Following an introduction, this Housing Chapter presents three areas of consideration. The first area describes policy issues Newport should examine in developing housing policy. Most pressing, the number of year-round housing units (see Definitions page) is decreasing, as population has increased. This can be attributed to a variety of factors which are combining to form an acute shortage. Newport must carefully manage its own success, as it is one of the most desirable places to live in the state. Among the issues stemming from Newport's desirability is rising property values. A parallel and related issue is the increase in the number of second homes and seasonal rentals in Newport. Once limited to the estate neighborhoods near the waterfront, second homes are appearing all over the city, driving costs higher. Seasonal rentals (see Definitions page) also add pressure to housing availability. Newport is also very attractive to real estate investors.

The second section of this Housing Update is a plan for action that calls for an "All-of-the-Above" approach. This includes an analysis of the projected population. Who will or can live in Newport over the next thirty years? Newport has identified a shortage of housing to serve middle income residents. The creation of housing for the middle class is the cornerstone of this plan. The Housing Chapter emphasizes a traditional means of promoting two and three-family dwellings. Newport, like other small New England cities, has a rich history of this type of housing. Such development patterns are familiar within the region and they shape desirable places with enhanced quality of life. These housing types build on Newport's strengths, including its compact, dense, walkable urban environment. Newport should create new housing in a manner that complements the existing urban form. This will require an attitudinal shift away from Newport's mid-20th

century suburban-style zoning, toward form-based code, which allows more housing units within existing housing patterns.

The third section of this Housing Chapter, the Implementation Plan, puts forth specific goals and policies. Action items are included and assigned to responsible parties. The Implementation Plan provides a matrix schedule for ordering and coordinating implementation. Appendices of data and related material that support the approach described above are included for deeper context. In order to preserve the city's economic success and exceptional quality of life, Newport should act swiftly to create additional workforce housing that will support an engaged population that contributes to the continued desirability of Newport.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### affordable housing

*or low- moderate-income housing (LMI)*

Any housing, whether built or operated by any public agency or any nonprofit organization or by any limited equity housing cooperative or any private developer, subsidized by a federal, state, or municipal government subsidy.<sup>1</sup>

### dark houses

Houses that are shut down and vacant for a large portion of the year.

### housing units

Housing unit information comes from the United State Census Bureau and City records. The Census primarily collects information from individuals, but tangentially collects information on "unoccupied" (not occupied by a year-round resident) households.

### missing middle housing

Middle-income multi-unit housing, an expression which is sometimes used interchangeably with workforce housing.

### occupied year-round housing unit

Units occupied by Newport residents as their primary residence.

### seasonal rental

Seasonal rentals include academic year student housing, summer rentals, monthly rentals, timeshares, Short Term Rentals (STRs) and yacht team housing, and are occupied for a portion of the year by tenants, not as their primary residence.

### short-term rental

A short-term rental (STR) is the lease of a housing unit or portion thereof for a period of less than 30 days. It converts a bedroom, house, or apartment, into a hotel room or rental. As of early 2024, short-term rentals of two bedrooms or less (when the homeowner is present) are permitted as a Home Occupation in Newport's residential zones. Home occupations are also permitted in houses in commercial zones. However, note that short-term rental of rooms within an existing home occupation does not change the number of year-round housing units. Short-term rentals are often listed for lease on hosting websites, such as AirBnB, Expedia and VRBO.

### unit vacancy

Newport does not have data on the actual number of seasonal housing units, which include both short-term rentals and second homes. The US Census Bureau ACS counts "households", which consist of year-round resident occupied housing units. There are fewer households than total housing units in Newport so the ACS counts the difference as "unoccupied", which in 2022 was

22% of all units. In nearby towns without significant tourist rentals, the actual vacancy rate of owner-occupied units and rentals averages around 3%. (see Table H-5). It can be assumed that the remaining 19% of units are utilized for seasonal and/or short-term occupancy (see Chart H-1 & Table H-3).

**vacation home**

Vacation homes are houses or condominiums that are owner-occupied, but not the owner's principal residence, and only occupied seasonally, usually the summer months.

**workforce housing**

Housing needed for individuals who support the local economy including those who work in hospitality, retail, construction, education, healthcare, and government.

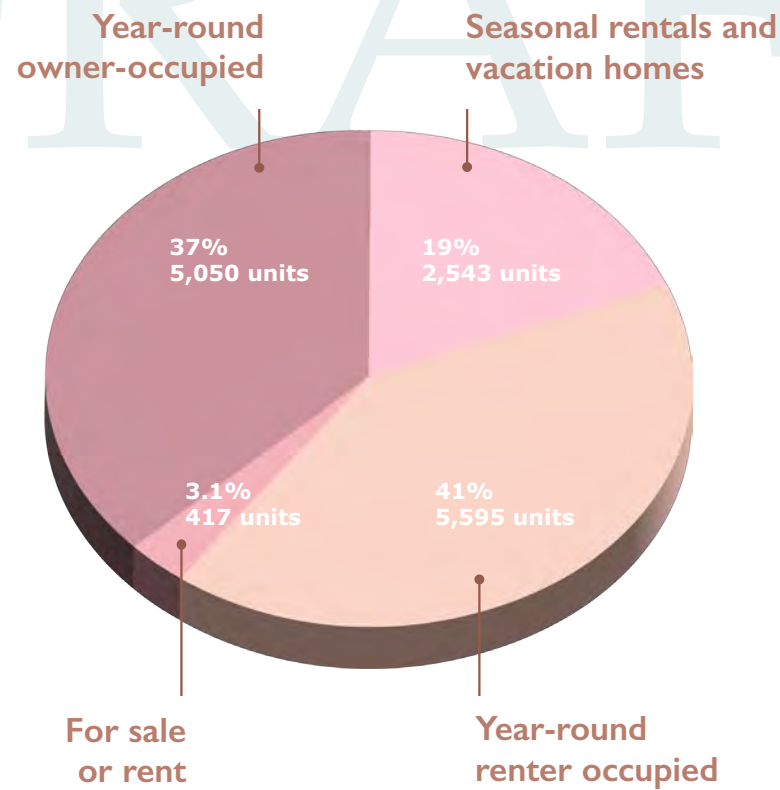


Chart H-1: Housing occupancy.

# THE NEWPORT POPULATION

## HOUSING UNIT PRESERVATION

Between 2000 and 2020 Newport gained only 240 total housing units, but lost 668 occupied year round housing units, according to the most recent data from the United States Census Bureau. <sup>2</sup> This represents a 6% decrease in Newport's housing stock available to year-round residents. As of 2022, 19% of Newport's housing units are not available for year-round residential occupancy (mostly vacation homes and short-term rentals, see Chart H-1, Table H-5). The biggest losses have been in workforce housing. Short-term rentals may contribute to this effect. As demonstrated in the last two decennial censuses, Newport's population is increasing (See Table H-1). Home sale inventory is low and apartment inventory is extremely low, reflected in the rapid increases in house prices and rents, showing the need for more additional housing to be made available.

Year	Population	Households	Average Household Size	Housing Units Per Household	Number of Housing Units
2010	24,672	10,959	2.25	1.27	13,933
2020	25,163	10,065	2.50	1.29	13,029
2030	25,664	11,158	<u>2.30</u>	<u>1.25</u>	13,948
2040	26,175	11,380	<u>2.30</u>	<u>1.25</u>	14,225
2050	26,695	11,607	<u>2.30</u>	<u>1.25</u>	14,508
2054	26,908	11,699	<u>2.30</u>	<u>1.25</u>	14,624

Source: 2010 & 2020 figures are from the Decennial Census.

Notes: 1) Underlined figures are a target set by the City of Newport. 2) Compared to the state average, Newport shifted from below average household size in 2010 to above-average household size in 2020. 3) In order to reduce the number of housing units per household, Newport will need additional policies to stop the conversion of occupied housing units to vacant housing units.

Table H-1. Population projections for housing unit needs.

### POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Utilizing modest population projections, Newport can expect a population growth of slightly fewer than 2,000 individuals over the life of this 30-year plan. To accommodate for this growth, based on slightly reduced household size and housing units per household which are more in line with the City's 2010 Census numbers, Newport needs 1,595 housing units<sup>3</sup> to meet this projected growth. (See Table H-1). This represents an increase of 12% of Newport's housing stock. The greatest demand is for workforce housing.

### Newport Housing Prices

For more information about home values, including median sale price, visit the HousingWorks RI Housing Fact Books: <https://www.housingworksri.org/research-policy/publications-reports/previous-housing-fact-books>

**CONNECT GREATER NEWPORT'S APRIL 2023 HOUSING ANALYSIS PROVIDES HELPFUL INFORMATION ABOUT FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS AND POLICY OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT HOUSING CONSTRUCTION IN NEWPORT COUNTY. THE DOCUMENT IS AVAILABLE ON THE CITY OF NEWPORT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WEBPAGE.**

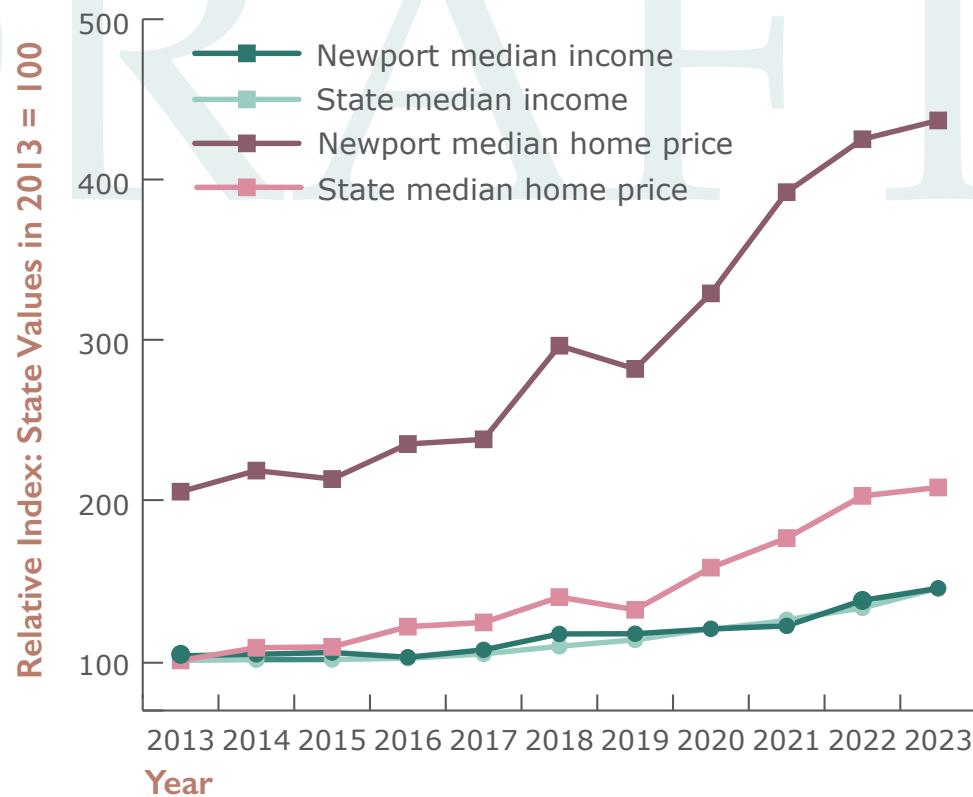


Chart H-2: Median single-family house prices vs. income. The data is indexed with the state median home price in 2013 equal to 100.

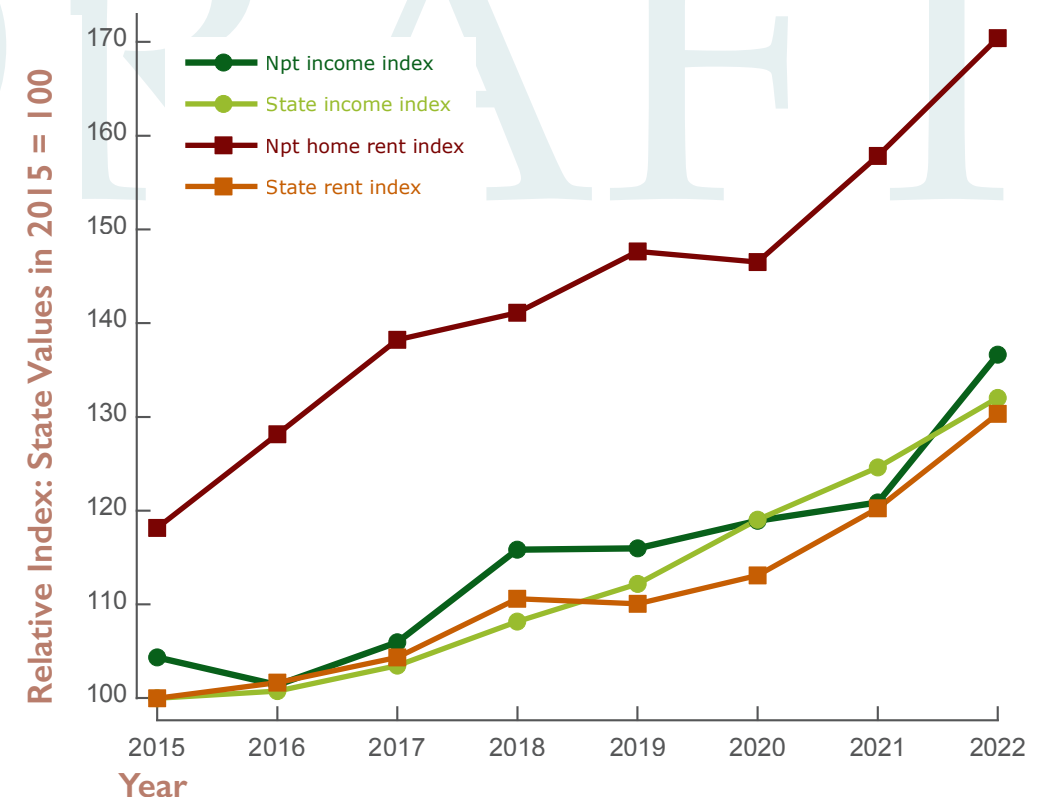


Chart H-3: Median 2-bedroom apartment rents vs. median income. The data is indexed with the state median rent in 2015 set to 100.

## DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

While it may seem counter-intuitive, decreases in household size in recent decades have actually increased the number of housing units required to house the city's population. A national increase in remote workers further strain housing availability in Newport, as more residents are able to take advantage of the city's quality of life without long commutes to job centers. Much of Newport's formerly workforce housing stock has been purchased by new wealthy owners. In some cases large houses that were once converted to multi-family housing have been re-converted back to single family houses. The escalation in residential property values resulting from these trends has been sharp. (see Charts H-2 and H-3.) This translates to lack of housing for many long-term Newport residents and employees. Bold action is needed to adequately add workforce housing.

Similarly, Newport was once home to sailors and fishermen. Not too long ago, in the twentieth century, the city had a working waterfront. The city also had a strong family-based working class. Today, Newport residents are more affluent, older and often empty nesters. At the same time, Newport has been moving toward a tourist economy for decades, though the impact of this economy on housing availability is not completely understood. The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified all these trends causing a need for renewed housing policy. On a positive note, the influx of affluent residents has improved the quality of housing stock and has often resolved substandard housing conditions. Indeed, housing quality throughout the city has improved through unit replacement and rehabilitation.

### Additional Newport Housing Data

For complete data on LMI and cost-burdened households, visit the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS):  
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html>

# POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

## HOUSING PRODUCTION

Housing production is stagnant in Newport (see Table H-2). Low rates of new construction fuel increases in housing prices and cause workforce housing units to be converted to luxury units. Low housing starts have concerned law-makers throughout the state (see Chart H-4), prompting a raft of recent legislation designed to promote new housing construction. Newport should adopt policies, in the spirit of recent legislation, that encourage new housing construction. This can be achieved through changes in the zoning code, public street parking policies and the building code. Newport should identify additional regulatory hindrances to housing production and lobby for such regulatory changes at the state level.

## WORKFORCE HOUSING

Middle income residents of Newport are particularly squeezed for housing. Historically, these residents lived in Newport's multi-family apartments and small single-family homes, such as three-deckers and ranch houses. The multi-family properties that once housed the workforce are distributed throughout the city (see Map H-1, Housing Stock). Although a majority of Newport's residential parcels are single-family, most of Newport's housing units are in fact, in multi-family buildings. This includes condominiums (see Charts H-5 and H-6). Multi-family buildings are an asset for housing availability. Newport should build upon this housing type because multi-family homes provide much needed choices for Newport residents diverse needs.

Workforce housing has challenges that exist to a lesser extent in luxury and LMI housing. To help with costs, some residents of

Year	Single-family units	Multi-family units	Total permits
2013	16	1	17
2014	7	10	17
2015	13	2	15
2016	16	1	17
2017	15	7	22
2018	14	13	27
2019	10	3	13
2020	7	0	7
2021	11	0	11
2022	8	0	8

Source: HousingWorks Housing Fact Book, breakdown of single vs. multi-family units estimated for 2017.

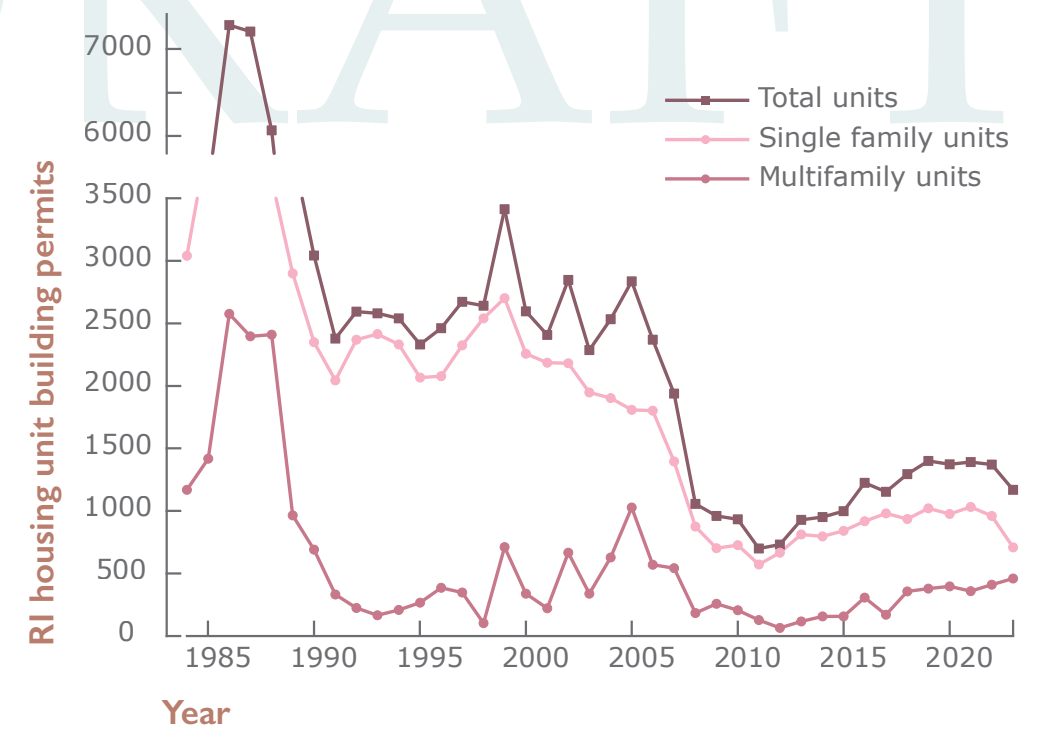
**Table H-2: Housing unit building permits issued. New units built are declining, especially for multi-family units.**

Year	Single-family units		2 or more units		Total Units
	Units	%	Units	%	
2014	5787	44	7365	56	13152
2015	5663	43	7507	57	13170
2016	5613	42	7752	58	13365
2017	5110	39	7992	61	13102
2018	5162	40	7743	60	12905
2019	5234	40	7852	60	13086
2020	4803	37	8179	63	12982
2021	5078	39	7943	61	13021
2022	5428	41	7812	59	13240
2023	4508	34	8721	66	13229

Source: HousingWorks RI Housing Fact Books, EXCEPT 2023 from Newport Assessor data. Difference in percentages of single vs. multi-family units is probably due to sampling error in HousingWorks data derived from the ACS.

**Table H-3: Newport Total Housing Units Throughout the Last Decade.**

THE HOUSING PINCH IN NEWPORT HAS BEEN ACUTELY FELT BY MIDDLE INCOME RESIDENTS. HISTORICALLY, THESE RESIDENTS LIVED IN NEWPORT'S MULTI-FAMILY APARTMENTS AND SMALL SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES, SUCH AS THREE-DECKERS AND RANCH HOUSES. THE MULTI-FAMILY PROPERTIES...ARE DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE CITY.



**Chart H-4: Housing building permits issued in Rhode Island since 1984.**

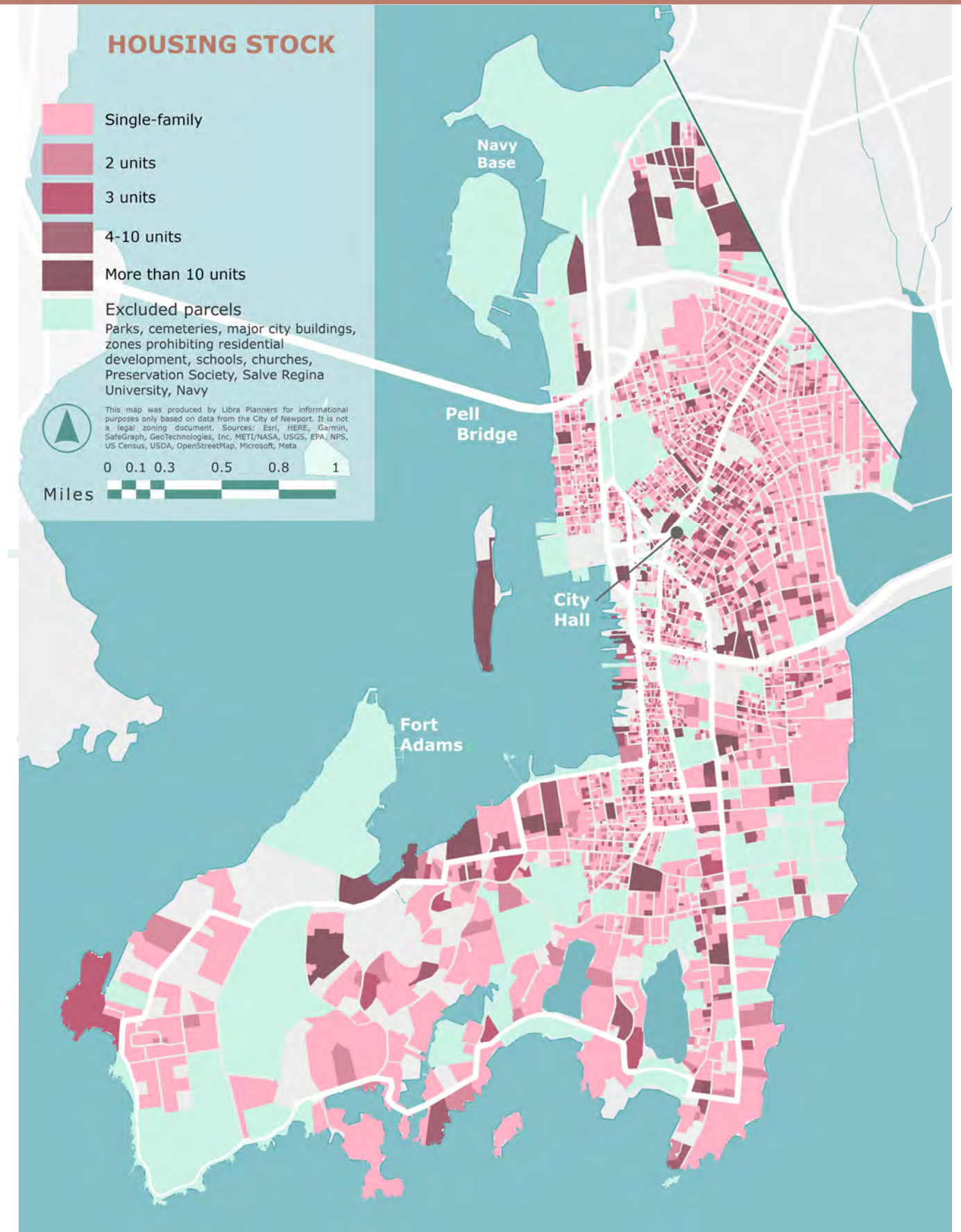
## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

workforce housing take in roommates. In isolated cases, this may lead to overcrowding. Census data shows 1% of Newport's housing units meet the definition of overcrowded (more than one occupant per bedroom). The vast majority, 92%, of overcrowded units are rental housing.

While additional workforce housing is needed, there is limited opportunity to add units within Newport's existing physical and regulatory context. New housing production is particularly hindered by the city's existing zoning ordinance, which superimposes mid-20th century suburban-style zoning on an 18th century development pattern. To address the housing shortage, zoning reform is needed. Such reform will create market opportunity for workforce housing and will limit competing uses. A portion of new units should be smaller in size to reflect the national trend in smaller household sizes and limited available space in Newport. Present zoning restrictions could be relaxed in a targeted fashion to create more opportunity within Newport's exceptional large house stock. Mansions that have been converted to multi-family housing already serve many residents well, including many affluent residents residing in luxury apartments.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable Housing has a technical definition in state law. (see Definitions page.) Affordable Housing is restricted to households below a certain income threshold, which are predominantly low- and moderate income and which qualify for state subsidy. Newport is a leader in providing Affordable Housing. It has historically had the highest rate of Affordable Housing of any municipality in Rhode Island. Newport maintained that position in 2023, the most recent year data is available. (see Table H-4). Newport has the third highest quantity of family Affordable units of any municipality in Rhode Island. For these reasons Newport does not have an inclusionary zoning ordinance.



Map H-1: Newport housing stock map showing distribution of housing unit types.

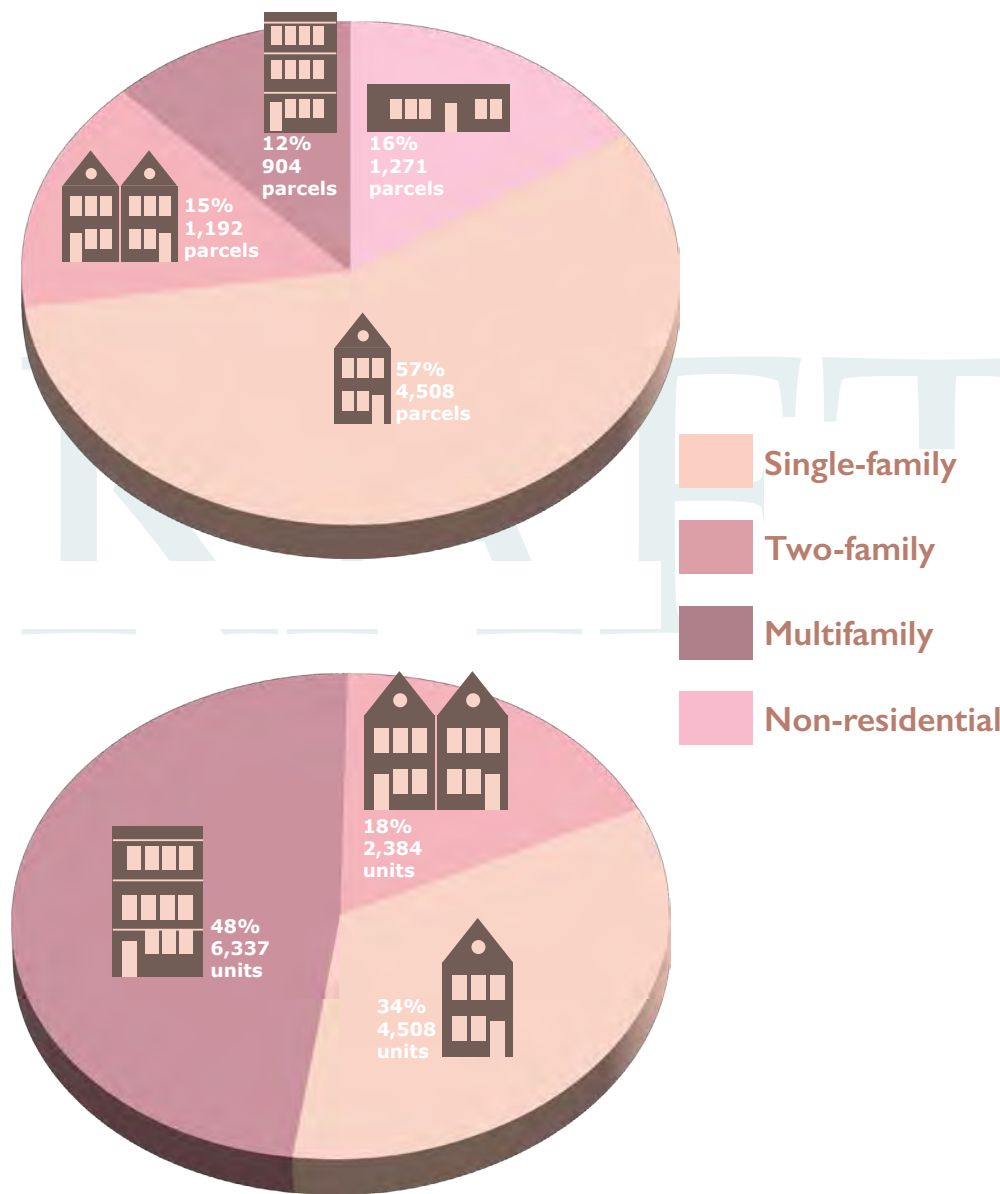


Chart H-5 - Showing housing types by parcel.  
Chart H-6 - Showing units by housing type.

Newport should continue to support Affordable Housing efforts within the City's existing programs.

Strains in housing costs and availability have resulted in increases to unhoused populations in Newport. The loss of shelter at the Seamen's Institute has reduced housing availability. Church Community Development Corporation, Newport's community development corporation (CDC), has 41 beds at its shelter located at 50 Washington Square. The Women's Resource Center provides shelter for women and children who are victims of abuse. Newport Housing Hotline provides emergency housing to those in need.

Additional unit creation potential exists on land currently owned by public housing providers, but is dependent on state and federal funds. The City of Newport should support the construction of additional subsidized housing by its local providers, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the City's zoning ordinance. The full

buildout of Newport Heights should be prioritized so that the percentage of LMI housing does not decrease as more market rate units are brought online. Substantial additional subsidized housing is not anticipated given funding constraints and high land acquisition costs.

Unit type	Number of units
Family	1,255
Elderly	462
Disabled	0
Special Needs	185
<b>TOTAL LMI UNITS</b>	<b>1,902</b>

Source: RI 2022 Integrated Housing Report

Table H-4: Low and moderate income housing units in Newport.

## INSTITUTIONAL HOUSING

Newport's institutions, primarily the U.S. Navy and Salve Regina University, and to a lesser extent, Newport Hospital and the International Yacht Restoration School, need housing for their students and employees. These institutions strain the Newport housing market during the academic year and sometimes during increased needs of Navy personnel. If these institutional housing needs can be met within the institutional properties, it will reduce demand for housing within the rest of the city. Salve Regina's academic calendar presents the opportunity for its housing to be used for overnight tourist stays and/or for seasonal employees, in support of Newport's summer economy. Navy housing is better served at the main base on and around Coasters Island than at Fort Adams. However, due to its waterfront location, housing may compete with recreational uses and historic preservation priorities at the old Navy Hospital site. According to Naval Station Newport, there are 690 Navy rental housing units available for military personnel.

Many Salve Regina University students live on campus while roughly 40% seek rental homes and apartments near the university. The Fall 2023 enrollment was 2,836, with 2,117 undergraduates and 719 graduate students. The university provides three residence halls for 590 first-year students and nine residence halls for 470 sophomore students. There are an additional twelve university-owned buildings that provide housing for another 185+ students. In total, 60% of the undergraduate student body lives on campus. It should be noted that more than 85% of Salve Regina University's graduate students are enrolled in online programs and may not have a local residential presence. The only Salve staff person living on campus is the University President.

It is not presently known how many of the remaining students occupy

housing in Newport versus surrounding municipalities in the area, but it can nonetheless be stated that much of this off-campus student housing competes with Newport's regional housing market. Students are able to pay above-market rents on a per-bedroom basis, driving up average rental prices and reducing housing unit availability. Consistent with the City's goal of housing more students on-campus, Salve Regina University has been working for over five years to develop additional on-campus housing to accommodate more undergraduate, upperclassmen students and to alleviate demand for off-campus housing.

## HOME-OWNERSHIP

Newport's homeownership rate, 47%, lags the state (58%) and national (65%) averages.<sup>4</sup> Newport should promote homeownership, especially among low-income residents, to encourage intergenerational wealth building in this community. Owner-occupancy is also associated with better property maintenance and lower crime rates. Newport's lower percentage of owner-occupied housing units may reveal an underlying tension. It is possible that Newport does not experience higher rates of home-ownership due to real-estate speculation. More than other communities, Newport is an arena for housing speculation, re-development and profit. In making policy shifts to increase year-round occupied housing, care should be taken to focus on homeownership.

### ATTRACTING FAMILIES

Newport housing policy should promote balance in the city. A healthy community has many income and age levels to support diverse needs. Presently, Newport is losing families for a variety of reasons including housing affordability. However there are other impediments to families living in Newport. In addition to promoting more middle income housing, Newport should continue to support policies that attract families such as homestead exemptions and tax breaks. Newport should also augment this by promoting improved schools, exceptional recreation opportunities and elevated children’s cultural enrichment. Newport has a declining school age population and attracting families will help to stabilize the school population. Newport has beautiful beaches and parks. The athletic opportunities at the Hut, Easton’s Beach and the parks are exemplary and should be highlighted. Newport should promote and enhance its recreational facilities and programs in order to create a more stable housing environment. Newport is a terrific place to raise children, but this may not be immediately apparent to would-be homebuyers.

### ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADUs)

Accessory dwelling units are a fine New England tradition, but used less frequently in cities and towns today. ADUs can serve many residents including seniors, students and seasonal workers. The City should develop a path for permitting of ADUs in separate buildings in one-and two-family properties (where they are currently prohibited) to aid in the creation of additional units. The state recently approved additional legislation to provide cities and towns with the legal foundation to permit this use.

### VACATION HOMES

Owners of vacation homes (see Definitions page) contribute to Newport’s vitality and tax base. However, there is some community cost to seasonality, including removing housing units for the pool for full-time residents. Seasonal occupancy can cause the dark house phenomenon. Dark houses can erode community cohesion. Once a phenomenon limited to its estate neighborhoods, dark houses are spreading throughout the city. Some proportion of the 19% of seasonally occupied units in Newport are vacation homes, although the precise number can’t be determined from city records. (see Table H-5). Newport has made strides towards reducing the effect of seasonality in recent years but should do more to promote the retention of year-round housing. The City should continue to set pro-housing occupancy policies and work with state and federal officials to promote the same. Housing policy should mitigate the unwanted effects of seasonality while recognizing the contributions and interests of seasonal residents.

<b>Total housing units (2022)</b>	13605	
<b>Total year-round households</b>	10,645	
<b>Difference: not occupied by year-round household (considered "Vacant" by ACS)</b>	2960	
	<b>Owner-occupied</b>	<b>Rental</b>
<b>Total year-round households</b>	5,050	5,595
<b>Estimated actual vacancy rate due to unit for sale or rent</b>	2.8%	3.3%
<b>Estimated actual vacant units</b>	181	236
<b>Remainder: Estimated seasonal units (both rentals and second homes)</b>	2,543	
<b>Seasonal estimated percentage of total units</b>	18.7%	

Table H-5: Estimate of proportion of units occupied seasonally

## SEASONAL RENTALS

Seasonal rentals (see Definitions page) contribute to the local economy, though they also take units from the full-time resident population. At least 1,000 short-term rental units are listed online for rent in Newport, although only 574 listings were registered with the city. Some of these short-term rentals are also in vacation homes. The proliferation of seasonal rentals is amplified by online host platforms. While seasonal rentals allow homeowners to remain in their homes by providing additional income they may also contribute to the housing crisis by causing unit conversions from residential to commercial uses. The “Home Occupation” use, allows residents to dedicate a portion of their house for acceptable use, including professional and commercial uses. Many Newport property owners offer STRs in up to 2 extra bedrooms under the “Home Occupation” use, which requires the homeowner be present during the rental period. This widely appreciated opportunity allows residents to remain in their homes. It should be supported. Yacht team housing similarly serves community needs. Moreover, Newport has made great strides in protecting residential neighborhoods from the intrusive effects of non-owner-occupied STRs. It is also worth noting that many housing units already exist in commercial zones. Policies to protect these neighborhoods from seasonal rentals have not yet yielded results. Many residents seek greater access to the harbor’s waterfront than is currently available. Newport harbor’s waterfront has new hotels, condominiums, and timeshares; new housing policy should take great care to balance commercial and housing uses in these zones, while promoting the benefits of mixed-use zones.

Seasonal rentals can be much more lucrative than year-round rentals. Many full time residents reap the benefits of seasonal rentals, helping with mortgage payments and cost of living increases. Housing policy should balance the needs of enterprising homeowners with the needs of year-round residents.

# A PLAN FOR ACTION

## ALL-OF-THE-ABOVE APPROACH

In consideration of existing housing conditions in Newport, two housing issues rise to the fore; preserving existing housing units as year-round occupied housing units and creating new workforce housing. This will require zoning changes as well as additional development on undeveloped lands such as the city’s North End. Accordingly, a long-needed expansion of housing unit development in Newport’s neighborhoods is anticipated. This, coupled with a balance of uses that compete with housing will steer the city towards the creation of housing units. Newport needs an all-of-the-above approach to correct a market distortion that has risen to crisis levels for many residents.

## SMALL LOTS / COMPACT NEIGHBORHOODS

Newport has an urban legacy of small lots reflected in its median housing unit year of construction, 1920. There are many existing lots that do not meet the 3,000 square foot threshold of the R3 zoning district, let alone the 10,000 square foot threshold of the R10 zoning district (see Appendix B: Buildout Analysis Figures 5, 6, 7, 8 and Table 2) Small lots create a sense of place which is walkable, neighborly and extremely desirable. Small lots make the city very attractive to retirees and young people. 20th century zoning undermined the prevalence of small lots and the corresponding sense of place and scale. It also introduced detriments to quality of life. For example: large residential areas no longer have access to a corner store. Similarly, vast swaths of parking diminish the walking experience and commercial activity. This Housing Chapter promotes small lots in walkable neighborhoods. Residential zones that re-establish Newport’s historic patterns can provide added economic value to an already great walkable city.

## TWO AND THREE FAMILY HOUSES

Small lots suggest certain housing typologies. Newport already has two- and three-family neighborhoods and it should make policy that creates more of these. Three-decker New England neighborhoods were once vehicles for immigrant social-mobility. These neighborhoods continue to keep families together while promoting intergenerational wealth. Two- and three-family housing units also support smaller families and unconventional household composition. They can be perfect for downsizing retirees. Importantly, these typologies support an optimum density which is consistent with Newport's architectural scale and character. Three-family neighborhoods create the kind of urban fabric that protects the city's natural assets while promoting conservation of infrastructure. These typologies are a win-win for Newport. Conversely, the state building code, which is divided into One and Two Family Dwelling Code and the International Building Code, hinders optimal housing development such as three-family dwellings. Newport should advocate for building code changes to allow for more three-family dwellings.

## HOUSING IN COMMERCIAL ZONES

Newport's commercial areas are excellent locations for additional density and housing development. The city's commercial neighborhoods have good access to transportation, utilities, and community services. A buildout analysis conducted to inform this Housing Update found that while growth may be possible in previously-targeted growth areas of the city, a broader scope is required to meet the Comprehensive Plan's stated goals of economic diversification, historic preservation, and community enrichment. Commercial uses that do not support these goals should be limited. Adjusting zoning to allow for denser housing options in commercial areas will help address demand for workforce housing. Modifications to parking requirements will improve housing

availability in these typically congested areas of the city. Housing can be added to commercial areas to support commercial activities. However, special care should be taken so that housing does not overwhelm other commercial and economic development goals.

## HOUSING ON THE WATERFRONT

Houseboats are increasingly popular as dwelling units. New regulations are drafted and in process for regulation of houseboats and living units on the water or at docks. Short term rentals on boats are a new issue which require the same regulations as land based short term regulations. Houseboats supplant recreation docks and water space and take away from the goal of the Harbor Management Plan. They should be discouraged. Current and new regulations for houseboats should be supported and enforced.

## FORM-BASED CODE

Zoning is the City's primary regulatory tool. The current zoning in Newport reflects an impractical century-old idea that undermines Newport's housing needs. Form-based zoning, which has a much greater capability to create additional workforce housing units, can also enhance Newport's urban form. Newport needs a paradigm shift toward form-based zoning. The North End Urban Plan and its corresponding zoning amendments are a potent example of the opportunity afforded by form-based zoning already existing in Newport. While the state has not yet created an enabling legal framework that better supports historic cities like Newport, the city should lobby the state for form-based code because it better serves the built environment, the residents, the business community and developers.

## ENDNOTES

1. Low- or moderate-income housing is defined by Rhode Island General Law § 45-53-3 as “synonymous with “affordable housing” as defined in § 42-128-8.1, and further means any housing whether built or operated by any public agency or any nonprofit organization or by any limited equity housing cooperative or any private developer, that is subsidized by a federal, state, or municipal government subsidy under any program to assist the construction or rehabilitation of affordable housing and that will remain affordable through a land lease and/or deed restriction for ninety-nine (99) years or such other period that is either agreed to by the applicant and town or prescribed by the federal, state, or municipal government subsidy program but that is not less than thirty (30) years from initial occupancy.” § 42-128-8.1 defines affordable housing as “residential housing that has a sales price or rental amount that is within the means of a household that is moderate income or less. in the case of dwelling units for sale, housing that is affordable means housing in which principal, interest, taxes, which may be adjusted by state and local programs for property tax relief, and insurance constitute no more than thirty percent (30%) of the gross household income for a household with less than one hundred and twenty percent (120%) of area median income, adjusted for family size... in the case of dwelling units for rent, housing that is affordable means housing for which the rent, heat, and utilities other than telephone constitute no more than thirty percent (30%) of the gross annual household income for a household with eighty percent (80%) or less of area median income, adjusted for family size. affordable housing shall include all types of year-round housing, including, but not limited to: manufactured housing; housing originally constructed for workers and their families; accessory dwelling units; housing accepting rental vouchers and/or tenant-based certificates under section 8 of the United States Housing Act of 1937, as amended; and assisted living housing, where the sales or rental amount of such housing, adjusted for any federal, state, or municipal government subsidy, is less than or equal to thirty percent (30%) of the gross household income of the low and/or moderate income occupants of the housing.”
2. Difference between number of total and occupied units in 2000 and 2020 decennial censuses.
3. Newport has identified an average household size of 2.3 as its target for 2054. This is closer to the 2010 average household size of 2.25 than the 2020 household size of 2.5. This will allow for more single-member households and aims to reduce overcrowding. for housing units per household. Newport has identified a goal for 2054 of 1.25. This is a slight reduction from 2010 and 2020 census numbers of 1.27 and 1.29, respectively. the hope is that having more year-round households and less short-term rentals will reduce housing unit requirements.
4. 2022 5-Year ACS estimate.

# GOALS AND POLICIES

Newport has selected a 30-year planning horizon for this Housing Chapter. This expands the end date of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan’s 20-year timeframe from 2037 to 2054. Housing investments and expenditures should be planned accordingly, and should anticipate the needs of the next generation of homeowners.

## GOAL H-1 - MEET PROJECTED DEMAND

### **Construct new housing units to meet the projected demand for additional housing.**

Housing unit preservation and creation has been insufficient in Newport for almost two decades and significant zoning reform is needed to enable additional housing units. Housing beyond projected demand may be needed if demographics shift or for economic development purposes. This goal and its priority should be reevaluated during the next comprehensive plan update in 2027.

#### **Policy H-1.1**

**Use the latest and most reliable population and housing estimates, projections and local housing unit buildout figures in establishing or changing housing policies and implementation proposals at any given time.**

Newport will always utilize the latest quality information to inform its housing planning and will update its plans without delay so as to remain relevant to contemporary issues.

#### **Action H-1.1A**

**Adopt ordinance amendments that spur additional year-round housing units.**

#### **Action H-1.1B**

**Evaluate the success of Newport’s housing efforts continuously and shift course as necessary.**

#### **Action H-1.1C**

**Include major housing statistics that demonstrate progress**

on this chapter's goals in required annual reports to the City Council.

**Policy H-1.2**

**Prevent discrimination in housing acquisition and occupation.**

Newport does not tolerate housing discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived race, creed, color, national origin, gender, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, military, family, citizenship, or source of income. All people should be able to take advantage of all housing opportunities and no one should be forced from their home based on their legally-protected status.

**Policy H-1.3**

**Prevent housing development which erodes Newport's quality of life and architectural character.**

As is mentioned throughout the Comprehensive Plan, there are many assets in Newport that make it a unique place to live. Newport's high quality of life should not be compromised. Development proposals must align with, and cannot be contrary to, Newport's vision for its future as stated in its Comprehensive Plan. Along these lines, the city should promote development in areas that are supported by excellent transportation access and utility infrastructure. Development should be limited in rural and ecologically sensitive areas. Development should support and enhance Newport's high quality architectural landscape.

**Action H-1.3A**

**Tax houses that are sold on speculation and use taxes to support workforce housing development.**

**Action H-1.3B**

**Develop templates of pre-approved residential plans based on Newport's vernacular architecture.**

This will encourage urban infill, streetscape continuity and more housing.

**Policy H-1.4**

**Identify the causes of and prevent housing unit loss.**

## **GOAL H-2 - MEET DIVERSE NEEDS**

### **Support a variety of housing options that meet residents' housing diverse needs.**

Newport's policies and programs should support all of life's changes: new jobs, new schools, new relationships, new children, growing families, intergenerational living, health challenges, and aging in place. Within the context of this goal is the obvious need for a robust housing market, both rental and ownership, where Newporters can easily change their living situation to meet their needs and stay within city limits.

**Policy H-2.1**

**Learn more about additional housing needs within the community.**

Although workforce housing for middle incomes is the most pressing need, many other needs are present, some of which are yet to be understood by city planning efforts. Effective housing planning is a process of continual information gathering, policy setting, and analysis. Newport commits to continuous process improvement in the field of housing planning.

**Action H-2.1A**

**Conduct a community wide housing needs survey.**

**Action H-2.1B**

**Participate in local community events to learn more about housing needs.**

**Action H-2.1C**

**Explore subsidies for housing, including tax, direct, unit preservation and rehabilitation assistance, trust funds and land trusts.**

**Policy H-2.2**

**Support and encourage housing in mixed-use zones and on institutional properties.**

Mixed-use zones afford opportunities for business owners and workers to cohabitate, increasing the sense of community and providing 24-

hour eyes on the street. Major institutions, such as the federal government, Salve Regina University, Newport Hospital, the Preservation Society of Newport County and Newport Restaurant Group, can improve conditions for their employees and/or students by constructing on-campus housing. Mixed-use and institutional housing should be encouraged in all appropriate locations.

**Action H-2.2A**

**Create a mixed-use zoning overlay district that balances residential, institutional and commercial needs.**

**Policy H-2.2B**

**Share Newport's housing expertise outside its borders.**

Newport is confronting issues that are faced by many other communities throughout the state. Its challenges and successes can serve to educate other communities. Newport's housing officials can benefit by learning from other communities as well. As much as possible, the City shall support learning opportunities by its experts and for its civic leadership.

## **GOAL H-3 - COMPLEMENT HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE**

**Support and encourage the development of new housing that complements Newport's architectural character.**

As is mentioned throughout the Comprehensive Plan, Newport has exceptional buildings that must be protected and enhanced in all of its decision making. The goal of this plan is not growth at all costs, but rather sustainable growth that meets Newport's needs, takes advantage of market opportunity, and preserves and enhances the city's unique physical design.

**Policy H-3.1**

**Employ regulations to approve new housing that is complementary to existing historic architecture and other exemplary design, especially in the urban core.**

**Action H-3.1A**

**Create commercial and residential design standards for new buildings.**

Design standards reduce discretionary review while offering basic quality control. Standards are supported by people who desire less intrusive oversight because construction requirements are transparent and knowable. Standards are also welcomed by people who wish to live in a high quality environment.

**Action H-3.1B**

**Lobby the state for Form-Based Code improvements in the zoning enabling act to create local zoning that will preserve existing historic residential development patterns.**

**Policy H-3.2**

**Preserve Newport's historic dwellings.**

Housing preservation (to maintain the number of housing units) and historic preservation (to preserve historic buildings) must work in tandem in Newport. As is mentioned throughout this plan, Newport

has unique historical, cultural, archeological, and ecological assets, many of which are homes for people. In maintaining these homes and constructing new homes, Newport must not degrade these assets which make it such a rich place to live, work, and play. Architectural details of the city matter a great deal and the loss of small pieces of history, or their discoordinated alteration, will irreparably alter Newport to everyone's detriment.

**Action H-3.2A**

**Identify existing historic buildings that may provide opportunity for adaptive re-use housing.**

**Action H-3.2B**

**Support and enhance Historic District oversight in historic residential neighborhoods.**

## **GOAL H-4 - MITIGATE SEASONAL IMPACTS**

**Mitigate the adverse impacts of seasonally vacant homes to increase neighborhood stability and vitality.**

**Policy H-4.1**

**Identify concerns about dark houses.**

**Action H-4.1A**

**Conduct a community survey to learn about the impacts of dark houses.**

**Policy H-4.2**

**Attract families to Newport to support housing goals.**

**Newport should incentivize families to live in the city year-round, to stabilize both the schools and the housing market.**

**Action H-4.2A**

**Continue to promote residential vibrancy in Newport throughout all twelve months of the year.**

**Action H-4.2B**

**Create new zoning that provides density incentives, dimensional incentives, parking incentives and permitting incentives, so as to encourage year round occupancy of families.**

Such incentives will reduce the development costs of a project containing year-round occupants and/or provide additional opportunities for non-year-round housing than would otherwise be allowed.

**Policy H-4.3**

**Discourage short term rentals in residential neighborhoods to those that directly support owner-occupancy.**

19% of Newport's housing stock is lost to seasonal rentals and second homes, a three-fold increase from twenty years ago. The City should continue to identify and monitor STRs and existing laws must be enforced.

**Action H-4.3A**

**Secure the abandonment of preexisting short-term rental uses in residential neighborhoods that no longer permit such uses by right, during development review.**

**Action H-4.3B**

**Cap the number of non-owner-occupied Short term rentals (STRs) allowed in the city.**

**Policy H-4.4**

**Encourage the adaptive re-use of hotels and related uses.**

Hotels may infringe on Newport's housing availability with limited benefit to the local economy and quality of life. New housing opportunities should be created from former hotels as opportunities arise. The Harbor Base Inn (former Pineapple Inn) is a good example of the potential for a hotel to serve as housing.

## **GOAL H-5 - MAINTAIN AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**Maintain the provision of affordable income housing.**

Newport leads in the provision of affordable housing in the State of Rhode Island year after year. It is one of a few municipalities that meets that State's goal of 10% affordable units. Newport additionally acknowledges and supports the State's goal that each municipality provide 10% of its housing units as Affordable Housing and understands that state and federal attention may be directed to those municipalities. However, the modernization of Newport's Affordable units and complete buildout of Newport Heights should not be delayed or sacrificed to support affordable construction in municipalities that have failed to plan and act in furtherance of the State's goal. The City will continue to work with local affordable housing providers to add Affordable units as opportunities arise to ensure Newport remains above the State's goal.

**Policy H-5.1**

**Maintain high-quality affordable housing.**

**Action H-5.1A**

**Work with Newport Housing Authority to secure the rehabilitation of all its units and completion of Newport Heights.**

**Policy H-5.2**

**Support quasi-public and non-governmental entities that provide affordable income housing.**

**Action H-5.2A**

**Support the work of Church Community Development Corporation in providing housing for Newporters.**

**Action H-5.2B**

**Monitor deed restriction expiration in affordable housing properties and work with property owners to renew the restriction.**

## **GOAL H-6 - SUPPORT SUSTAINABILITY**

**Support sustainable housing production that will not jeopardize the city's utilities, natural resources and other critical elements.**

### **Policy H-6.1**

Provide technical oversight of housing developments in order to protect city infrastructure.

### **Action H-6.1A**

Create a new development housing unit number threshold for the Technical Review Committee.

### **Policy H-6.2**

Protect housing and neighborhoods from environmental hazards.

### **Action H-6.2A**

Restrict housing in Newport's at-risk areas, particularly housing units in danger of inundation or destruction during a hurricane, flood or major weather event.

### **Action H-6.2B**

**Provide incentives to convert existing urban core parking lots into new housing developments.**

Excessive surface parking contributes to stormwater runoff and discourages neighborhood cohesion. It diminishes the pedestrian experience and commercial vibrancy. Parking is not the best use for land in high demand. The city should incentivize housing construction over parking.

### **Policy H-6.3**

**Protect the waterfront from housing encroachment.**

**Discourage the recreational waterfront, and vessels which are moored there, from becoming long term housing and/or seasonal rentals.**

### **Action H-6.3A**

Review and enforce the Harbor Management Plan for regulation of boathouses and seasonal rentals.

### **Policy H-6.4**

Support residents' quality of life through coordinated, effective response to neighborhood concerns.

Such concerns include property maintenance, traffic, parking and emergency access.

### **Action H-6.4A**

Continue to use, monitor and improve the neighborhood hotline.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

The Implementation program lists action items which have been created to achieve the goals outlined in this plan. To support priority and to ensure completion, action items are scheduled. Responsible parties are assigned to the tasks. In instances where there are multiple assigned parties, the primary responsible party is listed in bold text. A Strategic Implementation Plan is included to assist with annual milestones.

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Action	Timeframe	Responsible Party (lead in bold)
<b>Action H-1.1A</b> Adopt ordinance amendments that spur additional year-round housing units.	Before the end of 2024	Director of Planning and Economic Development presents ordinance amendments to City Council
<b>Action H-1.1B</b> Evaluate the success of Newport’s housing efforts continuously and shift course as necessary.	Before the next comprehensive plan update	Director of Planning and Economic Development
<b>Action H-1.1C</b> Include major housing statistics that demonstrate progress on this chapter’s goals in required annual reports to the City Council.	End of each calendar year	Land use boards, <b>Department of Planning and Economic Development</b> , Housing Planner
<b>Action H-1.3A</b> Tax houses that are sold on speculation and use taxes to support workforce housing development.	Before the end of 2025	City Council, Planning Board, <b>Director of Planning and Economic Development</b> , Housing Planner
<b>Action H-1.3B</b> Develop templates of pre-approved residential plans based on Newport’s vernacular architecture.	Before the end of 2026	City Council, Planning Board, <b>Director of Planning and Economic Development</b>
<b>Action H-2.1A</b> Conduct a community wide housing needs survey.	Before the end of 2025	Housing Planner
<b>Action H-2.1B</b> Participate in local community events to learn more about housing needs.	Four events annually	Land use boards, City Councilors, <b>Department of Planning and Economic Development</b>
<b>Action H-2.1C</b> Explore subsidies for housing, including tax, direct, unit preservation and rehabilitation assistance, trust funds and land trusts.	Before the end of 2026	Housing Planner

Action	Timeframe	Responsible Party (lead in bold)
<b>Action H-2.2A</b> Create a mixed-use zoning overlay district that balances residential, institutional and commercial needs.	Before the end of 2025	City Council, Planning Board, <b>Director of Planning and Economic Development</b> , Housing Planner
<b>Action H-2.2B</b> Share Newport’s housing expertise outside its borders.	At least one event annually	City Council, <b>City Manager</b> , department heads, Departments of Planning and Economic Development and Zoning and Building Inspections
<b>Action H-3.1A</b> Create commercial and residential design standards for new buildings.	Before the next comprehensive plan update	Director of Planning and Economic Development presents proposals to City Council
<b>Action H-3.1B</b> Lobby the state for Form-Based Code so that future zoning will protect and enhance the existing historic residential development patterns.	Annually	City Council
<b>Action H-3.2A</b> Identify existing historic buildings that may provide opportunity for adaptive re-use housing.	End of 2025	Preservation Planner
<b>Action H-3.2B</b> Continue to support and enhance Historic District oversight in historic residential neighborhoods.	Annually	City Council
<b>Action H-4.1A</b> Conduct a community survey to learn about the impacts of dark houses.	End of 2025	Housing Planner
<b>Action H-4.2A</b> Continue to promote residential vibrancy in Newport throughout all twelve months of the year.	Immediate, ongoing	Director of Planning and Economic Development provides updates to City Council

Action	Timeframe	Responsible Party (lead in bold)
<b>Action H-8.2B</b> Create new zoning that provides density incentives, dimensional incentives, parking incentives and permitting incentives.	End of 2024	Director of Planning and Economic Development presents ordinance amendments to City Council
<b>Action H-4.3A</b> Secure the abandonment of preexisting short-term rental uses in residential neighborhoods that no longer permit such uses.	Immediate, ongoing	Land use boards
<b>Action H-4.3B</b> Cap the number of non-owner-occupied Short Term Rentals (STRs) allowed in the city.	End of 2026	City Council
<b>Action H-5.1A</b> Work with Newport Housing Authority to secure the rehabilitation of all its units and completion of Newport Heights.	Construct all units with state and/or federal subsidy 2030	Director of Planning and Economic Development provides updates to City Council
<b>Action H-5.2A</b> Support the work of Church Community Development Corporation in providing housing for Newporters.	Immediate, ongoing	Housing Planner
<b>Action H-6.1A</b> Create a new development housing unit number threshold for the Technical Review Committee.	End of 2024	Director of Planning and Economic Development presents ordinance amendments to City Council
<b>Action H-6.2A</b> Restrict housing in Newport's at-risk areas, particularly housing units in danger of inundation or destruction during the city's next major hurricane.	Identify units in at-risk areas and develop policy by 2030	Land use boards, Department of Zoning and Building Inspections, <b>Director of Planning and Economic Development</b>
<b>Action H-6.2B</b> Provide tax incentives to convert existing urban core parking lots into new housing developments.	End of 2026	City Council

Action	Timeframe	Responsible Party (lead in bold)
<b>Action H-6.3A</b> Review and enforce the Harbor Management Plan for regulation of boathouses and seasonal rentals.	End of 2027	Waterfront Commission, Director of Planning and Economic Development
<b>Action H-6.4A</b> Continue to use, monitor and improve the neighborhood hotline.	Immediate, ongoing	City Manager

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## STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Year	Actions
2024	H-1.1A, H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.2B, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.1A, H-6.4A
2025	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-1.3A, H-2.1A, H-2.1B, H-2.2A, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2A, H-3.2B, H-4.1A, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.4A
2026	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-1.3B, H-2.1B, H-2.1C, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-4.3B, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.2B, H-6.4A
2027	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1A, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.3A, H-6.4A
2028	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.4A
2029	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.4A
2030	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.1A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.2A, H-6.4A
2031	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.4A
2032	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.4A
2033	H-1.1B, H-1.1C, H-2.1B, H-2.2B, H-3.1B, H-3.2B, H-4.2A, H-4.3A, H-5.2A, H-5.2B, H-6.4A

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# APPENDIX A

## NEWPORT'S NEIGHBORHOODS





Map of Newport Neighborhoods.

# OVERVIEW

Newport still maintains a vestige of neighborhood identity. Though the closing of neighborhood public schools and churches, and the influx of out-of-town second home residents continues to erode neighborhood identity. Today, architecture is the best substitute for neighborhood cohesion. Newport has 19 identified areas, all of which have their own character and identity. Together, they help create the city's social fabric. This Appendix I describes and examines each of these 19 neighborhood areas. It should be noted that for purposes of this plan, the term "neighborhood" is used broadly. A description and brief analysis of each neighborhood is presented alphabetically.

## BELLEVUE AVENUE AND ESTATES

This large neighborhood is located in the southeastern portion of Newport, encompassing most of Newport's shoreline along Easton Bay. Extending north from Land's End to Parker Avenue (but also including areas farther north) and west to Coggeshall Avenue/Spring Street, this area is mainly estate residential and institutional land uses. It is named for Bellevue Avenue, Newport's most fashionable address, which runs the length of the neighborhood, from Bailey's Beach to Kay Street, three neighborhoods north. In general, lots in the Bellevue Avenue and Estates neighborhood are large "estate" lots of several acres, although density is generally higher in the northern portions of the neighborhood. Institutional uses reflect the neighborhood's past as one of estate for the country's elite. Salve Regina University's initial campus at Ochre Court was the gift of ultra-wealthy businessman Robert Goulet IV and popular tourist destinations The Breakers, The Elms, Rosecliff and Marble House are Gilded-Age mansions maintained by the Preservation Society of Newport County. Doris Duke's Rough Point is open to the public and maintained by the Newport

Restoration Foundation. This neighborhood was once active farms. The Cliff Walk, one of Newport's most significant recreational assets, is a centuries-old public way along Easton's Bay from Memorial Boulevard to Bailey's Beach.

The historic estates and large institutional uses make this area difficult for creating additional housing without eroding the neighborhood's character, although the minimum lot size of the zone fails to reflect this. That said, the neighborhood is home to a number of large-scale multi-unit housing complexes which have historically served that very purpose. This neighborhood and others in Newport south of Memorial Boulevard have limited transportation access due to heavy summertime traffic volumes on limited, narrow roads. Enhanced cycling access east of Annandale Road could ease congestion and create additional development opportunity. The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority's Route 67 bus serves this area well. Additional housing units could easily be added within existing mansion footprints, as has been done many times already.

## **BROADWAY**

The Broadway neighborhood is oriented to this major arterial and extends from the Middletown line southerly to Marlborough Street. The "width" of the neighborhood varies considerably as one travels along the corridor. Newport City Hall and the adjacent middle school anchor its south end and most of the neighborhood is characterized by medium-density residential, civic uses and neighborhood-scale retail and services, though the relative amount of commercial and larger scale mixed-use diminishes as one moves north through the corridor. The Newport Hospital and adjoining neighborhood business area is roughly in the center of this neighborhood. In general, homes that do not front

directly on Broadway are detached homes on small lots.

Lower Broadway is zoned General Business consistent with downtown. Limited business zones exist at Innovate Newport and the neighborhood commercial area abutting Newport Hospital. The rest of the neighborhood is zoned R-10. In the future, a special zoning district for the hospital may better regulate its operations and a denser residential zoning designation will better reflect existing housing patterns off-Broadway.

The Broadway Streetscape Improvement Plan changed the face of the neighborhood as it encouraged economic development and commercial activity. Broadway has experienced a rise in property values and many circa 1900 houses have been recently renovated. Some of these houses have been converted from multi to single family housing, thus eliminating necessary housing stock. An upcoming planning area of focus of this neighborhood is infill on Broadway and expansion of commercial uses into residential areas.

## **DOWNTOWN**

The Downtown neighborhood extends northerly from Memorial Boulevard to Bridge Street and from the north part of the harbor to Spring and Farewell Streets. Long Wharf west of America's Cup Avenue is listed as a separate neighborhood and is not included in Downtown. Downtown is characterized by a wide range of dense uses, with variable degrees of architectural quality and maintenance. Uses range from historic homes to walkable retail, civic uses, restaurants and tourist-oriented retail, higher density residential, institutional, hotels, marine-oriented business and others. The west edge of this neighborhood fronts the harbor and is zoned Waterfront Business. The rest of this neighborhood is zoned General Business. Landmarks are

numerous in the neighborhood and include Trinity Church, Old Colony House, Museum of Newport History (Old Brick Market) and White Horse Tavern, America's oldest restaurant. Public open spaces include Washington Square, Perrotti Park, Queen Anne Square and Cardines Field.

The Downtown neighborhood has recently experienced great physical transformation with many newly developed large hotels. Continued hotel development threatens the market opportunity of other uses that better support Newport's year-round economy. As the center of the city, this neighborhood can support denser development, including housing. The biggest challenge for development in this neighborhood is illogical parking minimums.

### **EUSTIS / EASTON'S POND**

Memorial Boulevard, and Braga Memorial Field provide open space for residents. Within the neighborhood are two ponds, Easton Pond and Green End Pond. The Green End Pond lies mostly within the Town of Middletown, while Easton's Pond is mostly within the City of Newport. These ponds are used as a surface water supply for the Newport Water Division (NWD) and the Station 1 Water Treatment Plant located in the neighborhood. More about the NWD and the Station 1 Water Treatment Plant can be found in Chapter 12, Water.

Easton's (First) Beach is a barrier beach three-quarters of a mile long along the southern edge of Easton's Pond. Memorial Boulevard runs on this barrier, along with the retention wall for Easton's Pond, and a drainage canal surrounding the pond. An ultra-violet stormwater treatment system at the eastern end of the beach reduces beach closures due to bacteria growth. The Beach's recreational facilities recently included a 1950's carousel, playground, skate park, concessions,

and the Rotunda Ballroom. However, poor maintenance, ocean storms, and sea-level rise have deteriorated many of those facilities to the point where they need to be demolished. The hope is they will be rebuilt on higher ground off the barrier beach.

Mid 20th century residential development patterns are typical of this area. Two-family housing is restricted, although present throughout. Due to larger lots and lower existing lot coverage, this area has experienced significant gentrification in the recent past. "Tear-downs," where modest mid-century houses are being replaced by larger second homes, are common in this neighborhood. Perhaps no other neighborhood in Newport tells the story of demographic shift like Eustis. Good access outside the City makes this a good place for additional housing development, although stormwater drainage into First Beach is a concern.

### **FIFTH WARD**

The Fifth Ward neighborhood is located in south-central Newport, along the eastern portion of the southern edge of Newport Harbor. The neighborhood contains mostly residential properties on small lots, some commercial sites and the city's high school. In general, clear delineation between the watersheds of the harbor and Lily and Almy Ponds in the adjacent Lily/Almy Pond neighborhood is not reflected in the zoning for this area.

The Fifth Ward neighborhood is also characterized by its parks and open spaces. King Park, Spencer Park, Morton Park, and Murphy Field are all located within this neighborhood. King Park, located in the southeast corner of the harbor, features a gazebo that is used for concerts, a small beach area, open space for picnicking, and a concrete boat ramp. Ida Lewis Yacht Club, named for the nationally recognized

female lighthouse keeper who manned Lime Rock, on which it sits, is located to the west of King Park. Continuing down Wellington Avenue is the Newport outpost of the New York Yacht Club at Harbour Court.

The Fifth Ward is another Newport neighborhood that was once dominated by big families and modest houses. It is now experiencing swift gentrification. The location of this neighborhood, with proximity to the yacht clubs, town, the mansions and Newport Neck, is very desirable for summer renters. As the northern portion of the Fifth Ward neighborhood is located in low-lying land along the waterfront, The Fifth Ward is at risk for flooding due to sea level rise. This neighborhood is faced with transportation access challenges outside the city, limiting housing desirability. Regardless, zoning more reflective of the building stock in this neighborhood could ease housing pressures.

### GOAT ISLAND

Goat Island forms the northwest edge of Newport Harbor. Goat Island got its name due to the early Newport residents who pastured goats on it. It has held various industrial uses over the centuries, and was responsible for producing the majority of torpedoes used by the Americans during the Battle of the Atlantic during World War II. In the 1960s, the City used urban renewal funds to build a causeway connecting Goat Island to the mainland. The island was subsequently redeveloped as a waterfront community with the worst urban design ideas of the mid-twentieth century and is a waterfront eyesore for the city.

Goat Island is home to the Newport Harbor Lighthouse. This lighthouse was constructed in 1842 and was built as a replacement for

an earlier lighthouse that wasn't adequately lighting the reefs on the north end of Goat Island. The Newport Harbor Lighthouse underwent renovation in 2006 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Other uses present on Goat Island are a hotel, condominiums, the Belle Mer convention center and the Goat Island Marina. Careful planning should consider the future of this neighborhood with the advent of sea level rise.

### HARBOR / LOWER THAMES

The Harbor / Lower Thames neighborhood straddles the southern portion of Thames Street just south of downtown, along Newport Harbor. Waterfront-oriented businesses are located along the harbor, while multifamily housing on small lots are found on the east side of the neighborhood. Commercial businesses dot Thames Street with intermixed residential.

This area is one of the city's principal commercial waterfront areas. However, Lower Thames commercial spaces are more likely to experience seasonal business turnover. Here, the cyclical economy takes a toll. Similarly, significant automobile traffic may also impact Lower Thames businesses. While this may seem unrelated to housing needs, diminished commerce in this area can harm quality of life for adjacent residents. The long line of vehicles waiting to enter lower Thames on busy summer days and backups onto Memorial Boulevard from Spring Street challenge access in and out of this neighborhood and limit future development potential. Parking on sidewalks is common on a few streets, eroding the pedestrian environment. Enhancing bicycle and pedestrian access to this neighborhood will ease transportation frustrations and support future development.

## HISTORIC HILL

Historic Hill is located in central Newport, adjacent to and east of Downtown. The southerly portion is bounded by Bowery, easterly is bound by Bellevue, northerly is bound by Touro, and westerly is bounded by Spring. Kay/Catherine lies to the north, Old Beach to the east, Memorial Boulevard to the southeast and Harbor / Lower Thames to the southwest.

Most of the southern portion includes the Bellevue Shopping Center, Aquidneck Park, institutional and commercial uses. Aquidneck Park is home to the Newport Public Library, Newport Recreation Department, and Edward King House, the city's senior center. The southern portion also contains a strip of commercial property along its frontage with Memorial Boulevard. The northern portion is more diverse and includes residential uses, Touro Park and its Newport Tower, the Hotel Viking, the Elks Lodge and the Touro Synagogue. Touro Synagogue is located in the Historic Hill neighborhood at its northern edge. Construction of the synagogue started in 1759, making it the oldest synagogue in the United States.

Historic Hill is dense and centrally located; it is highly desirable. The urban pattern of this area suggests it could support additional housing units within existing structures, without harming the essential character of the neighborhood. Bellevue Shopping Center should be explored for mixed-use redevelopment.

## KAY / CATHERINE

Located north of Historic Hill to the southeast of Broadway, the Kay / Catherine Neighborhood is almost entirely residential housing. The north end of this neighborhood surrounds the Newport Hospital. The western side of this neighborhood shares density characteristics with the neighboring Historic Hill, while the eastern side is more like

the much less dense estate neighborhoods to the south. This area could support additional housing with careful consideration of the neighborhood's historic homes.

## KERRY HILL / VAN ZANDT

Kerry Hill is located in north-central Newport, just north of Downtown and east of The Point. Defined generally by Farewell Street to the west, Garfield Street to the north, Malbone Road to the east and Warner Street to the south, it is largely made up of residential uses. This neighborhood includes two large cemeteries within its borders - the Common Burial Ground and Island Cemetery, co-located along Farewell Street on the western side of the neighborhood. These cemeteries were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. Benjamin Franklin's brother, James Franklin, is interred in Common Burial Ground as are numerous other prominent colonial figures. "God's Little Acre," one of the few marked cemeteries for early African-Americans, exists here as well. A former Governor of Rhode Island, Charles C. Van Zandt, is interred in Island Cemetery, from which the neighborhood gets part of its name.

In general, homes are located with minimal front setbacks along a fairly well defined grid street pattern. Existing zoning is incompatible with the built environment. This neighborhood is within walking distance of downtown, the waterfront and has easy access to points outside the city.

For many years the houses in Kerry Hill were relatively affordable. Kerry Hill, once a Newport neighborhood staple, is increasingly becoming gentrified. Like many other places in the city, somewhat modest houses are no longer affordable for Newport residents.

## LILY / ALMY POND

Lily / Almy Pond is located along the Atlantic Ocean, Newport's southern border. The neighborhood surrounds two large, ecologically-sensitive ponds—Lily and Almy. This neighborhood is characterized by large open spaces with limited infrastructure. Housing prices here are amongst the highest in Newport. One end of scenic Ocean Avenue terminates at Coggeshall Avenue adjacent to the southern end of Bellevue Avenue.

This neighborhood has two beaches within its borders, both divided in two, with half of each somewhat public and the other half decidedly private. Bailey's Beach, located at the intersection of Bellevue, Coggeshall, and Ocean Avenues south of Almy Pond, contains a public section with no parking on its eastern end. The remainder of the beach is limited to Bailey's Beach members. Hazard's and Gooseberry Beaches are located to the south of Lily Pond. Gooseberry Beach is accessible for members of the public with paid parking in limited capacity. All four barrier beaches are frequently closed due to high bacteria counts from the adjoining ponds.

Much of this neighborhood faces water intrusion from a direct hit of a hurricane. Development should also be careful not to further degrade the environmental quality of the ponds. Gooseberry Island is a private island off Gooseberry Beach that contains a house. It is an important scenic vista for beachgoers and development impact should be limited.

## LONG WHARF

Long Wharf is the redeveloped cruise terminal and railyard that abuts Newport Harbor, The Point and Downtown. This neighborhood contains the Gateway Center, Newport Shipyard and Marina, the state pier, the Newport Yacht Club and major hotels. Long Wharf is a major activity node and anchors the north end of the city's commercial

center. The City-owned Gateway Center contains an outmoded building, aging parking garage, and lots of impervious surface area. Redevelopment is in the near future and could include much-needed additional housing

## MEMORIAL BOULEVARD

The Memorial Boulevard neighborhood is located just east of the Harbor/Lower Thames neighborhood and north of the Bellevue Avenue and Estates neighborhood. To the north, the neighborhood generally abuts Memorial Boulevard, to the west, Spring Street south of Bowery and then extends east to Easton Bay (including the areas north of Bowery east of Bellevue). It consists mainly of single-family residential land uses, but also includes commercial, institutional and other non-residential uses, such as the Tennis Hall of Fame and Museum in the historic Travers Block and adjoining Audrain Block, a supermarket strip mall plaza, Freebody Park, and lodging.

This centrally-located neighborhood is well-suited for additional development. Effort should be made to minimize traffic impacts for northbound traffic on Bellevue Avenue, which has long wait times on summer afternoons. Mixed-use redevelopment opportunities exist on 20th-century commercial development parcels.

## NORTH END COMMERCIAL

The North End Commercial neighborhood is located in Newport's northwestern edge, along Narragansett Bay. Much of this neighborhood is federally-owned for the Newport Navy base, including Coasters Harbor Island, which is home to the Naval War College and Naval War College Museum. The mainland portion of the main base within Newport contains the commissary, medical facility, and a Rhode Island National Guard facility. Access to the base from within Newport is available through Gate 17 on Training Station Road.

Between the naval station and the rest of the city lies former farm land that became twentieth century light industrial and retail strip development. The City's incinerator was located in a wetland in this area, and is now home to a waste transfer station, the City's public works facility, and a vacant former casino. The City's sewage treatment plant and Rhode Island Department of Transportation and Rhode Island Public Transit Authority maintenance facilities are also located in this neighborhood. Care should be taken to prevent additional unsavory uses from being established in this neighborhood. The Community College of Rhode Island has a campus in this neighborhood as well.

There have been multiple planning endeavors, some decades in the making, that are finally being realized in this neighborhood. Most impactful on the city's urban form, the Newport Pell Bridge realignment is nearing completion. Once completed, the intent is for excess lands to be transferred to the city for redevelopment pursuant to The North End Urban Plan (NEUP). The NEUP, incorporated by reference into this Comprehensive Plan, was completed in 2020. This plan provides a road map for future economic development. Compatible Zoning amendments that implement the North End Urban Plan have been adopted. The census tract that includes this neighborhood was designated an Opportunity Zone in 2018. The state's Transportation Master Plan secures this neighborhood as a hub for Transit Oriented Development (TOD). The NEUP creates the vision for the development of an urban village in this neighborhood. Continued state and federal support for the city's vision for this neighborhood will secure its achievement.

## NORTH END RESIDENTIAL

The North End Residential Neighborhood is directly east of the North End Commercial Neighborhood, along Newport's northern border, and adjacent to Middletown. The neighborhood consists of inner-ring suburban-style housing and a large park, Miantonomi Memorial Park. There is ample open space at this park, but some of the park is not owned by the City and could face development proposals, reducing much needed city open space. This park is a part of Newport's long and rich history. The land that the park is situated on originally was owned by the Narragansett Native American Tribe. The park is named after the Tribe's Chief, Chief Miantonomi. The park is also home to the Memorial Tower, built in 1929 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Rhode Island, a major Revolutionary War battle.

The North End Residential neighborhood is home to the city's sole public elementary school. The North End Residential neighborhood also includes several areas of public housing. These areas provide a mix of affordable rental and for-sale housing. Recent rehabilitations of the dated public housing are award winning and exemplary affordable housing. These types of projects should be supported as they are undertaken.

If developed as the attractive twenty-first century urban village envisioned, the North End Commercial neighborhood could promote higher property values in the adjacent North End Residential neighborhood. The North End Urban Plan provides additional detail regarding the North End Residential neighborhood area. Care should be taken to stabilize this neighborhood and community to limit displacement as adjacent areas are redeveloped. Higher intensity zoning in line with the existing housing patterns in this neighborhood is supported.

## OCEAN DRIVE

The Ocean Drive neighborhood forms the western edge of Newport Neck, a peninsula on Newport's southwest edge that juts westward like Italy's southern boot. This neighborhood is named for Ocean Avenue, a picturesque oceanfront drive laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and Narragansett Bay. This neighborhood consists mostly of multi-acre residential and open space uses. Within the neighborhood are the two state parks and a small state beach with no facilities—Fort Adams State Park, Brenton Point State Park, and King's Beach. Fort Adams is a military facility established in 1799 and is now home to the annual Newport Folk and Jazz Festivals. The State of Rhode Island completed upgrades to the pier located at Fort Adams State Park in 2015, which now hosts sailing events, including a stop on the Volvo Ocean Race. Newport Country Club is in this neighborhood and has hosted PGA events. The Hamilton Estate maintains hereditary farming techniques, supported by the Smithsonian Institution.

Ocean Drive's remoteness makes it a poor location for year-round housing. Indeed, flood maps show complete isolation during a high water event. Historic estates and large institutions limit housing development in this neighborhood, with the added challenge of private water and sewer. Large-lot zoning limits development in this neighborhood and could be enhanced. Like Bellevue Avenue, the neighborhood is home to a number of large-scale multi-unit housing complexes. Future opportunities in less exposed locations should be taken advantage of when possible.

## OLD BEACH

The Old Beach Neighborhood is located in central Newport, and functions primarily as a residential neighborhood. Old Beach also has a few institutional draws, such as the St. Michael's School, the Newport Art Museum, and the historical Redwood Library & Athenæum within its boundaries. As such, the neighborhood is almost entirely within the Historic District. The Redwood Library & Athenæum is the oldest lending library in America and holds more than 160,000 volumes. The library gets its name from its founder, Andrew Redwood.

This centrally located neighborhood, with access to Memorial Boulevard and Kay Street, is an ideal location for additional housing development although a portion of the neighborhood may be within the sensitive Eustis Pond watershed.

## THE POINT

The Point (previously known as Easton's Point, which is also a neighborhood in the adjoining town of Middletown) runs along Narragansett Bay directly north of Long Wharf and Downtown. The neighborhood is defined by the Bay on the west, Route 138 to the north, Farewell Street to the east and Gladys Carr Bolhouse Road to the south. The area is "buffered" to the east by the rail line and the cemetery. Land use in the neighborhood at present is almost exclusively residential, although there are a few small scale tourist commercial uses.

The Point has experienced multiple demographic and socio-economic shifts over the centuries. Planned as a Friends (Quaker) neighborhood, streets are oriented on a rectilinear grid of consistent width, much different from Newport's other cart-path neighborhoods. The neighborhood was home to a robust furniture-making industry pre-

Revolutionary War. The Point suffered rise and decline in several forms over the centuries since. Grand Victorian homes were added to this neighborhood during the Gilded Age. Some houses were relocated here to make room for Memorial Boulevard and America's Cup Avenue. Like many neighborhoods in Newport, during economic decline, large houses were converted to multifamily units. Today The Point has become one of Newport's most-desirable neighborhoods and the trend is reversed; The Point is losing housing units as developers expand single-family house uses for seasonal residents. Residents now identify the neighborhood as a genteel residential one, despite its working industrial past.

Hunter House, located on the water in the Point, is a National Historic Landmark and features furniture of the colonial era made by the renowned Townsend-Goddard family. The Point is also home to five parks, Arnold Park, Battery Park, John J. Martins Memorial Park, Storer Park and Ellery Park. Battery Park was built in 1877 on land previously used by Fort Greene. Storer Park is a waterfront park located south of the Hunter House. The land the park now occupies was previously owned by the Storer family until they willed the land to become a park for mothers and children.

Much of The Point is located within the floodplain and is expected to be impacted the most by sea level rise in the immediate future. Assuming the low-lying areas can be managed, this is an excellent location for additional housing.

## ROSE ISLAND

In the middle of East Passage, between Newport and Jamestown, lies Rose Island. This neighborhood also includes Gull Rocks, a former light station in-between Rose Island and Coasters Island, and Newport Pell Bridge, the iconic suspension bridge that connects Newport to Conanicut Island. These largely undeveloped bay islands are natural resources and scenic icons enjoyed by Newport residents and visitors. Newport Pell Bridge is the most identifiable symbol of Newport and care must be taken to preserve its historic integrity and scenic beauty.

Rose Island is an 18 acre island, one mile into Narragansett Bay. The island is home to the Rose Island Lighthouse and museum as well as a wildlife refuge. The lighthouse is in operating condition and is open for visitors from July 1 to Labor Day. The Rose Island Lighthouse was built in 1869 and renovated in 1984. Pomham Rocks Lighthouse in East Providence is of the same design. The Rose Island Lighthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

# APPENDIX B

## NEWPORT HOUSING BUILDOUT ANALYSIS

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- Residential Units Per Parcel
- Accessory Dwelling Units
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- Newport Has Great Capacity
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- Strategy 1- Reduce Minimum Lot Sizes and Maximum Lot Coverage
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# HOUSING BUILDOUT INTRODUCTION

## OVERVIEW

From the American Planning Association “Buildout Analysis: A Valuable Planning and Hazard Mitigation Tool:

*...THE BASIC PURPOSE OF BUILDOUT ANALYSIS IS TO TRANSLATE TECHNICAL PLANNING AND REGULATORY MATERIALS (SUCH AS ZONING) INTO A LONG RANGE GROWTH PICTURE OR SCENARIO THAT CAN BE UNDERSTOOD BY LOCAL DECISION MAKERS TO HELP THEM EVALUATE POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND DISCUSS POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES...*

Libra Planners has undertaken a Housing Buildout Analysis as part of Libra’s engagement with Newport, through Rhode Island Housing’s Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP). The purpose of the MTAP program is to support the study of municipal regulations that may hinder the creation of additional housing and to promote regulatory changes in service of easing the current housing crisis.

## BUILDOUT ESSENTIALS

A buildout analysis is a study of development potentials that can be used to inform planning. Buildouts begin with an assessment of existing conditions. Once existing conditions have been considered, a study area should be defined. Constrained lands are generally excluded from the study area. Constrained lands include open space and conservation lands, as well as areas that are undevelopable due to extreme natural conditions such as steep slopes or wetlands. A buildout analysis targets

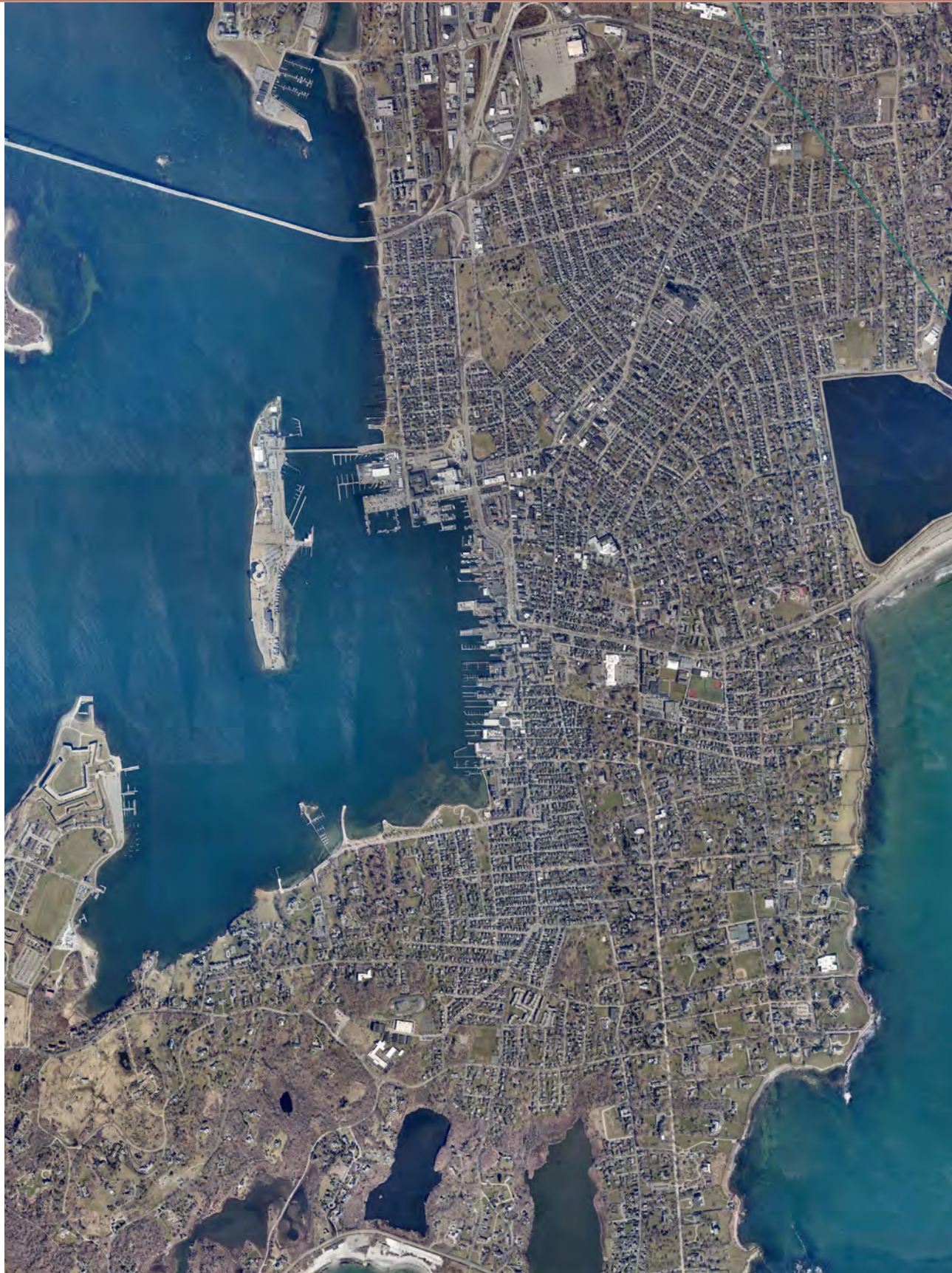


Figure 1 - Aerial View of Newport

developable land and begins with the basic question “How much growth can a city sustain, within the current regulatory framework?” The Newport Study Area shows unconstrained lands targeted for additional housing.

In Newport, there is little undeveloped buildable land. There is however much underdeveloped land. Underdeveloped lands include areas such as single family houses with large yards. There are also surprising swaths of underdeveloped land in the city core. For example, in the city center to the south of Memorial Boulevard are many lots that exceed the present zoning lot size restrictions. There is also abundant surface parking. These areas may be fertile ground for additional construction. This Buildout Analysis takes existing conditions into consideration and proposes strategies which are aimed at creating additional housing as it considers the planning implications of these strategies.

This study projects an idealized housing scenario that has both merits and detractions for community services and infrastructure. Libra Planners has worked with Newport’s Housing Working Group to consider the full panoply of regulatory tools and the implications of using such tools.

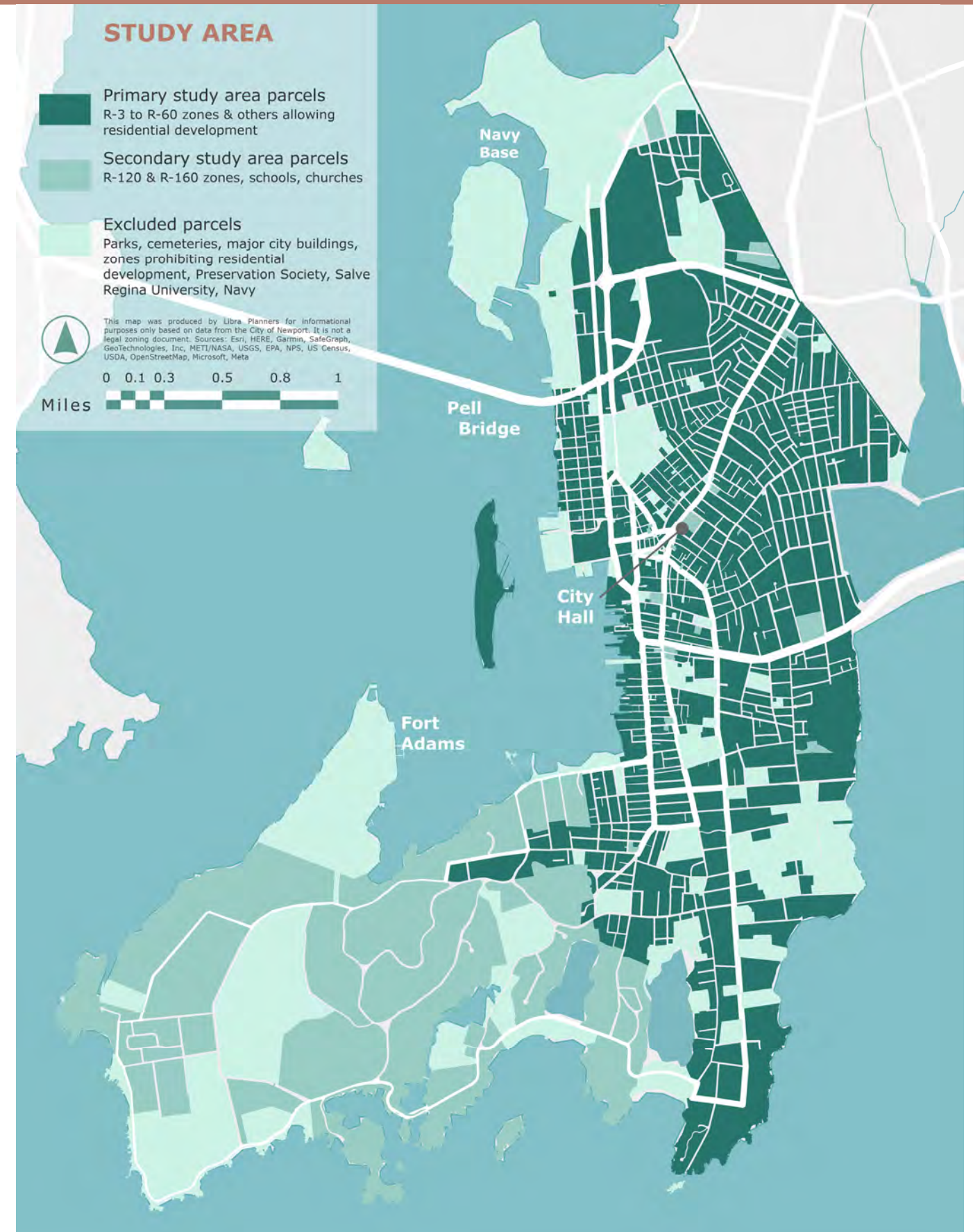


Figure 2 - Newport Study Area

## NEWPORT'S HOUSING GOALS

Buildout analyses are ideally suited to communities experiencing rapid growth or dwindling supply. They are less suitable for communities that seek to protect large areas of conservation land. Newport's housing crisis certainly meets the qualification of dwindling supply. Newport hopes to deploy a regulatory regime that meets the housing unit needs projected in the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Housing Update; 1,595 units within the next 30 years. This study identifies approaches that balance residents' needs with desired community goals, such as maintaining open space and adequately planning for hazards including sea level rise. It also identifies the pronounced need for middle income or "missing middle" housing. To align with MTAP goals and to improve housing availability in Newport, recommendations should be considered by City leadership.

DRAFT

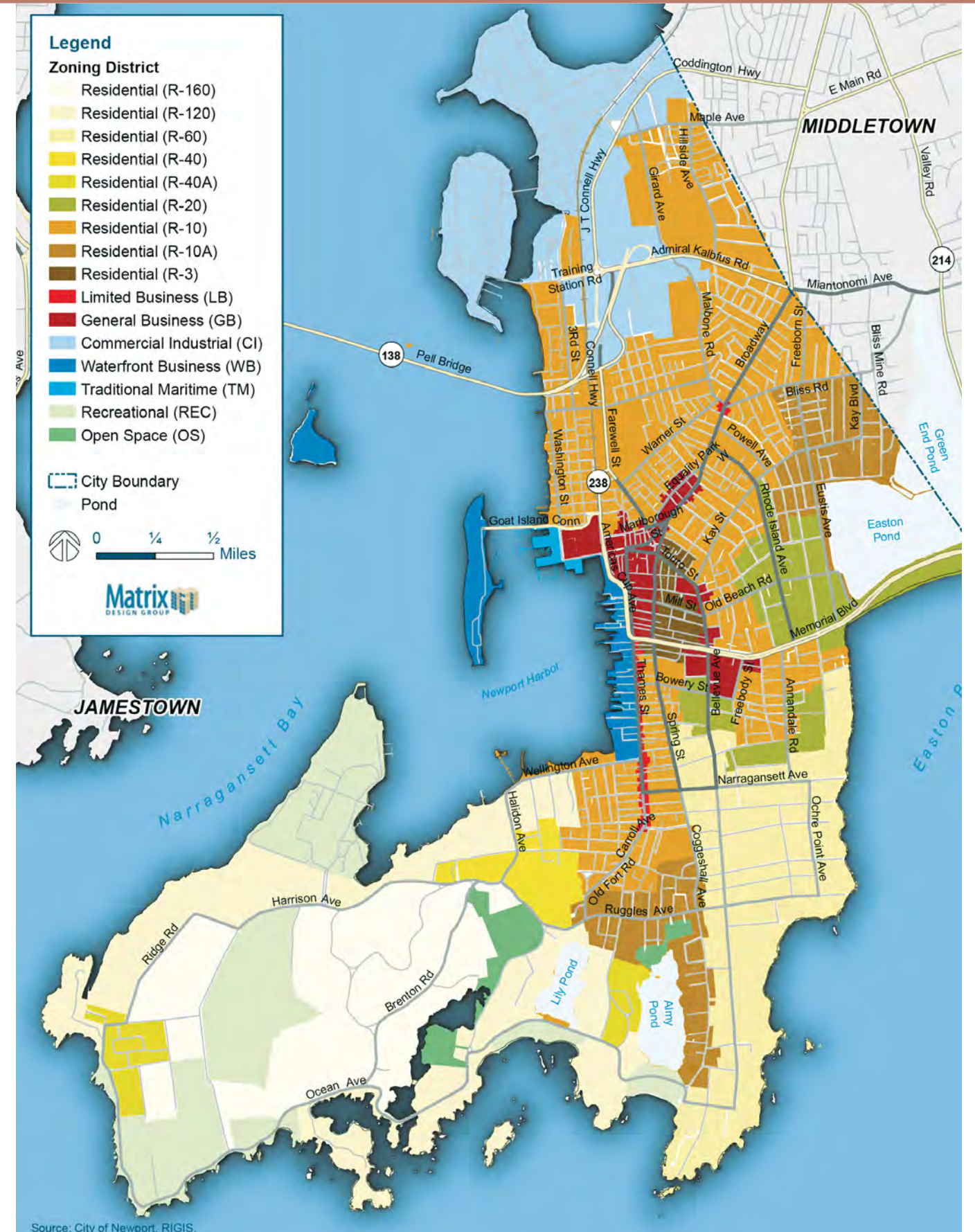


Figure 3 - Zoning Map From 2017 Newport Comprehensive Plan

# EXISTING CONDITIONS

## DYNAMIC URBAN REALITY

It is often stated that well-established historic cities such as Newport are already “built out” and therefore future growth is greatly constrained. This view neglects the dynamic nature of urban evolution. It also fails to recognize the role of technical planning and regulations in positively altering the shape of the city. Buildout analyses serve the idea that municipal planning empowers civic leadership to intentionally shape the future of a community. It may surprise many that in present day Newport there are still opportunities to subdivide properties and construct new housing in a manner that is entirely consistent with existing land use and with historic land use patterns. Moreover, changes to existing regulations may accelerate and augment the creation of new housing. The existing zoning map reflects Newport’s special characteristics, ranging from semi-rural estates in the south, to a dense waterfront urban core, to “suburban” newer development in the northeast and military and industrial uses in the north.

## URBAN RENEWAL AND SURFACE PARKING

There is substantial surface parking in the city center and much of this vacant land results from the ill-conceived urban renewal of the 20th century. Surface parking is inappropriate in urban settings and it is another area where Newport’s zoning regulations are misaligned with historic development patterns. Onerous parking minimums and low land tax rates contribute to the expansion of surface parking. In order to increase development opportunities for housing, Newport should change the parking requirements in its zoning ordinance and explore a land value tax, as opposed to the existing tax system that relies on taxing improvements. These changes can ameliorate existing urban economic development concerns and promote additional housing at the same time.

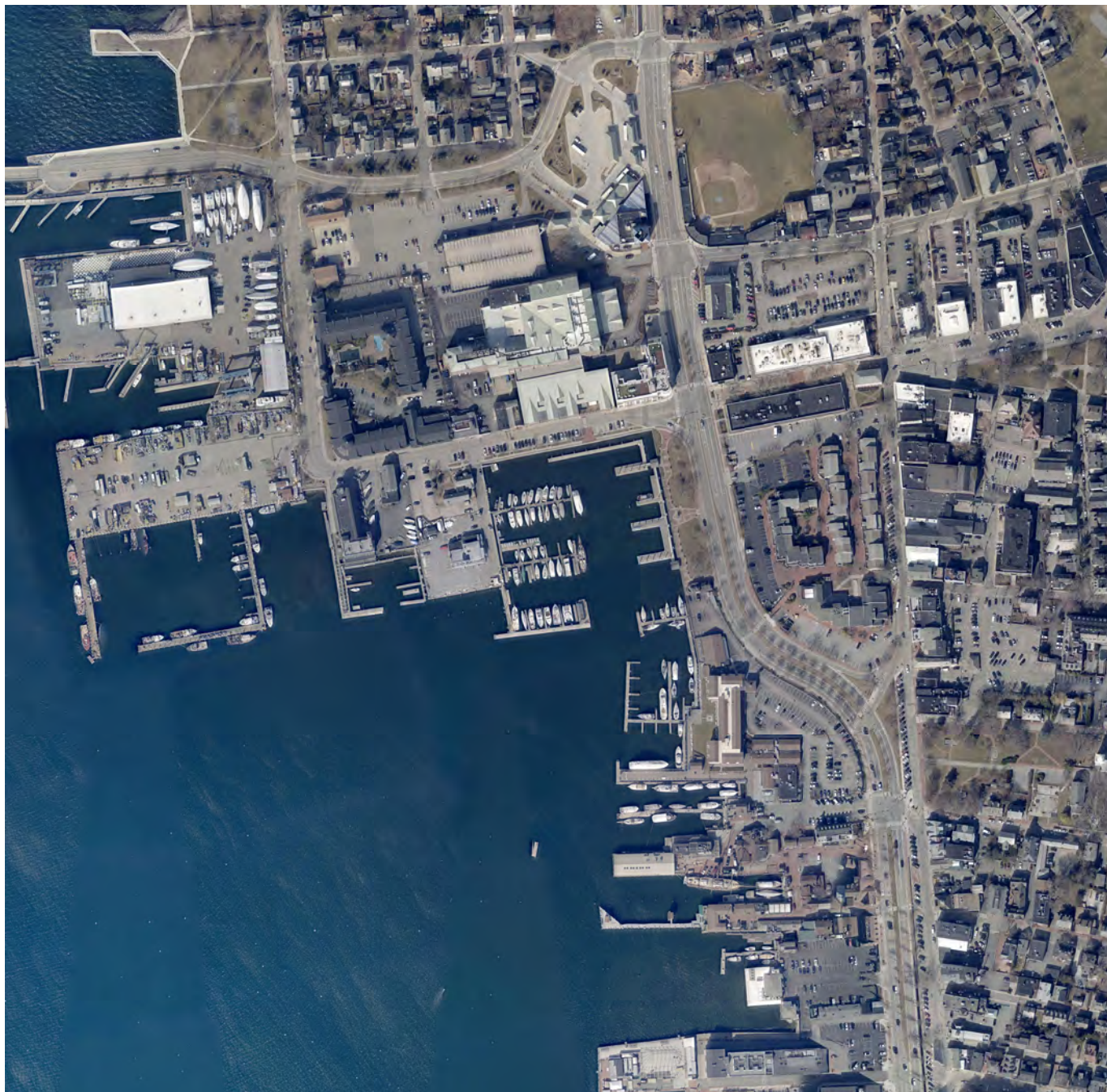


Figure 4 - Aerial View of Surface Parking

Zone	Permitted By Right Uses	Min Lot Size (sq. ft.)	Max Lot Coverage	Density - current code
R-3	One & 2-family dwellings	3,000	45%	<3000 sf single fam only; 5000 sf for new 2-fam or multi-fam (1500 sf/unit)
R-10	One & 2-family dwellings	10,000	20%	<10,000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion if >5,000 sf lot that existed before 1977
R-10A	Single-family dwellings	10,000	20%	Single-fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed if over 10k sf lot that existed before 1977
R-20	One & 2-family dwellings	20,000	15%	<20,000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed if >10,000 sf lot that existed before 1977
R-40	One & 2-family dwellings	40,000	15%	<40,000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed if >20,000 sf lot that existed before 1977
R-40A	Single-family dwellings	40,000	10%	Single-fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed if over 20k sf lot that existed before 1977
R-60	One & 2-family dwellings	60,000	10%	<60,000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed if >40,000 sf lot that existed before 1977
R-120	One & 2-family dwellings	120,000	8%	<120,000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed if >40,000 sf lot that existed before 1977
R-160	One & 2-family dwellings	160,000	6%	<160,000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed if >80,000 sf lot that existed before 1977
LB	One & 2-family dwellings & some business	3,000	50%	<5000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed on lot that existed before 1977
WB	One & 2-family dwellings & some business	5,000	40%	<5000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed on lot that existed before 1977
GB	One & 2-family dwellings & general business	5,000	40%	<5000 sf lot single fam only; 2-fam conversion allowed on lot that existed before 1977
CI	Commercial Industrial	10,000	50%	No residential allowed
UV	Urban Village (complex reqmts) incl multifam	5,000	100%	up to 35% residential/50% if workforce
MK	Maker	10,000	100%	No residential allowed
MT	Maker-Tech	10,000	100%	up to 35% live-work, 50% live-work if 50% workforce
TM	Traditional Maritime	10,000	40%	No residential allowed

**Table 1 - Newport Zoning Table**

*THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL SURFACE PARKING IN THE CITY CENTER AND MUCH OF THIS VACANT LAND RESULTS FROM THE ILL-CONCEIVED URBAN RENEWAL OF THE 20TH CENTURY.*

## NON-CONFORMING PROPERTIES

Over 80% of Newport properties are nonconforming to their current zoning. This means the physical dimensions of many properties, including setbacks and lot coverage, do not comport with the rules of zoning that govern them. Newport is an extreme example of a city in which the dimensional regulations are out of alignment with the built environment. Over the years, Newport has developed a culture of permitting development that is inconsistent with its zoning regulations. Many who seek alterations to their property must obtain permission in the form of variances and special permits to achieve goals that might otherwise be permitted by right in a more appropriate regulatory scheme. In other words, Newport regularly allows residents to break the rules of zoning (rules that sometimes make no sense) to develop consistently with the city's existing urban fabric because these rules are foreign to existing conditions.

The excess of nonconforming properties is antithetical to planning best practices and it undermines municipal planning in general. Furthermore, it burdens residents and developers with costly regulatory oversight. It also burdens applicants and city officials with lengthy and expensive appeals. This is the kind of regulatory burden that many communities have chosen to eliminate; yet in Newport it thrives. Newport's regulatory scheme must match its development objectives or it will not achieve planning goals. Regarding the application of legal standards on proposed development, predictability is the most necessary element for successful future development. Continuing to emphasize discretionary reviews and public hearings greatly reduces the amount of predictability in the process. In the future, this may cause development to languish and Newport's housing crisis to deepen.

Most striking is the map depicting Nonconforming Lots according to Lot Coverage (Fig. 6). Compare this map with the aerial photograph

in Fig. 1. In general the photograph shows a dense early 20th century city where houses are thickly settled. From observation we can confirm that these residential areas exist today without disease, squalor and blight. Indeed, the aerial photograph depicts a dense, walkable urban fabric; the kind of fabric that planners seek to emulate everywhere to promote economic development and improved quality of life. Meanwhile, the map shows much housing development out of compliance with its current set of regulations. Not only does this zoning pose a cost and inconvenience to property owners, it undermines the very reason people choose to live in Newport by promoting suburban style development in an urban core. The Nonconforming Lots according to Lot Size map is also instructive in that it points to policy changes that could build upon Newport's positive urban attributes while seeking to mitigate the housing shortage. Such changes could include creating smaller minimum lot sizes and/or increasing by-right density such as two-family dwellings.

## OVER-ZONING

In many ways Newport zoning is an artifact of archaic planning practices. Historically, the urban slums of the early 20th century prompted zealous regulatory responses nationwide. In an effort to promote health, cities sought to create less dense, more “airy” environments. Many places were consequently “over-zoned”, where regulations called for harmful density restrictions, based on an ideal of low-density suburban land use. This caused fissures in both urban and social fabric. The early 20th century point of view, focused on public health and biased against cities, did not anticipate the loss of community and culture that would arise from decongestion. Early 20th century zoning, fraught with anti-urban, anti-poverty and anti-ethnic sentiment and fueled by waves of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe as well as urban migration of Southern blacks, is an unfortunate existing condition in Newport. Adding to the planning challenges of this inherited condition, Newport has an unusually wide planning transect that spans urban and rural environments. While there are many opportunities to improve Newport housing through changes to existing zoning, this endeavor is not without difficulty and must be undertaken with great care.

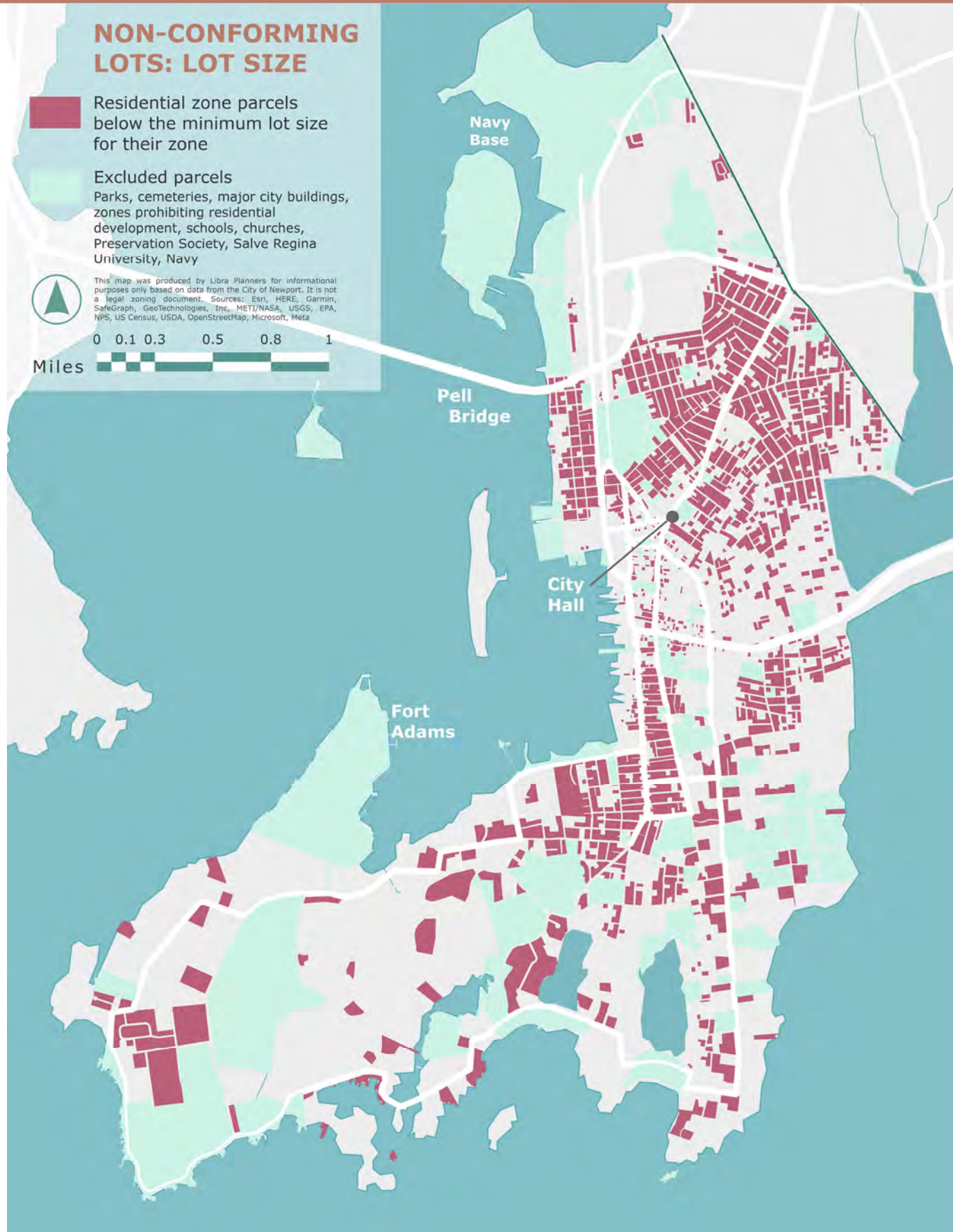


Figure 5 - Map of Nonconforming Properties in Newport According to Lot Size

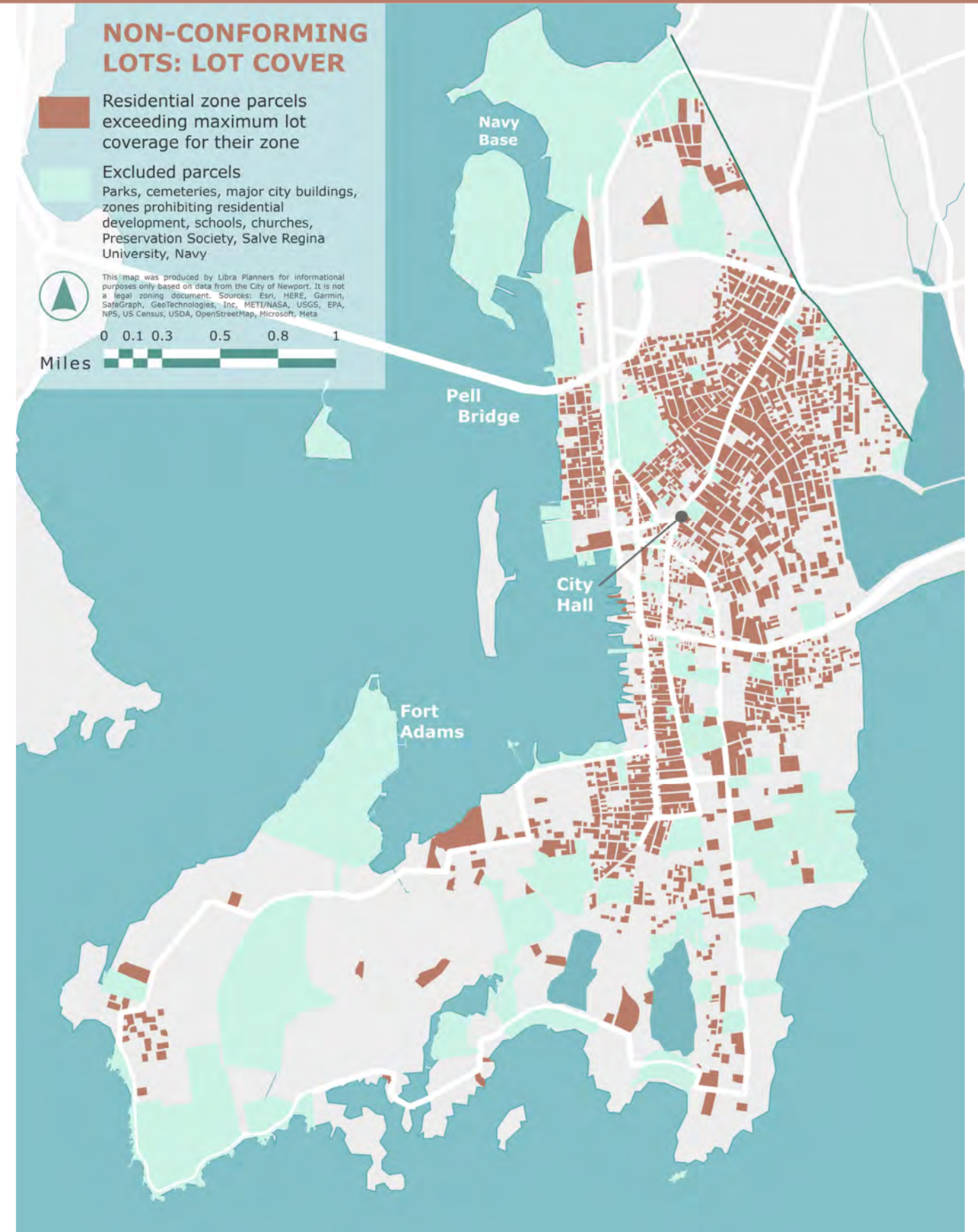


Figure 6 - Map of Nonconforming Properties in Newport According to Lot Coverage

## RHODE ISLAND GENERAL LAW (RIGL) ON SUBSTANDARD LOTS

The Rhode Island State Legislature recognizes that an excess of nonconforming properties can slow down the approvals process, and deter, defer or inhibit housing development. In 2023 the state passed bill H6059 permitting development by-right on substandard (i.e. nonconforming) lots (in other words, lots that existed prior to the passage of the zoning ordinance that established lot dimensional regulations in Newport). According to the new law, setback requirements need not conform to existing zoning. Rather, setback requirements may decrease proportionally, with the size of the substandard lot. Newport has created a substandard lots calculator to assist property owners in understanding the new rules for set-backs and lot coverage. However, the state legislature's new approach to substandard lots could create unintended consequences resulting in setback irregularity on a street or very small setbacks.

Zoning codes generally provide different minimum lot sizes per zone. In theory, lot sizes should reflect existing conditions and should promote compatible future development. Lot sizes, setbacks and lot coverage should be intentional. Dimensional regulations are used to create a future physical environment with spatial patterns that are desired by the community. Dimensional regulation is especially critical in historic contexts. Newport is a city with intact historic urban land-use patterns. Newport zoning should augment historic preservation by maintaining setback and lot coverage patterns that are intrinsic to the historic fabric.

The lot calculator as conceived by the state is a crude instrument,

providing insufficient zoning finesse in critical contexts. To counter this effect, Newport could eliminate existing minimum lot sizes, while maintaining existing setback requirements for substandard lots. This approach could maintain desired setbacks, promote smaller lot coverage, and lead to smaller footprints and smaller (and therefore inherently more affordable) houses. This approach couples historic preservation with affordable housing best practices.

*NEWPORT IS A CITY WITH INTACT HISTORIC URBAN LAND-USE PATTERNS. NEWPORT ZONING SHOULD AUGMENT HISTORIC PRESERVATION BY MAINTAINING SETBACK AND LOT COVERAGE PATTERNS THAT ARE INTRINSIC TO THE HISTORIC FABRIC.*

## NEWPORT LOT SIZE STATISTICS BY ZONE

A histogram is a graph that shows the frequency of numerical data. The height of a rectangle (the vertical axis) represents the distribution frequency of a variable (the amount, or how often that variable appears). The histograms in Fig. 7 describe lot size distribution by zone in Newport. These graphs could be useful in projecting future zoning that is better suited to existing residential properties.

For example, zone R3, which has a minimum lot size of 3000 s.f., has a preponderance of properties clustered in the 2,000 - 3,000 SF lot range (Fig. 7). This result shows that the standards of the R3 zone govern an area with many properties below the 3,000 SF minimum lot size standard. Zone R10 tells a more extreme story. The histogram shows a large portion of lots falling between 2,000 and 6,000 SF. Almost all of the properties in this zone fall short of the 10,000 SF standard. This would suggest that an intermediary zone may be useful. Zone R10A, which prohibits 2-family dwellings, is somewhat (though not completely) better suited to its standards. Zone R20 has many lots over the standard. Meanwhile, zone R40 clearly serves as a transition to the large lots, rather than an appropriate governing tool for the numerous 4,000 to 20,000 SF lots.

The purpose of a minimum lot size is to restrict building density and subdivision. Zoning standards that better reflect existing lot sizes promote development pattern continuity. There is also a social benefit to appropriate lot size standards. In the Newport context, smaller lots yield smaller, and thus more affordable housing. Smaller lots generally promote walkability and desirable small scale urban density. Smaller lots conserve municipal infrastructure, and promote energy conservation. Purposeful and intentional zoning reform will go a long way to solving multiple problems simultaneously, not least of which is more housing opportunity.

*SMALLER LOTS GENERALLY PROMOTE WALKABILITY AND DESIRABLE SMALL SCALE URBAN DENSITY. SMALLER LOTS CONSERVE MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE, AND PROMOTE ENERGY CONSERVATION. PURPOSEFUL AND INTENTIONAL ZONING REFORM WILL GO A LONG WAY TO SOLVING MULTIPLE PROBLEMS SIMULTANEOUSLY, NOT LEAST OF WHICH IS MORE HOUSING OPPORTUNITY.*



Figure 7 - Histograms of lot sizes by zone

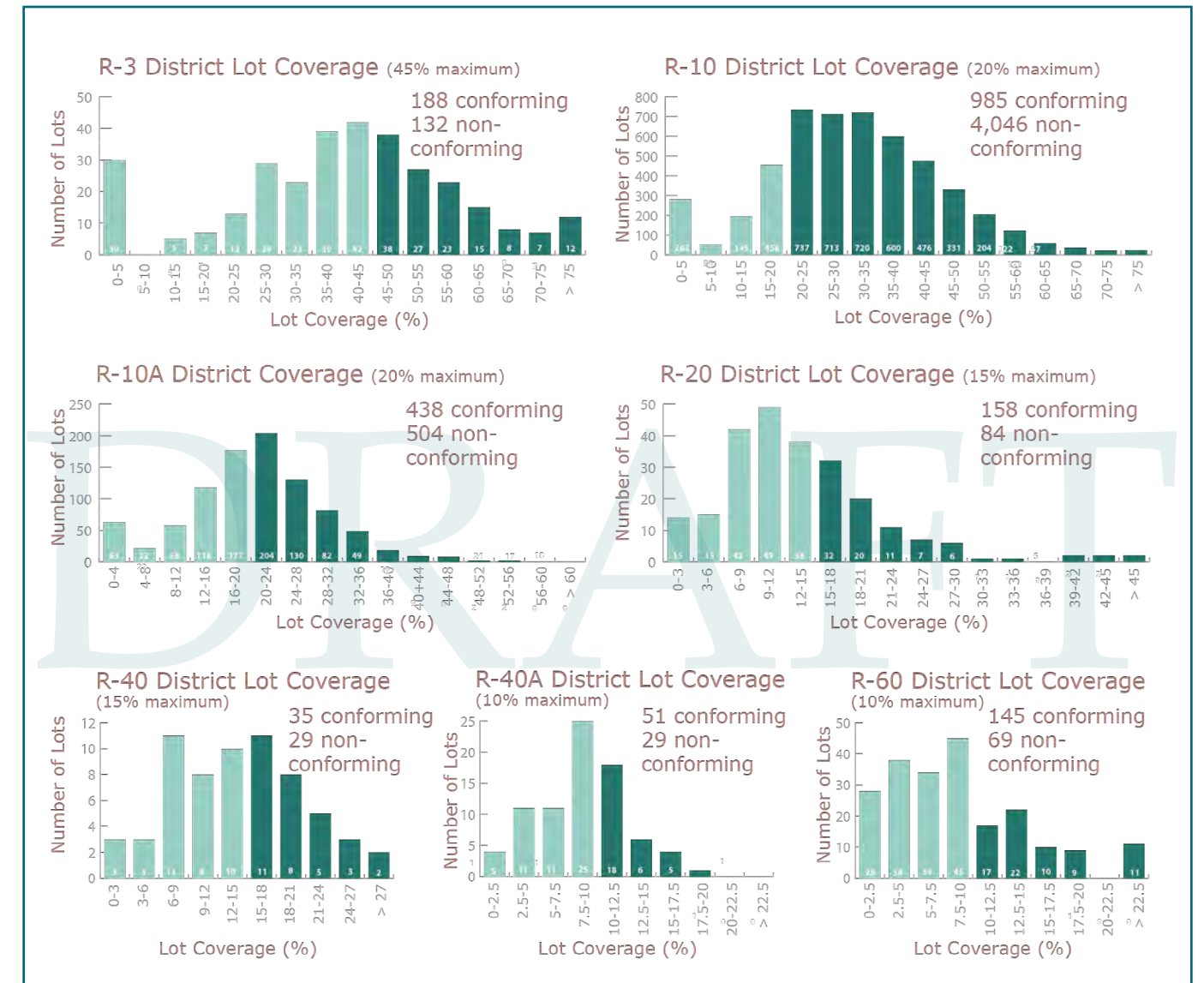


Figure 8 - Histograms of lot coverage by zone

Current Regulations			Actual Median Conditions		% Currently Conforming	
Zone	Min Lot Size (sq. ft.)	Max Lot Cover	Lot Size (sq. ft.)	Lot Cover	Conforming by size	Conforming by coverage
R-3	3,000	45%	3,294	42%	57%	59%
R-10	10,000	20%	4,517	31%	11%	20%
R-10A	10,000	20%	7,805	21%	30%	46%
R-20	20,000	15%	20,973	13%	57%	65%
R-40	40,000	15%	16,354	14%	22%	55%
R-40A	40,000	10%	22,176	9%	30%	64%
R-60	60,000	10%	57,916	8%	48%	68%

Table 2 - Existing Lot Statistics

*NEWPORT COULD ENCOURAGE OR INCENTIVIZE AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TAX BREAKS AND OTHER MEASURES.*

### UNDERUTILIZED LOTS

Underutilized lots are those parcels with very small buildings, such as garages. The Underutilized Lots map shows a surprising number of underutilized properties scattered throughout the city, with heavy concentrations in the North End. While most of these properties are privately owned, and many owners may wish to keep their property vacant, Newport could encourage or incentivise affordable housing development through tax breaks and other measures. A land tax may also spur development. Many of the vacant lots in the North End present intersecting opportunities, where mixed-use, vacant land, transit and commercial activity coalesce. This is the low hanging fruit for future development (Fig. 9).

### UNDERBUILT LOTS

The Underbuilt Lots map shows lots that are more than twice as large as the minimum and with less than half the lot coverage maximum in that zone. Some of these may be subdividable, or be appropriate for multi-family development. They are scattered throughout the city, with concentrations in the North End, in the urban core and in Ochre Point. However, there are competing interests in some of these areas which should discourage future development of many of the lots. Both the Salve Regina adjacent properties and Ochre Point properties are located on the Cliff Walk, and are subject to rigorous local and state historic oversight. The Cliff Walk, both a cultural asset and a major tourist destination, is an economic engine for the city and the state. It is culturally defined by estate character which includes large lots and expansive vistas. In Ochre Point the mandates for historic and economic preservation outweigh the need for affordable housing. Conversely, the city should encourage the development of subdividable lots in the city center; coupling the opportunity to remake damaged urban fabric with the creation of additional housing (Fig. 10).

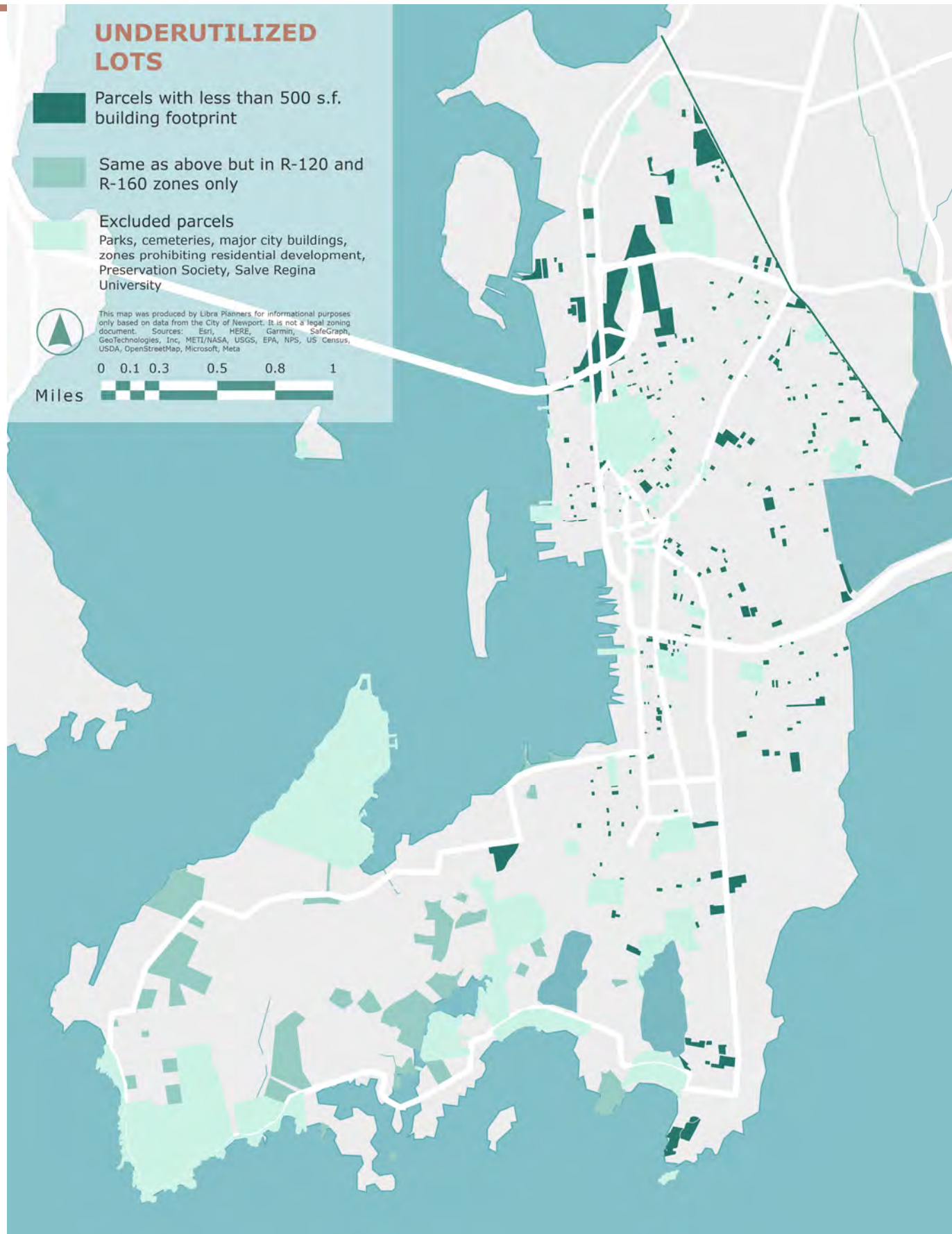


Figure 9 - Underutilized lots

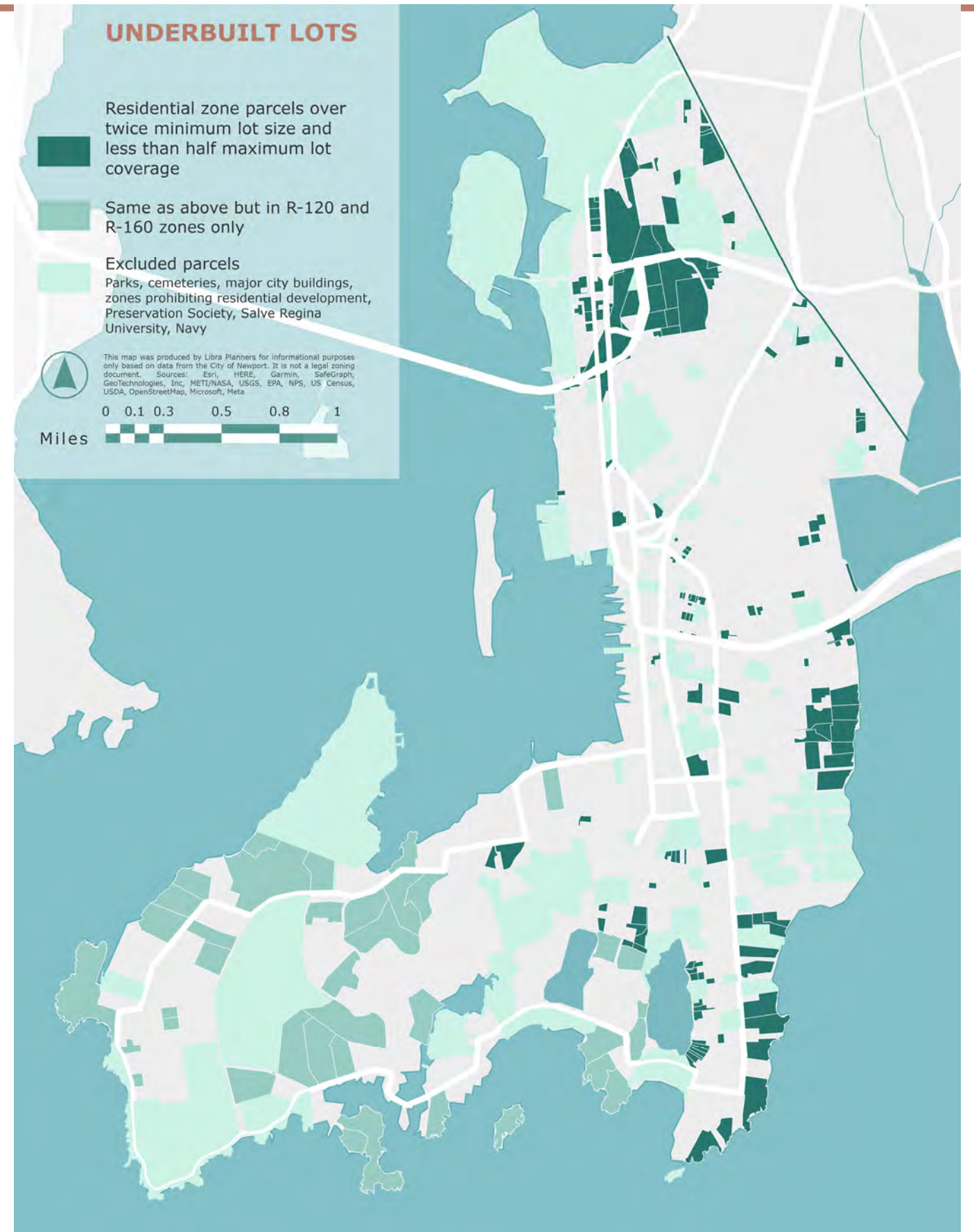


Figure 10 - Underbuilt lots

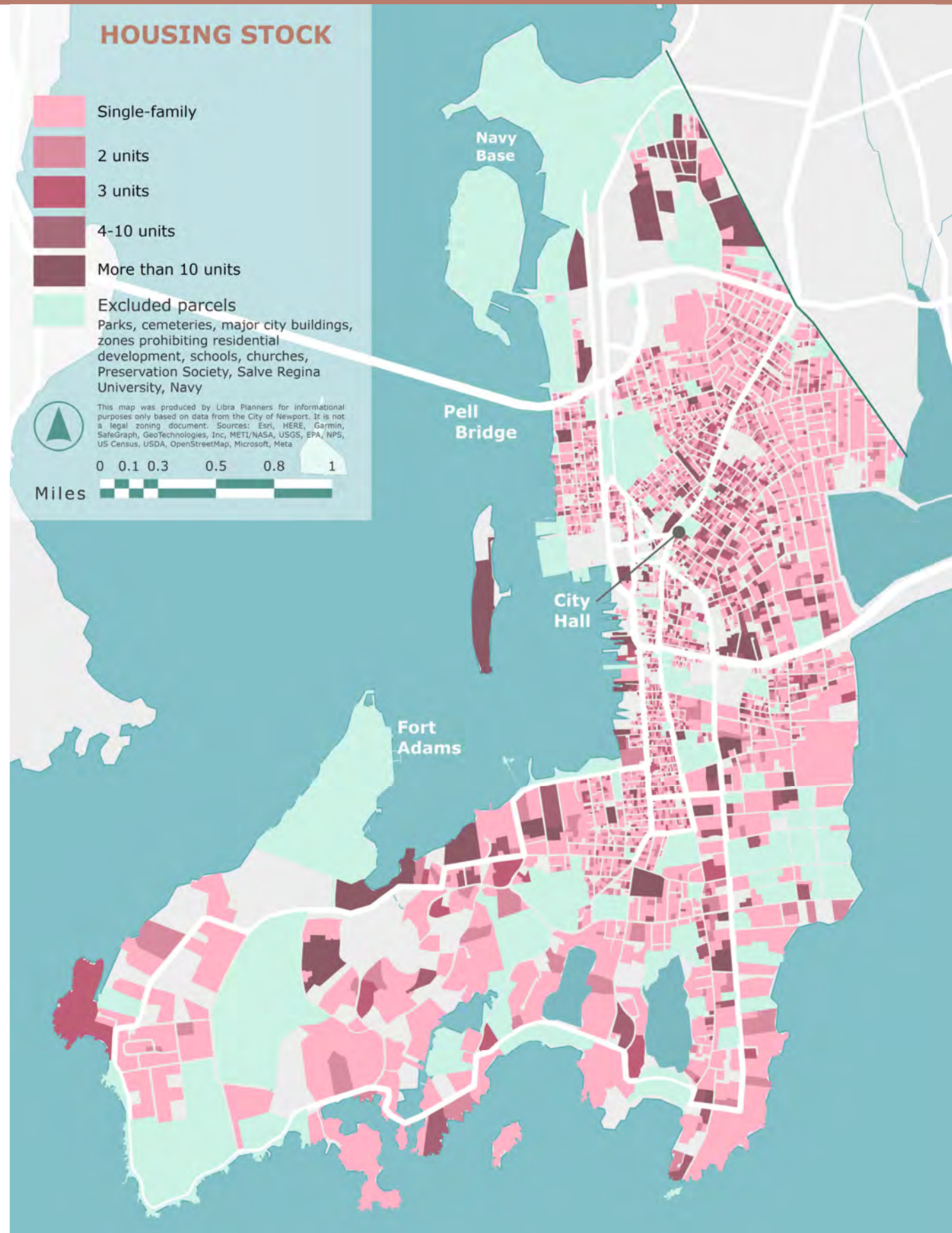


Figure 11- Housing Stock map

### RESIDENTIAL UNITS PER PARCEL

Fig. 11 shows the distribution of housing units in Newport by residential units per parcel. Specifically, the map illustrates the locations of existing multi-unit housing. While most of the housing units in Newport are in multifamily buildings, most of the parcels are devoted to single family houses (Fig. 12). Single family buildings are the iconic residential architecture that people strongly associate with a sense of home. Many of these houses were once converted to multifamily residences, or functioned as boarding houses, or were mixed-use. Many have been re-converted to single-family houses. Today, two-family and multi-family dwellings are present all over the city and well distributed throughout the various residential zones.

### ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) also exist throughout the city. Historically ADUs in Newport have been limited to family members. The available data on ADUs, however, is not sufficiently accurate to locate the areas and zones that are home to the highest number of ADUs. Newport also maintains a process of permitting “home occupations”. Under this use, homeowners may rent two rooms of a house. Home occupations may include shared facilities such as kitchens. Home occupations are a use type for residential zones that essentially permit commercial uses throughout Newport’s residential zones. This further complicates the counting of housing units and types. While state law has broadly enabled ADUs, not all communities and not all homeowners are quick to take advantage of this provision. It is not yet known if widely permitted ADUs will make a significant contribution to housing availability.

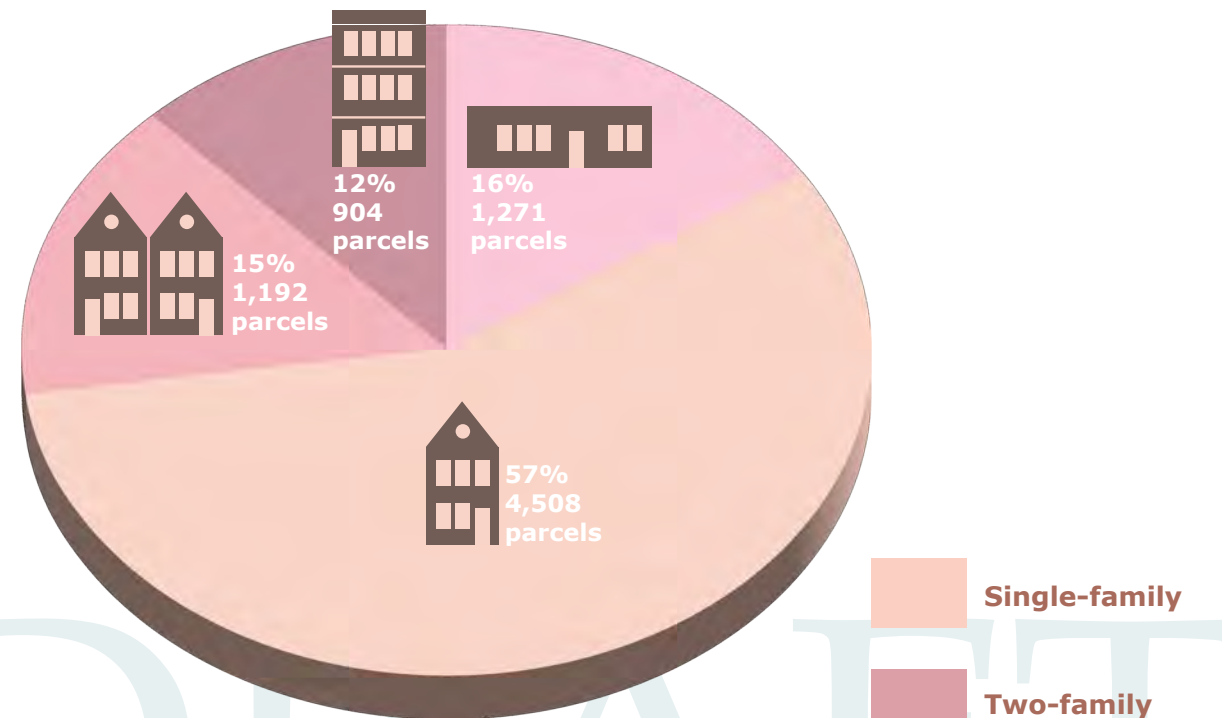


Figure 12A - Chart showing housing types by parcel

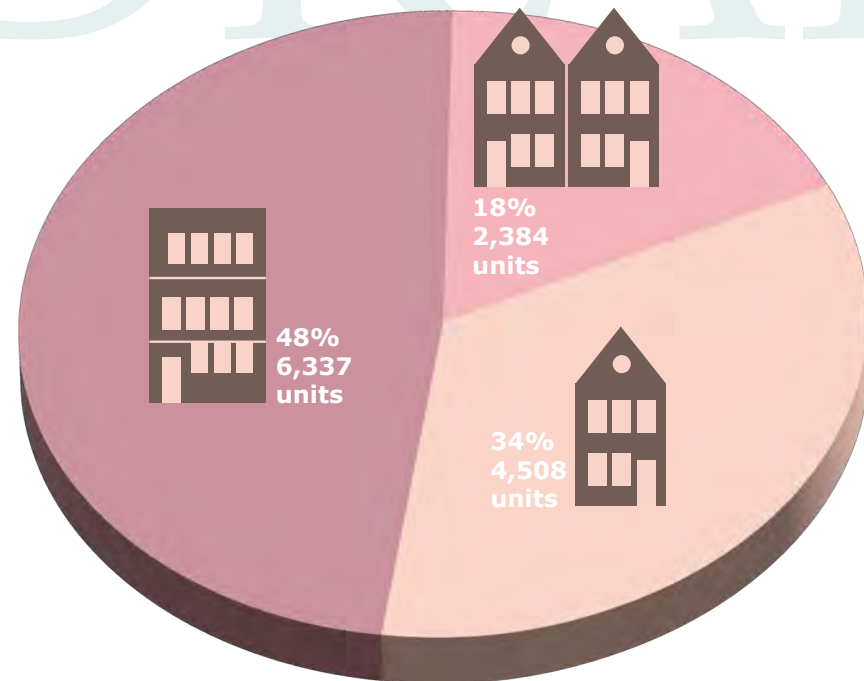


Figure 12B - Chart showing units by housing type



Aerial view of Newport Green, multifamily “missing middle” housing.

## MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING

There are two main existing locations for large multi-family housing. Large swaths are clustered in the city's North End, often in deed-restricted low-and-moderate-income housing complexes. Surprisingly, many multifamily dwellings also exist in Newport Neck, particularly the stretch of land on the southern edge of the harbor that was once home to sprawling estates. Many of these buildings have been converted to condominiums or luxury apartments. This housing has a high second home market value due to the proximity to scenic assets. Access to this part of the city is hampered during summer months. This makes commuting to and from the southern end of Newport difficult for working residents. Also, the value of these properties remains high, and inaccessible to middle income residents. For these reasons, it is not recommended that properties outside of Newport's urban core south of Memorial Boulevard be utilized for additional affordable or even "missing middle" units.

## NEWPORT HOUSING QUALITY

Newport houses are some of the most desirable in the region. While many houses are old and some in disrepair, most houses were built with high quality materials and construction. Indeed, many of the houses were built before the turn of the 20th century. Similarly, Newport contains the largest selection of 18th century wood houses in the country. With old growth lumber and excellent (if anachronistic) craftsmanship, the old houses are worthy of repair. Restoration of historic houses has persisted in Newport for over fifty years and it continues to boost the local economy. Though this is not without cost. The beautiful, high quality and newly maintained houses command high prices. A tourism economy may not provide current Newport residents with the income required to purchase these desirable houses. Indeed, Newport housing has attracted many new professional class residents as well as remote knowledge-based workers. This trend is creating a shift in city demographics and it is amplifying the affordable housing crisis.

# NEWPORT BUILDOUT STRATEGIES

## NEWPORT HAS GREAT CAPACITY

Like much of Rhode Island, Newport is not building new housing, largely due to current regulations. This study proposes 3 ways Newport could encourage additional housing development without altering its essential character. What is Newport's essential character? It is articulated in the Comprehensive plan vision statement. From the 2017 Newport Comprehensive Plan:

*The City of Newport is a vibrant, forward-looking and welcoming community built upon a strong sense of place and cultural heritage. Residents and visitors alike enjoy the city for its rich history, natural beauty, boating traditions, walkability, enticing downtown, community diversity, and overall quality of life.*

The three building strategies described below each recognize Newport's essential character, while providing additional housing that does not harm quality of place and quality of life.

## BASELINE BUILDOUT

It is useful to project what can be built under current regulations before proposing new strategies to increase housing production. Existing law permits 2-family dwellings on conforming properties in residential and business zones with some important exceptions.<sup>1</sup> The Baseline Buildout converts single family dwellings to 2-family dwellings, where permitted. Within the existing regulatory parameters there is potential for a 16% increase in total housing units, or around 2,100 new units. This is substantial unrealized potential; its true cause is not immediately apparent.

The vast majority of parcels in Newport are nonconforming due to lot

size or lot coverage. Conversion to 2-family may require a dimensional variance in most cases. The Buildout Analysis assumes any required dimensional variances and/or special use permits will be granted, but that no use variance requests for greater density will be granted. It is worth noting that very few conversions to 2-families have occurred in recent years. While conversion is permitted by right, market forces may be shaping a different course in housing development.

## STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING HOUSING PRODUCTION

Three general strategies for increasing housing production in Newport are detailed below. The first strategy revises the zoning code by creating intermediate medium density residential zones. The second strategy builds on the first by allowing more multifamily development throughout medium density zones. The third strategy targets specific areas of the city for increased development. There is one caveat for the proposed housing production strategies: building new units relies on private action taken by property owners. It is the goal of the Buildout Analysis to identify regulations that will encourage property owners to fully develop potential housing.

### STRATEGY 1 - REVISE ZONING DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS

Strategy 1 eases zoning regulations on lot dimensions. This will permit more units on existing lots and more new lots by subdivision. The strategy focuses on zoning districts with the most parcels, R-10 with 5,031 lots and R-10A with 942. By changing the R-10 minimum lot size from 10,000 SF to 4,000 SF (R-10 becomes R-4), the proportion of conforming properties increases from 11% to 59% (see Table 3). Even in this scenario, more than a third of parcels remain below the minimum size, 4,000 SF. However, the revised lot size is appropriate for new lots, the new lot size is consistent with existing neighborhood patterns (ref. Fig. 13).

Lot coverage rules are also an important aspect of dimensional regulations. Current lot coverage requirements in R-10 are unsuitably low, resulting in only 20% of parcels conforming. By increasing the lot coverage to 35%, conformance increases to 63%. However, in this scenario more than a third of properties with excess coverage remain out of compliance. In any case, this change in lot coverage will steer new development toward existing neighborhood patterns.

A similar strategy could be applied to the R-10A zone. The main difference between the existing R-10 and R-10A zones is that the R-10 allows 2-family dwellings by right whereas the R-10A allows only single-family dwellings. In R-10A existing lot sizes tend to be larger than in R-10, but are still mostly less than the minimum lot size of 10,000 SF. If the minimum lot sizes are reduced to 6,000 sq. ft. and coverage is increased from 20% to 25%, conformance with the new regulations will increase from 30% up to 59%. These new lots with lessened restrictions will achieve the effect of permitting greater housing density while preserving existing neighborhood patterns.

The main benefit of revised zoning dimensional standards is that many larger parcels in those zones will become newly open to subdivision. This may result in the creation of new lots, and thus additional housing units. With the existing R-10 and R-10A minimum lot sizes, there are 144 lots that are more than twice as large as the minimum size and have less than half the maximum lot coverage. Roughly 60% of those large lots, or about 85, would be able to be subdivided, due to the shape and existing building placement on the lot.<sup>2</sup> With the R-4 and R-6 reduced minimum lot sizes, the number of large lots would go up to 516, with about 300 of those subdividable, or a 350% increase. Reducing the minimum lot size and maximum lot coverage is a good policy choice. Yet, these actions alone are insufficient to generate the required housing.

Zone	Min Lot Size (sq. ft.)	Max Lot Cover	Conforming by size		Conforming by coverage	
			Existing R-10 & R-10A zones	Revised R-4 & R-6 zones	Existing R-10 & R-10A zones	Revised R-4 & R-6 zones
<b>R-10 to R-4</b>	4,000	35%	11%	59%	20%	63%
<b>R-10A to R-6</b>	6,000	25%	30%	59%	46%	72%

**Table 3 - Strategy 1 Recommended Zoning Changes**

*NEWPORT IS ALREADY A MULTIFAMILY CITY, WITH TWO-THIRDS OF ALL HOUSING UNITS IN 2-FAMILY OR MULTIFAMILY BUILDINGS... WHAT IF MULTIFAMILY BUILDINGS ARE ALLOWED IN ALL PRIMARY STUDY AREA ZONES?*

## STRATEGY 2 - ALLOW MORE MULTIFAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Newport is already a multifamily city, with two-thirds of all housing units in 2-family or multifamily buildings (ref. Fig. 12). Indeed, many nonconforming parcels with 2 or more dwelling units already exist throughout the city, without significant negative impact on quality of life. In many cases, creating a 2-family or multifamily house on a property may not alter the built environment, as these are often reconfigured single family houses.

### STRATEGY 2A

Since most units in Newport are already in multifamily buildings, Strategy 2A poses the question “What if multifamily buildings are allowed in all primary study area zones?” The current zoning code allows multifamily buildings with a special use permit in all zones that allow residential uses, except R-10A and R-40A. The number of units allowed on a property, given the permit, are determined by a formula in the code (see Table 1). Strategy 2A envisions buildout of all parcels as multifamily buildings, with the number of units according to the existing lot size rules. For example, in the R-10 zone, with a special use permit, if a lot is over 10,000 sq. ft. one unit is allowed per 2,500 sq. ft. of lot area. Table 4 gives the estimates of the number of units achieved if all properties are developed to the maximum under this strategy. While the maximum is not realistic, it does give an indication of how “developability” increases under this rule (see Fig. 14).

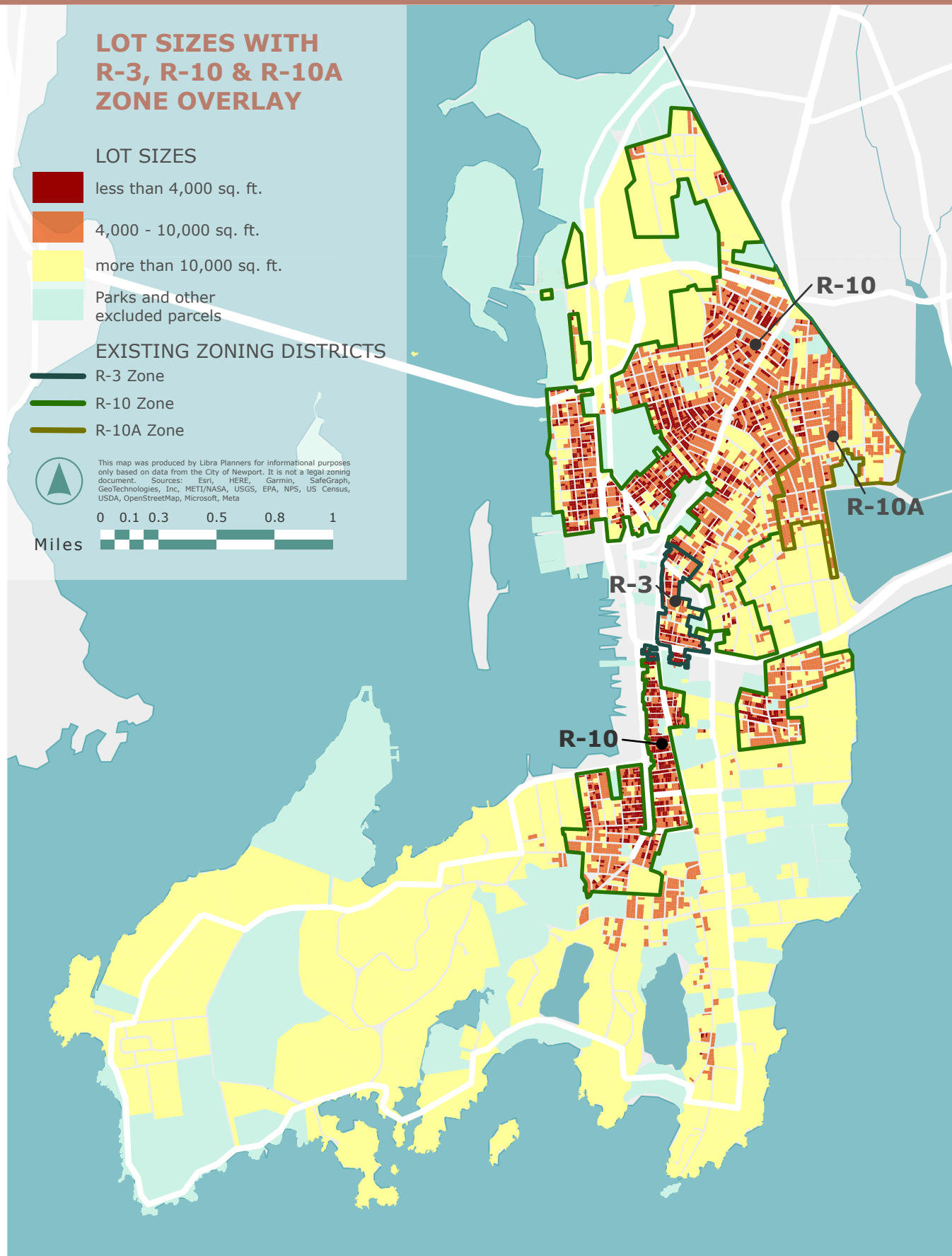


Figure 13 - Map of Lot Sizes vs. Existing Zoning Boundaries

## STRATEGY 2B

This strategy applies a similar approach to multifamily development as Strategy 2A, but determines the numbers of units with the revised zoning, R-4 and R-6 zones envisioned in Strategy 1 and allows application of the per unit lot area rules without a minimum lot size. For example, in the R-20 zone, the current code allows multifamily buildings on lots over 20,000 sq. ft. at one unit per 3,000 sq. ft. In Strategy 2B, multifamily buildings are allowed on any lot at one unit per 3,000 sq. ft. So, for the 20,000 sq. ft. lot example, 6 units would be permitted.

This strategy is well suited to Newport's landscape of over 80% non-conforming properties because it has the potential to permit many new multifamily units on lots below the minimum lot size. These non-conforming lots may be developed as multifamily at the densities currently allowed with a special use permit, without being limited to the larger lots. The city may also elect to use this strategy but revise the per unit lot area requirements.

Fig. 14 shows that Strategies 2A and 2B both greatly increase the potential for new housing units in Newport. The strategies show how regulations may be revised to increase the potential for new housing, which could be managed over time to suit the city's needs and goals.

## STRATEGY 3 - TARGETED DEVELOPMENT

The Buildout Analysis proposes three areas for targeted development that are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Newport should encourage housing development in mixed-use zones. This action is consistent with neighborhood patterns and it supports changing attitudes toward vibrant urban living. Newport has already created the North End Urban Plan (NEUP) and has enacted zoning for this area.

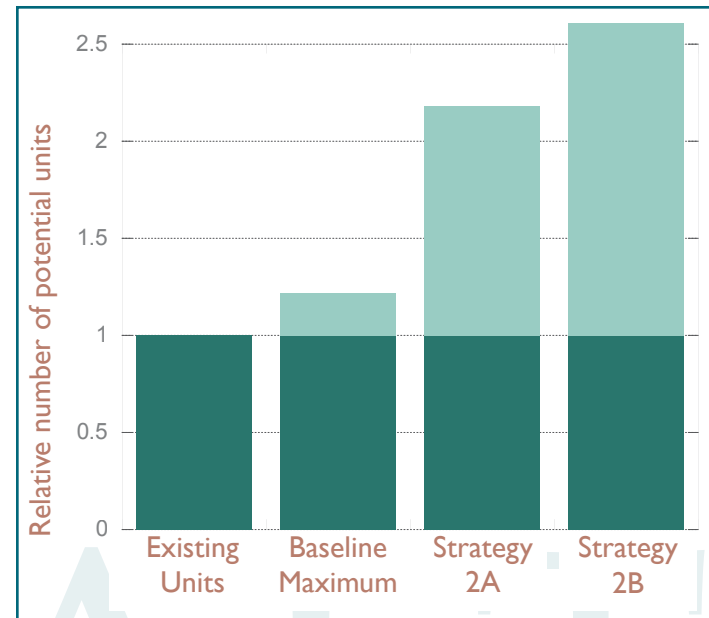


Figure 14 - Strategy 2 Alternatives Bar Graph

CONDITION	Single-family Units	2-family Units	3+ family Units	Total Units
<b>Existing</b>	4,510	2,384	6,337	13,231
<b>Baseline Buildout: Max. buildout with current zoning (single-family converted to 2-family)</b>	2,932	6,156	6,307	15,395
<b>Strategy 2A: Current zoning but multi-family allowed at existing density rules</b>	138	11,032	15,325	26,495
<b>Strategy 2B: Strategy 1 zoning (R-10 zone becomes R-4) multi-family with no minimum size to apply existing multi-family density rules</b>	138	7,458	26,647	34,243

Table 4 - Strategy 2 Alternatives

There is opportunity for additional housing that is compatible with the economic development goals of the NEUP. Finally, the Gateway Center, a central and desirable area of the city, is vastly underutilized. It is well suited for new housing development.

### MIXED-USE

Many Rhode Island communities have lovely beaches, but few have a thriving, extensive, pedestrian-centered walkable downtown. This is Newport's greatest asset. Similarly, walkability is the key to Newport's commercial success. Newport is regularly visited by day-trippers who walk the shopping streets. The city has an opportunity to promote mixed-use development, bolstering and building upon its strengths, while simultaneously solving the critical housing shortage. Mixed use developments are the ideal place to create smaller and more affordable workforce and "missing middle" housing units. Housing located near city centers and transit hubs, amenity rich urban environments, best serve residents with fewer resources.

*MIXED USE DEVELOPMENTS ARE THE IDEAL PLACE TO CREATE SMALLER AND MORE AFFORDABLE WORKFORCE AND "MISSING MIDDLE" HOUSING UNITS.*

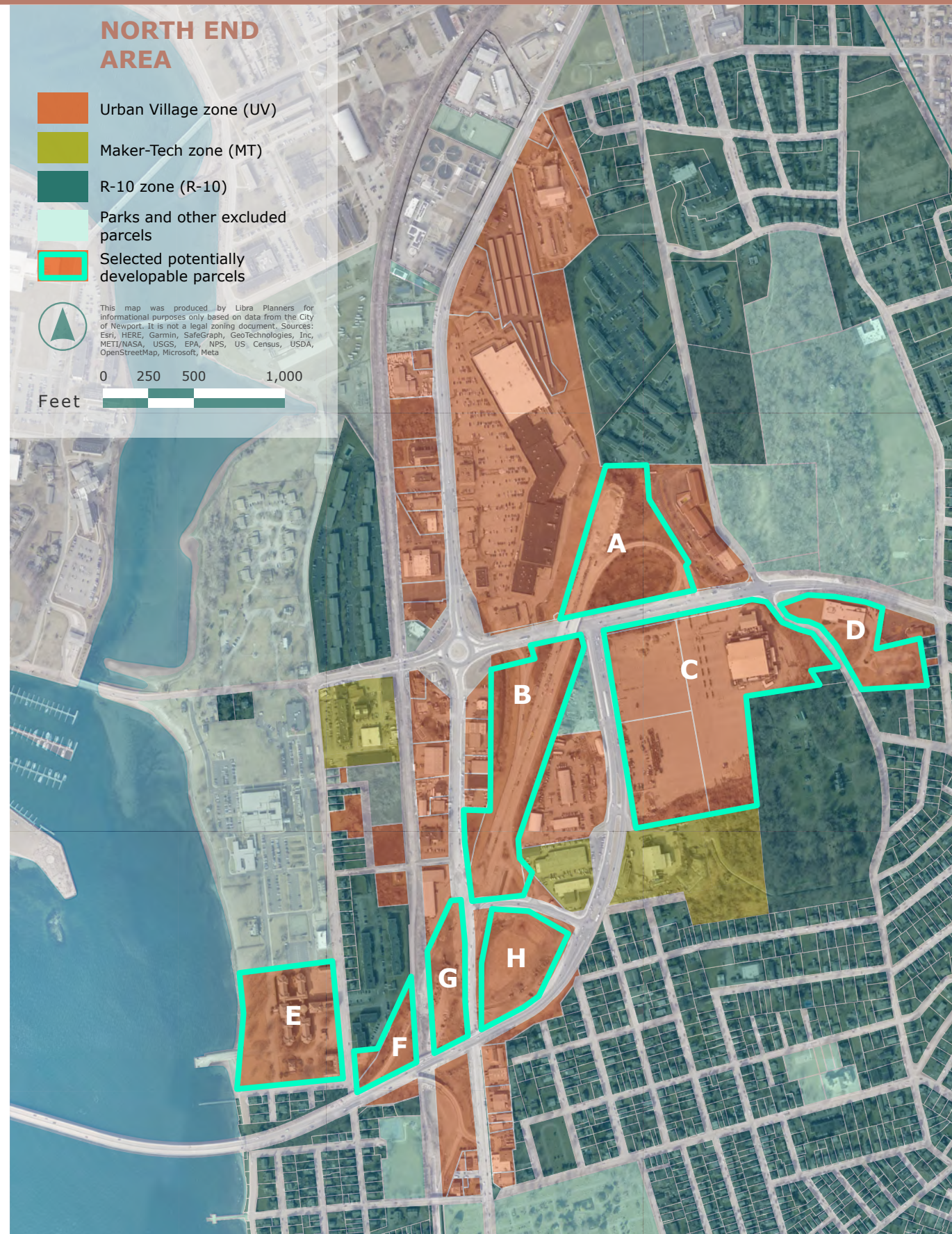


Fig. 15 - Strategy 3 - North End Major New Parcels

PARCEL	Lot Area (sq. ft.)	Lot Area (acres)	Housing units at 90 units/acre	
			50% Housing	100% Housing
A	363,000	8.3	263	525
B	470,000	10.8	340	680
C	983,000	22.6	711	1,422
D	204,000	4.7	148	295
E*	348,000	8.0	50	50
F	96,000	2.2	69	139
G	139,000	3.2	101	201
H	208,000	4.8	150	301
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,811,000</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>1,831</b>	<b>3,612</b>

Notes: \* Former Navy hospital (Parcel E) estimated using existing building area at 70% building efficiency and 1,000 sq. ft. apartments. Other parcels assume 30% of site devoted to internal circulation and open space.

Table 5 - North End Housing Unit Projections

## THE NORTH END

The Newport North End is nearing the fruition of decades of urban planning. The Pell Bridge ramp realignment is nearly complete. The Newport North End Urban Plan (NEUP) has provided a road map for new development. North End zoning has been vetted and adopted. Deaccessioned state lands will soon provide additional locations for future mixed-use development. There is ample opportunity for new high-density “missing middle” housing development in the North End. Developers should embrace the spirit of the plan by creating features that support pedestrian (and by proxy live-work) activity. Recent RIDOT road construction appears to undermine the goals of the NEUP. City leadership should engage with the state to ensure that plan goals are supported by state road construction.



PARCEL	Lot Area (sq. ft.)	Lot Area (acres)	Housing units at 90 units/acre
Gateway Center	253,000	5.8	366

Note: Assumes 30% of site devoted to internal circulation

Table 6 - Gateway Center Housing Unit Projections

## THE GATEWAY

The Newport Gateway is presently underutilized. Having lost its biggest tenant during the pandemic, the Gateway is scheduled to house the Save the Bay Hamilton Family Aquarium in 2024. Additionally, the architecture of the Gateway is somewhat incongruous with Newport's intimately scaled residential whole. Situated in the floodplain, it is not ideal as a major transit hub. Yet the location of the Gateway is extremely desirable for residential use. Co-location with RIPTA, proximity to downtown and the harbor, and easy access to state roads makes this location well-suited to Newport residents who commute to work in the region. Underused surface parking areas could be developed to include high-density "missing middle" housing. Care should be taken to protect the ground floor of any development on this site, as it will soon be claimed by the rising ocean.

Fig. 16 - Strategy 3 - Gateway Center

## CONCLUSION

To restate the concern, Newport has low middle income or “missing middle” housing availability. This is the kind of housing that people like teachers, police and hospital workers need. All of the strategies listed above are useful tools for creating more “missing middle” housing. All three strategies are achievable, worthwhile pursuits. Multiple strategies pursued in tandem will yield the best results. Scenario 2 presents the greatest possibility for swift additional housing construction. Unlike Scenario 3, Scenario 2 does not rely on large commercial developers. There are not many in the region. Scenario 1 is unlikely to produce a large quantity of new housing units, but is sufficiently beneficial to pursue. The large number of units that could be created by Scenario 3 are worth pursuing in some capacity. In short, an “all-hands-on-deck” approach is required to meet the goals set forth by the Mayor and the City Council.

### ENDNOTES:

1. The current rules for 2-family buildings are rather complicated (ref. Table 1). In particular, conversions of single-family buildings are allowed at lower lot sizes for parcels and buildings existing before 1977, so the age of those buildings have been taken into account in the calculations.
2. It is not feasible to put an exact figure on the number of actually subdividable lots. While the number of parcels that are more than twice as large as the minimum size and have less than half the maximum building coverage can be calculated, existing building placement, or the shape of the lot interferes with by-right subdivision. A random sample of those big lots showed that approximately 60% of them could potentially be subdivided. Using this logic, existing zoning would allow about 85 new lots, while the proposed R-4 and R-6A zoning could result in about 30 new lots, should the owners elect to subdivide.

# DRAFT



CITY OF NEWPORT  
ORDINANCE  
OF THE  
COUNCIL

NO.

AN ORDINANCE IN AMENDMENT OF TITLE 14 OF THE CITY OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, AMENDED, ENTITLED, "LAND USE"

BE IT ORDAINED by the City of Newport:

THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES REVISION OF 1994, AS SECTION 1. Chapter 14.04 of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Newport, RI, revision of 1994, as amended, entitled, 'Comprehensive Land Use Plan," is hereby further amended as follows:

**14.04.010. Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act.**

- (a) Legislative Findings. The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, Title 45, Chapter 22.2-2 requires that all Rhode Island communities adopt a comprehensive plan to be in conformance with the Act, and, the planning board for the City of Newport did hold the necessary public hearing with the required advertising, and did forward the plan with a recommendation for city council adoption, and the city council did hold the necessary public hearing with the required advertising.
- (b) The comprehensive plan of the City of Newport, Rhode Island, as duly adopted and updated from time to time, and as most recently updated and approved by the City Council on February 8, 2017, **and first** amended on January 27, 2021, **and most recently amended on September 11, 2024**, is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. The comprehensive plan shall take effect for the purpose of conforming municipal land use decisions and for the purpose of being transmitted to the Rhode Island Director of Administration for state review upon public hearing and passage.

The comprehensive plan and any amendments thereto shall not become effective for the purposes of guiding state agency actions until it is approved by the State of Rhode Island pursuant to Chapter 45-22.2 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, a/k/a the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act.

SECTION 2. This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and all ordinances or parts of ordinances inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed.

IN COUNCIL  
READ AND PASSED

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Laura C. Swistak, CMC  
City Clerk