



# Aquidneck Island

PLANNING COMMISSION

## Strategic Plan 2016

*Approved by AIPC Board of Directors*

*12 July 2016*

*Developed with support from  
Jonathan W. Howard*

**CAUSE & EFFECT**<sup>®</sup>  
INC.

Please direct additional questions or comments to:  
Thomas Ardito, Executive Director  
Aquidneck Island Planning Commission  
55 John Clarke Road, Middletown, RI 02842  
[tardito@aquidneckplanning.org](mailto:tardito@aquidneckplanning.org)  
(401) 845-9299

# AIPC Strategic Plan

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# About AIPC and this Plan

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to guide the work of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission in its core mission: to preserve and improve Aquidneck Island's environment, economy and quality of life, working in partnership with Island stakeholders including municipalities, non-profit organizations, businesses, residents and visitors.

AIPC was established in 1985 by the municipalities of Middletown, Newport and Portsmouth, and the State of Rhode Island, and has completed many important projects on Aquidneck Island. In 2014, the organization initiated a structural reorganization and expanded its Board of Directors, which is now a 12-member Board with four appointees from each of the Island municipalities, as well as a non-voting representative to each Council and a small advisory board (complete list on Page 13). AIPC is also a 501(c)3 non-profit organization which receives limited funding from the three Island municipalities, raising most of its operating and project funding from state, federal and private grants and donations. As a 501(c)3, AIPC is subject to IRS rules governing non-profit corporations as well as the municipal oversight outlined in the organization's bylaws and enabling legislation.

In late 2014, the new Board began developing this strategic plan, sponsoring workshops and consulting with municipal officials to identify AIPC's role in relation to the communities, and the qualities needed in a new Executive Director. These first-phase recommendations were presented in April, 2015, and in August, AIPC hired Thomas C. Ardito as its new Executive Director.

In November 2015, AIPC contracted Jonathan Howard of Cause & Effect, Inc., to assist AIPC in completing its Strategic Plan. The Board established a Strategic Planning Committee, which surveyed board members, interviewed business and non-profit leaders, and continued consulting with municipal leaders. The Committee drafted this Strategic Plan in May, 2016; provided it for review by elected officials and professional staff in all three Island communities in June; and on July 12, 2016, approved the final Plan.

This Strategic Plan is intended as a "living document." Its intended time horizon is 3-5 years; however, AIPC will revisit and revise it annually, or more often if needed.

The Board of Directors and the staff of AIPC wish to thank the many individuals – in Middletown, Portsmouth, Newport and elsewhere – who contributed to the development of this Strategic Plan. For more information about AIPC or to discuss this Plan further, please contact us.

# Our Mission and Vision

AIPC works to preserve and improve the environment, economy and quality of life on Aquidneck Island – to ensure that the Island remains a great place to live, work, play and thrive.

The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission envisions an Aquidneck Island that is dynamic, sustainable and connected:

- **Dynamic:** Aquidneck Island's institutional and physical infrastructure supports shared economic prosperity through well-managed growth and technological and business innovation. We develop and maintain world leadership in our areas of competitive advantage (sailing, marine & defense technology, tourism). We support thriving cultural and arts institutions while preserving our historic heritage, and improve educational opportunities and resources at all levels. Affordable housing and accessible technology attract and retain residents of all ages and skill levels.
- **Sustainable:** Aquidneck Island communities and institutions make informed choices about land use, infrastructure and economic development that preserve our environmental quality, and which will continue to meet our needs well into the future. The Island supports a healthy environment including clean air and water, ample open space and public shore access, and diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation. Communities maintain the viability of working farms; reduce traffic and transportation impacts; and increase renewable energy production. The Island ensures storm protection and climate change preparedness, and reduces reliance on off-island sources of food, energy and water.
- **Connected:** Citizens and communities are well-connected to one another and to the world, physically, digitally and economically. Citizens are informed and engaged in collaborative decision-making regarding the future of the Island. Cutting-edge communications technology is available and accessible to support businesses and residents.

# Our Values

AIPC is:

- **Community-based.** Our work supports the diversity and integrity of Aquidneck Island's people, municipalities, institutions and neighborhoods within the framework of an inclusive Island-wide community vision.
- **Consultative.** We maintain an ongoing dialog with our stakeholders and the public to expand our knowledge base, benefit from many ideas and perspectives and ensure that our work adds value to the community.
- **Collaborative.** We partner with many agencies, organizations and individuals in our work, adding our capacity to theirs to leverage better results at minimum added costs.
- **Multi-disciplinary.** We synthesize information and ideas from many different fields and work across administrative and cultural borders to expand our vision and impact for Aquidneck Island.
- **Comprehensive.** Our work adds value to every Aquidneck Island community and delivers broad benefits to residents, visitors, businesses and agencies in all communities.
- **Forward-looking.** We anticipate critical trends and emerging needs and take a long term vision so that our work and plans to add lasting value.
- **Results-oriented.** Our plans and programs lead to tangible results.

# Why Aquidneck Island communities must work together

## **Our History**

For more than 300 years, municipalities in New England have provided core services, security and opportunities for work and prosperity to their citizens, operating largely independently from one another. Today, however, local economies based on small-scale farming, commerce and industry have been replaced by regional, national and international systems that drive employment, prosperity and municipal revenues.

## **Our Challenges**

The capacities of local governments are being stretched by new demands. State and federal governments impose increasingly stringent requirements. Schools strive to achieve higher educational goals for more diverse populations of students, with limited funding. Citizens require high levels of services within constrained municipal budgets. The huge natural forces of climate change and rising seas pose a complex and costly series of challenges to coastal communities like Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport.

## **Our Unique Advantages**

Small cities and towns still have much to offer, including preserved landscapes, a deep sense of place and community and a high quality of life. But our discussions in the three Aquidneck Island communities found that many people in and out of government believe that these qualities of small town life are at risk from the unsustainable demands facing local governments.

## **Regionalization and Collaboration**

Regional thinking and regional solutions offer the best way, and perhaps the only way, to cope with the looming challenges and unmet needs of our communities. Learning from the successes of other communities that have faced similar challenges can inspire action, reduce risk and increase the likelihood of success in new initiatives. Coordination and cooperation among the towns can lead to better services at lower cost and new responses to challenges and opportunities that communities could not implement individually.

The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission was created for just this reason. Over the last 20 years, we have modeled Island-wide thinking and planning through projects such as the West Side Master Plan, our Aquidneck Island Open Space Mapping and the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study. Our work shows that effective and affordable solutions to problems like traffic congestion, food security, clean water and environmental quality can be found if we are willing to step across town lines to look for them.

Today, we face increased urgency to think, plan and, most of all, act regionally. This strategic plan is designed to move our communities through a process of learning, decision-making and action on the critical issues before us today.

# Shared challenges facing Aquidneck Island communities

The three Aquidneck Island communities face many shared challenges that will become more acute over the next decade:

## **Sustaining water quality**

- Counter threats to fresh and salt waters, including drinking water supplies, from storm-water and other sources of pollution.
- Meet new federal and state mandates for storm-water management.

## **Creating robust infrastructure**

- Develop fully accessible, multi-modal transportation systems.
- Maintain and upgrade core water, storm water and wastewater systems.
- Increase use of renewable energy.
- Improve broadband service.

## **Developing resilience and disaster readiness**

- Prepare for more severe storms and flooding.
- Plan for possible loss of bridge access.
- Protect key systems: food, water, energy, communications.

## **Responding to social needs**

- Job creation for workers of all skill levels.
- Improve recreational opportunities and infrastructure.
- Provide services for an aging population.
- Provide food security.
- Ensure equity and inclusion for all.

## **Meeting our economic needs**

- Develop workforce skills in key sectors.
- Develop surplus Navy properties.
- Diversify employment sectors and areas of economic growth and benefit.
- Develop “green economy” sectors.

## **Meeting the need for investment**

- Grow the tax base through development.
- Find savings through municipal partnerships.
- Identify alternative revenue streams.
- Leverage public-private partnerships.

## **Adapting schools to present and future needs**

- Expand out-of-classroom learning, such as internships and vocational education.
- Provide more options for diverse learners.
- Increase in STEM curriculum.
- Engage with business and private initiatives.

## **Balancing land uses**

- Expand affordable housing options and availability.
- Encourage local farming and food production.
- Preserve landscapes, natural open spaces and outdoor recreation.
- Preserve and restore ecosystems.
- Expand shoreline access for recreation and commercial uses.
- Allocate space for commercial and industrial growth

# Core strategies: Our role in the community

## **We pursue the achievement of our mission by:**

- Leading the development and realization of a shared vision for the future of Aquidneck Island among municipalities, citizens and institutions;
- Providing new and effective information, analysis and technical assistance to municipal governments and others that supports empirically sound, collaborative decision-making;
- Building and leading partnerships for communication and coordinated action among all stakeholders regarding the future of Aquidneck Island.

## Program criteria

### **AIPC's programs and initiatives, whether included in this plan or newly identified, should meet the following conditions:**

- The program falls within our mission and strategic priorities.
- The program demonstrates value to Aquidneck Island communities.
- AIPC has, or can reasonably anticipate, the needed revenues and resources.
- AIPC has, or can develop, the staff or contractual capacity to manage the program.
- The program will not duplicate other efforts.



## Strategic Goals

*In alignment with our vision, we are committed to these strategic goals:*

# Goal 1: Dynamic Aquidneck Island: Promote the development of excellent infrastructure supporting a diverse and thriving economy.

### **A. Improve access to broadband internet services for all Aquidneck Island businesses and residents:**

- Continue to promote the recommendations of our 2015 Aquidneck Island Broadband Analysis.
- Develop Island-wide business plan for broadband.
- Convene broadband working group.
- Host broadband workshops and conferences.

### **B. Support a more diverse and accessible transportation network:**

- Pursue planning and funding of an Aquidneck Island Bikeway / Shoreline Greenway along the coastal rail line.
- Promote safer and more accessible areas for walking and biking – whether on or off-road.
- Support planning and implementation of non-automotive transportation alternatives and Complete Streets.
- Continue tracking state Transportation Improvement Plan.
- Help municipalities secure funding for transportation investments.
- Develop an Island-wide bike plan.
- Promote implementation of projects in the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study, subject to ongoing review and update.

### **C. Support the infrastructure needs of Island-wide economic development initiatives:**

- Support implementation of transportation infrastructure needs.
- Continue renewable energy development and promotion.
- Promote and support energy system diversity and resilience.
- Support recreational infrastructure as an economic development strategy.
- Coordinate and compliment local economic development initiatives.

## Strategic Goals

*In alignment with our vision, we are committed to these strategic goals:*

# Goal 2: Sustainable Aquidneck Island: Develop and support Island-wide responses to Aquidneck Island's critical environmental needs.

### **A. Coordinate joint storm water planning and management for Aquidneck Island communities:**

- Pursue funding and implementation of an Island-wide water quality initiative, addressing Aquidneck Island's network of fresh and salt waters, including drinking, ground and coastal waters.
- Implement Island Waters arts project and other initiatives to raise awareness of water quality issues on Aquidneck Island.
- Participate in R.I. Green Infrastructure Coalition and other regional and national groups focused on developing water quality solutions.

### **B. Support Island-wide studies and planning for reducing vulnerability to natural hazards:**

- With partners, develop Aquidneck Island Resilience Strategy.
- Conduct coastal planning initiatives for resilience and public access.

### **C. Participate in and support other important Island-wide environmental initiatives:**

- Promote conservation and management of open space and recreational areas

## Strategic Goals

*In alignment with our vision, we are committed to these strategic goals:*

# Goal 3: Connected Aquidneck Island: Engage more Aquidneck Island residents, officials and businesses in Island-wide thinking and planning, and provide access to more complete data and plans.

### **A. Develop and launch our Connect Aquidneck website:**

- Provide online library of AIPC and third-party studies and plans pertaining to Aquidneck Island.
- Share news and links to ongoing planning processes.
- Develop an online public dialog on important Island-wide issues.

### **B. Publish updated and improved information about island-wide indicators and issues.**

- Complete Aquidneck Today reference book or similar compilation of information on the Island.
- Develop and track ongoing Island-wide status and trends data on key issues.

### **C. Host at least four public forums and conferences on Island-wide issues each year:**

- Host annual legislative forum.
- Organize biennial Island Summit Conference.
- Sponsor workshops and speakers.

### **D. Support expanded municipal coordination and collaboration:**

- Consult regularly with municipal leaders on shared issues.
- Identify most promising opportunities for collaboration.
- Identify and pursue resources to support collaborative work.
- Convene and coordinate collaborative projects.
- Assist with training for municipal officials.
- Explore opportunities for municipal shared services.

## Strategic Goals

*In alignment with our vision, we are committed to these strategic goals:*

# Goal 4: Develop AIPC's institutional capacity to support robust collaborative planning and action.

### **A. Build our capacity to facilitate, plan and manage multi-stakeholder dialog and projects:**

- Develop online and social media platforms and skills.
- Engage facilitators and program managers on staff or under contract as needed.

### **B. Develop our resources for strong stakeholder communications and engagement:**

- Create an expanded Advisory Committee.
- Issue Annual Reports on progress toward our strategic goals.
- Provide periodic program reports to municipalities and other stakeholders.

### **C. Develop our revenues to support expanded operations:**

- Complete our fundraising plan.
- Hire full time development director.
- Diversify and expand our revenue base.

### **D. Ensure operational excellence:**

- Complete bylaws and board policies review and revisions.
- Update accounting systems and procedures.
- Implement non-profit best practices for financial management and other aspects of AIPC operations.

### **E. Maintain a positive work environment:**

- Maintain an environment of collaboration, transparency and support among AIPC's Board of Directors.
- Maintain a positive and mutually supportive work environment for AIPC employees, with opportunities for personal growth and advancement.

# Aquidneck Island Planning Commission Board of Directors

*(Strategic Planning Committee in Italics)*

## **Middletown:**

*Richard Adams  
Diana Campagna-Skaggs  
Linda Finn  
Gladys Lavine (Secretary)*

## **Newport:**

*John DiBari (Treasurer)  
Peter Janaros (Vice Chair)  
Hilary Stevens (Chair)  
Dean Workman*

## **Portsmouth:**

*Ray Berberick (Strategic  
Planning Chair)  
Kathleen Wilson*

## **Council Representatives**

*Henry F. Lombardi, Jr. (Middletown)  
Marco Camacho (Newport)  
Keith Hamilton (Portsmouth)*

## **Advisory Members**

*Erin Donovan-Boyle  
(Newport County Chamber of Commerce)  
Daniel Sullivan (US Navy)*

# Aquidneck Island Planning Commission Staff

*Thomas Ardito (Executive Director)  
Allison McNally (Office & Project Manager)  
George Johnson (Senior Planner)  
Liza Burkin (Program Specialist)*

## **Please direct questions or comments to:**

Thomas Ardito, Executive Director  
Aquidneck Island Planning Commission  
55 John Clarke Road, Middletown, RI 02842  
(401) 845-9299  
[tardito@aquidneckplanning.org](mailto:tardito@aquidneckplanning.org)