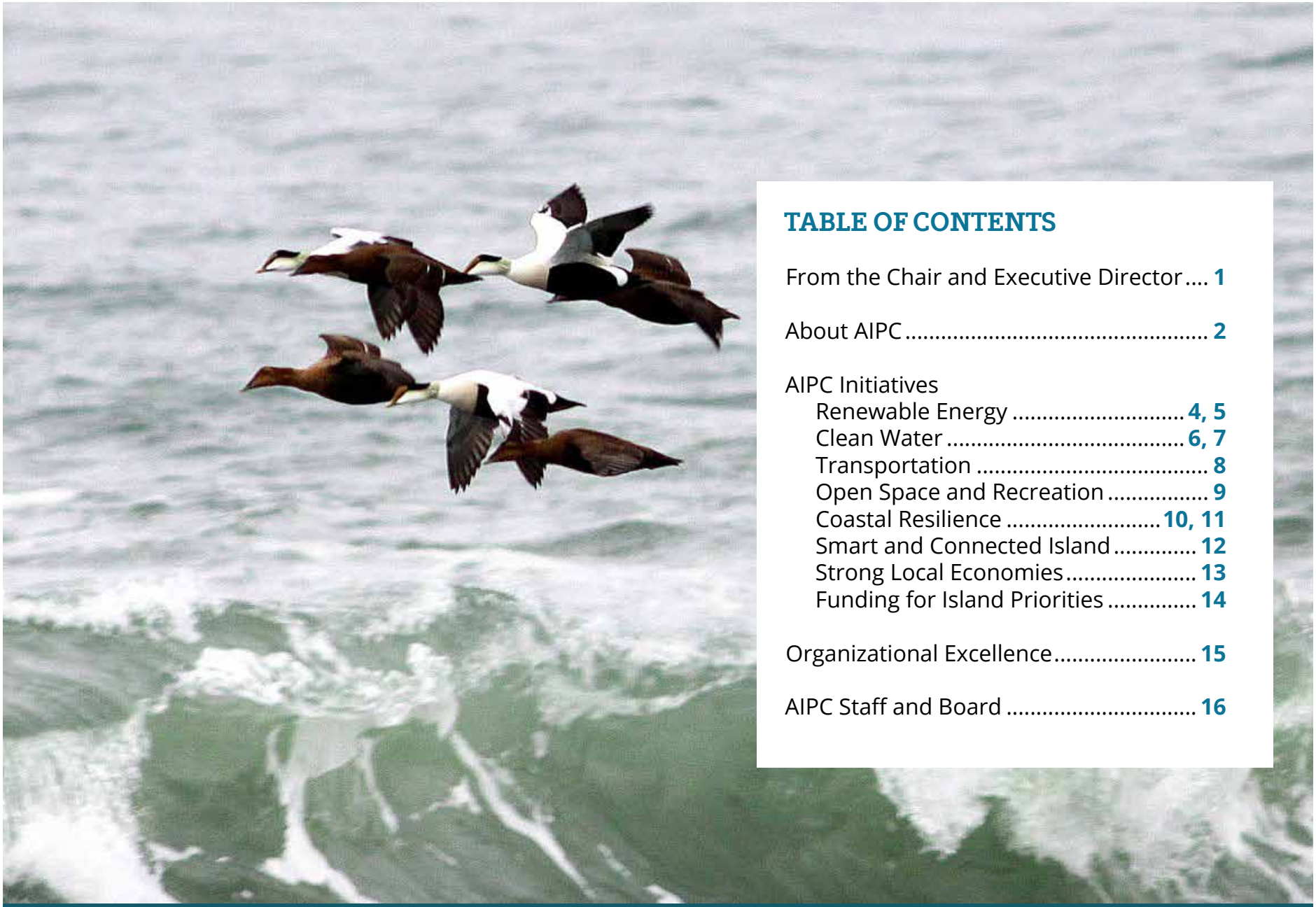
Aquidneck Island
PLANNING COMMISSION

2016 Annual Report



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Common Eiders at Sachuest Point — Photo: Bob Weaver, courtesy of Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge
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Aquidneck Island
PLANNING COMMISSION

From the Chair and Executive Director

Aquidneck Island is a unique and special place. From all over the world, visitors come to enjoy our beautiful coasts, our interesting architecture, and our vibrant arts. Those of us who live here appreciate these blessings daily—and recognize the challenges of Island life as well: traffic congestion, housing costs, and vulnerable waters and shorelines.

For more than 30 years, the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission has led the effort to find shared solutions to these, and other, Island-wide problems, working closely with Portsmouth, Middletown, Newport, and the Navy—and many partners and supporters.

From clean water to renewable energy and transportation planning, we're pleased with what we've achieved together over the past year, and are looking forward to accomplishing even more in 2017. Thank you for reading AIPC's 2016 Annual Report. We look forward to working with you this year!

Photo: AIPC

Sincerely,

Richard P. Adams, *Chairman*

Thomas Ardito, *Executive Director*

About AIPC

The mission of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission is to preserve and improve the Island's environment, economy and quality of life—to ensure that Aquidneck Island remains a great place to live, work, play and thrive.

We accomplish this by creating effective partnerships that bring funding, technical expertise, and other resources to bear on the Island's most pressing issues. AIPC's unique structure—a non-profit organization with strong municipal ties—allows us to work closely with organizations and individuals both inside and outside of government, and ensures full accountability to the Island communities.

AIPC was established in 1985 by the municipalities of Middletown, Newport and Portsmouth, and the State of Rhode Island. AIPC is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization governed by a 12-member Board of Directors. Each of the Island municipalities appoints four Directors to the Board. In addition, AIPC's non-voting Advisory Committee consists of one sitting member from each municipal Council, the Navy, and other stakeholders. AIPC receives significant annual funding from each of the three Island municipalities, but raises the majority of its operating and project funding from state, federal and private grants and donations. For more on our budget, see "Income and Expenses," page 15.

Visit Us Online!

Website: www.aquidneckplanning.org
Twitter: @aquidneckisland
Instagram: www.instagram.com/aquidneckisland/
Facebook: www.facebook.com/Aquidneckplanning/

Postcards: Boston Public Library Tichnor Brothers collection

This year, the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission:

- SECURED nearly $3 million in new federal, state and private funding for clean water, renewable energy and other Island priorities.
- GENERATED more than $4 million in economic activity through Solarize Aquidneck, which enabled the installation of more than 150 residential solar panel systems, saving Island homeowners $450,000 per year.
- HOSTED four major public forums with a combined audience of 500 people.
- ADVOCATED successfully for approval of $35 million statewide Green Economy Bond.

AIPC's Strategic Plan

AIPC has completed a strategic plan to serve as the organization's guiding document for the next 5 to 10 years.

The plan envisions an Aquidneck Island that is positioned to succeed in the context of economic, environmental, and technological challenges, while describing AIPC's strategies, programs and projects for achieving this goal.

To read our strategic plan and for more about AIPC, check out our website: www.aquidneckplanning.org

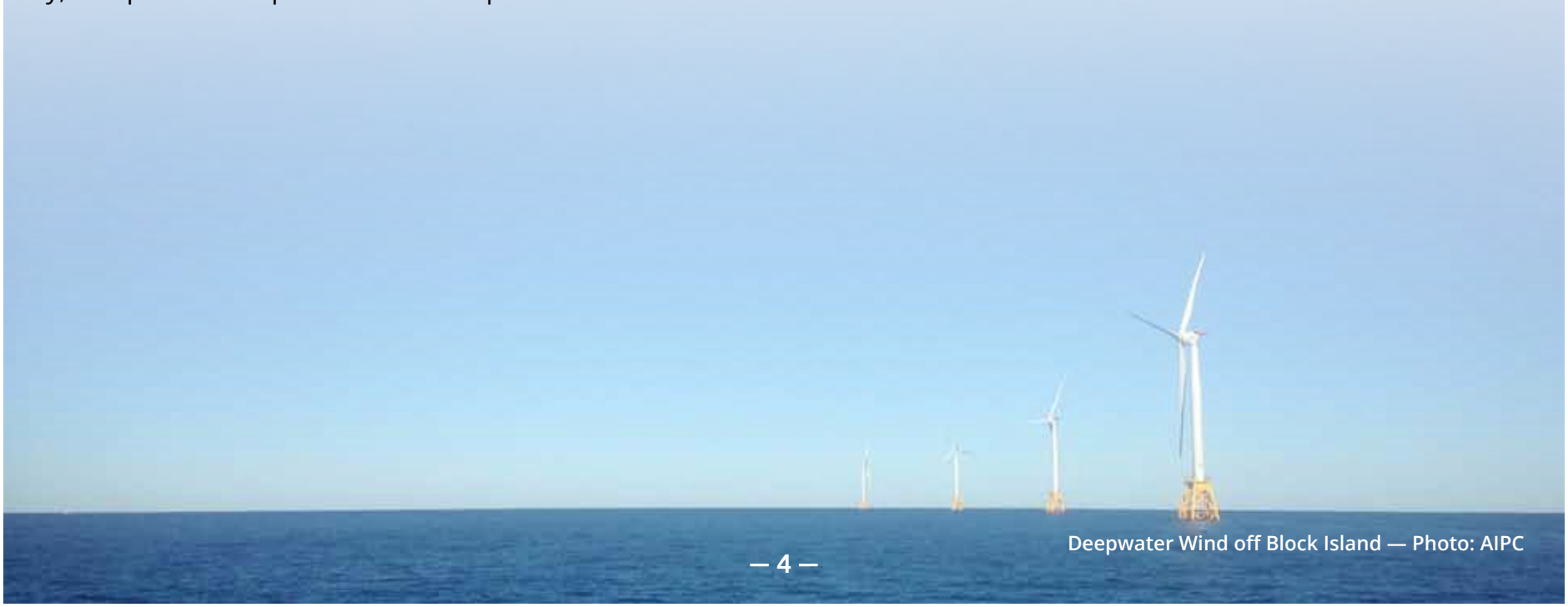
First Beach in Newport — Photo: Vistawhite

AIPC Initiatives — Renewable Energy

America is entering a golden age for renewable energy, as solar and wind power become more economical and practicable by the day. AIPC is working on several initiatives to help Aquidneck Island develop cleaner, cheaper and more reliable energy supplies—to benefit residents, businesses and municipalities.

In 2016, we completed Solarize Aquidneck, developed in partnership with Newport, Middletown, Portsmouth and Rhode Island's Office of Energy Resources. This time-limited program helped Island homeowners "go solar" by reducing installation costs, maximizing grants and tax incentives, and pre-selecting installers to establish a safe, easy, comprehensive process for solar panel installation.

Through Solarize Aquidneck, more than 150 homeowners installed a total of 1.14 solar megawatts on the Island—generating more than $4 million in economic activity; producing nearly $450,000 in annual value for homeowners; securing more than $1 million in federal tax credits; and creating a cleaner, more diverse, and more resilient energy system for our communities. One local installer doubled the size of his business thanks to the impetus provided by Solarize Aquidneck.



Deepwater Wind off Block Island — Photo: AIPC

AIPC Initiatives — Renewable Energy

AIPC will continue to work locally and at the state level to improve Aquidneck Island's access to clean, affordable energy. For example, we're working with the Acadia Center, a regional leader in renewable energy policy, to advocate for state and local initiatives that will improve local control of energy markets; increase the use of renewables; and reduce costs for municipalities, residents and businesses.

Solarize Aquidneck generated a total of more than $4 million in economic activity, while saving Island homeowners $450,000 per year.

Photo: Garbo-Kane LLC

Water is what brings us all to Aquidneck Island. Clean coastal waters provide a host of benefits: a safe and pleasurable environment for swimming and boating; productive habitat for fish and wildlife; and the foundation of the Island's tourism economy. Clean drinking water is essential to the health and safety of our families. Yet the Island's drinking and coastal waters are threatened by stormwater runoff, which washes pollution from roads, parking lots, farms and lawns into drinking water reservoirs and near-shore waters.

In 2016, AIPC launched Island Waters, a new program to help Island communities reduce stormwater pollution and restore clean fresh and salt water. AIPC developed the program in partnership with the communities of Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth, along with the non-profits Clean Ocean Access, the Aquidneck Land Trust and the Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District.

Recognizing the value of the project to communities throughout Southeast New England, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded Island Waters $1 million, which we will use to construct control measures that reduce stormwater problems now, while planning for tomorrow's funding needs.

Outreach is a big part of the project too, helping homeowners and others to better control runoff from yards and rooftops. In December, AIPC organized a public forum, "The Future of Clean Water," to discuss water issues on Aquidneck Island. The event featured speakers from EPA, each of the island municipalities, each of our non-profit partners, and the R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management. With more than 170 participants in the audience, the event kicked off a public dialogue that will continue throughout the project.

AIPC is a member of the R.I. Green Infrastructure Coalition, a group of 37 public and non-profit organizations that is working to coordinate stormwater management and communication statewide. On Aquidneck Island, the coalition is providing homeowners with information and tools to reduce pollution from homes and gardens.

Island Waters is providing $1 million to Island communities to combat water pollution, while helping to secure additional state and federal financing.

Aquidneck Island's Drinking Water System

Most East Coast islands—like Long Island, Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard—obtain their drinking water from underground wells. Aquidneck Island, by contrast, relies on an interconnected network of surface water reservoirs for its drinking water supply—making it uniquely vulnerable to stormwater pollution.

The City of Newport operates nine reservoirs, of which seven are located on Aquidneck Island, in all three communities. The Island reservoirs comprise 80% of all fresh surface water on Aquidneck Island; their watersheds, or drainage areas, total 6,000 acres—a quarter of all Island lands. Water from these watersheds flows into the drinking water supply and also into coastal waters. Stormwater pollutes both fresh and salt waters on and around Aquidneck Island.

Gardiner Pond in Middletown, one of seven drinking water reservoirs on Aquidneck Island — Photo: AIPC

AIPC Initiatives — Transportation

The goal of improving and diversifying Aquidneck Island's transportation systems is at the core of AIPC's mission. In 2011, we completed the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study, which identified traffic improvements as well as needed facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, Island-wide. Many of the study's recommendations have been implemented, and more are planned. However, much more needs to be done, particularly with respect to safe passage for bicycles and pedestrians.

Last year Rhode Island revised and reopened its Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). AIPC worked with the Island communities to develop a dozen proposals to the state, primarily dealing with transportation alternatives: bicycle paths and lanes, ferry lines, and a transit center to ease congestion by the Pell Bridge. The state adopted four of AIPC's proposals into the plan, all of which pertained to bicycling improvements, while the transit center remains a priority for Newport.

Next year, AIPC will continue to advocate for more bike- and pedestrian-friendly roadways, as well as off-road alternatives. For example, we're working with Paths to Progress, a statewide coalition, to recommend priorities for $10 million in new bikeway funding provided by the state's 2016 Green Economy Bond.

For many years, advocates on Aquidneck Island, including AIPC, have supported development of an Aquidneck Island Bikeway along the Newport Secondary Rail Line, a state-owned rail corridor that runs along the Island shoreline from the Sakonnet Bridge to Newport. AIPC will continue to advocate for funding, engineering and construction of segments of the Bikeway—beginning, for example, with the First Mile project to connect downtown Newport with the City's North End, included in this year's TIP.

Providence-to-Newport Ferry

One of the recommendations of AIPC's transportation study was re-establishment of the Providence-to-Newport Ferry. The ferry had been in service from 2000, but was discontinued in 2009. In 2016, the state re-established seasonal service and improved the connection to downtown Providence. The ferry was tremendously popular in 2016 and will resume service in summer, 2017.

AIPC Initiatives — Open Space and Recreation

Public open space, whether inland or along the shore, is vital to Aquidneck Island's environment, human health and quality of life—and is an essential economic asset for our tourism-based economy.

AIPC works to ensure that all Island residents have access to public open spaces—for example as a member of the Newport Open Space Partnership (NOSP), which developed a master plan for the City's public spaces, and is now working to develop a public/private partnership to support City parks. In addition to the City, our partners on this project are the Newport Tree Society, Newport Tree & Open Space Commission, and Aquidneck Land Trust. The work of the Partnership will benefit all Aquidneck Islanders and visitors who enjoy Newport's open spaces, and will inform public land management in all three Island communities and beyond.

We are working to develop a project that extends the lessons of the NOSP project to all of the Island's shorelines, in order to ensure that public coastal access is maintained and improved in the face of waterfront development and coastal change. For example, we'll continue to work with Friends of the Waterfront and others to advocate for improvements to the Newport Harbor Walk.

Return on Investment

AIPC returns more than $10 in funding for each municipal dollar received. Newport, Portsmouth and Middletown each contribute $18,000 per year to AIPC. This year, we used this local funding as match to raise about $3 million for Aquidneck Island, including:

- $1 million to ensure clean, safe drinking and coastal water through our Island Waters program;
- $1.5 million in grants and tax credits for Island homeowners through our Solarize Aquidneck program;
- $400,000 to support AIPC programming and operations—including our Smart Island public forums, safer bikeways, clean water, clean energy, outdoor recreation and more.

Photo: Courtesy of Norman Bird Sanctuary

With 69 miles of coastline, Aquidneck Island is vulnerable to coastal storms and flooding—a vulnerability which will only increase with climate change and sea level rise, threatening homes, businesses, beaches and roads. Last year, the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council approved a sea-level rise policy that considers maximum potential increases to sea level of one foot by 2035, two feet by 2050 and seven feet in 2100. Just a foot or two of sea level rise could threaten the very existence of First, Second and Third Beaches, while Hurricane Sandy proved that storm surges can have major impacts on low-lying neighborhoods and historic buildings such as those along Newport Harbor and in Island Park, Portsmouth.

Sea Level Rise at Newport Harbor

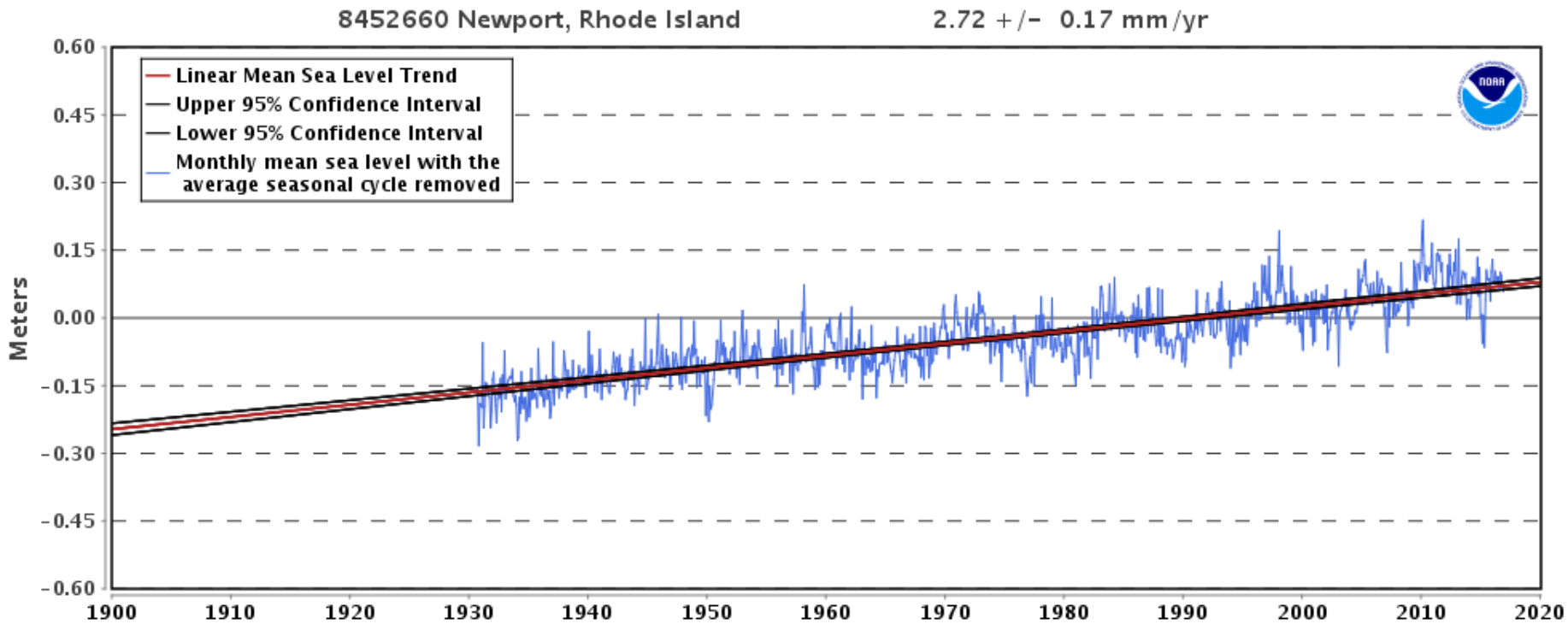


Chart: www.noaa.gov

AIPC Initiatives — Coastal Resilience

AIPC is working to help Island communities prepare for coastal change. For example, we're working with URI's Coastal Resources Center on an Island-wide resilience strategy that will improve our preparedness for storms and sea level rise. In a new initiative, we'll be helping Middletown and Newport seek federal and state funding to strengthen Island shorelines, and helping the communities plan for future changes and adaptation.

Bowen's Wharf in Newport following Hurricane Sandy
Photo: Dave Hansen, courtesy *Newport Daily News*

AIPC Initiatives — Smart and Connected Island

Civic engagement is central to AIPC's mission. Our goal is to better connect citizens to government, government to citizens, and all of us—individuals, organizations and government—to one another.

This year, we launched a new website and communications platform, Connect Aquidneck, designed to help all Island individuals and institutions stay informed—in 2017 we'll continue to develop and expand this program.

We also initiated the Smart Island Series of public forums, in partnership with the Newport Daily News.

The goal of the series is to bring innovative policy ideas from elsewhere in the region and around the world to Aquidneck Island, while fostering a dialogue about the Island and its future.

Smart Island Series topics included clean water and clean energy. Next year, we'll be discussing demographic changes—the aging of the Island population and the needs of seniors—while continuing to focus on technology, energy, environment and transportation issues.

Smart Sponsors

We're grateful for the support of our Smart Island Series sponsors:

Newport Daily News
Pell Center at Salve Regina University
Community College of Rhode Island
Newport Solar
Direct Energy Solar
RGS Energy
van Beuren Charitable Foundation
Rhode Island Foundation

Smart Island Series event, December 2016: "The Future of Clean Water" — Photo: AIPC

A big part of AIPC's mission is centered on creating the conditions for economic prosperity and sensible growth on Aquidneck Island. This goal underlies much of our work—from improving transportation systems to expanding recreational opportunities.

New technologies offer both opportunities and challenges for Aquidneck Island's economy, and AIPC is working to help Island communities establish a strong economic position for the future. Since 2014, for example, AIPC has advocated for improved broadband on Aquidneck Island, and this year we developed IslandGig, a proposal to create a business plan for a community-based, public/private broadband network.

Throughout the U.S., communities have demonstrated that these types of networks can provide improved service at lower cost by increasing marketplace competition. AIPC will continue working to help Island communities improve broadband service, with the goal of providing the Island with a competitive advantage for business, tourism, government and residential needs, while pioneering a model for use and adoption throughout Rhode Island and elsewhere in the U.S.

Map: NationalAtlas.gov

The Value of Clean Water

Rhode Island's greatest economic strength is in our natural and cultural assets—Narragansett Bay and our Atlantic shoreline, our beaches and parks, our historic cityscapes and waterfronts.

AIPC's work to preserve and restore clean water, open space, beaches, bikeways and recreational areas, therefore, benefits not just our environment and quality of life, but our economy as well. In Middletown alone, for example, beaches produce $1.4 million annually in direct municipal revenue—and much more to local restaurants, hotels, surf shops, etc. Saltwater recreational fisheries are valued at $160 million statewide, much of it generated by Aquidneck Island.

AIPC is developing a new report, ***The Value of Clean Water***, to better understand the contribution of high-quality natural resources to our Island economy, and help our communities make smarter public investments in the future.

AIPC Initiatives — Funding for Island Priorities

Much of AIPC's work focuses on securing funding to address Island priorities—like the $1 million Island Waters grant discussed on page 6. Through grant writing, project development and other kinds of funding advocacy, AIPC has been successful in bringing state, federal and private dollars to help Island communities meet current needs and prepare for future challenges.

Island Park, Portsmouth, during Hurricane Sandy
Photo: Dave Hansen, courtesy *Newport Daily News*

AIPC and partners successfully advocated for development and approval of a $35 million statewide Green Economy Bond—first through action at the state and municipal levels, and later through communications with the public. The bond measure, passed in November, will provide:

•$8 million for state land conservation and parks development;

•$9 million for local open space protection and parks development;

•$8 million to protect clean water and clean up brownfields; and

•$10 million for bike path development.

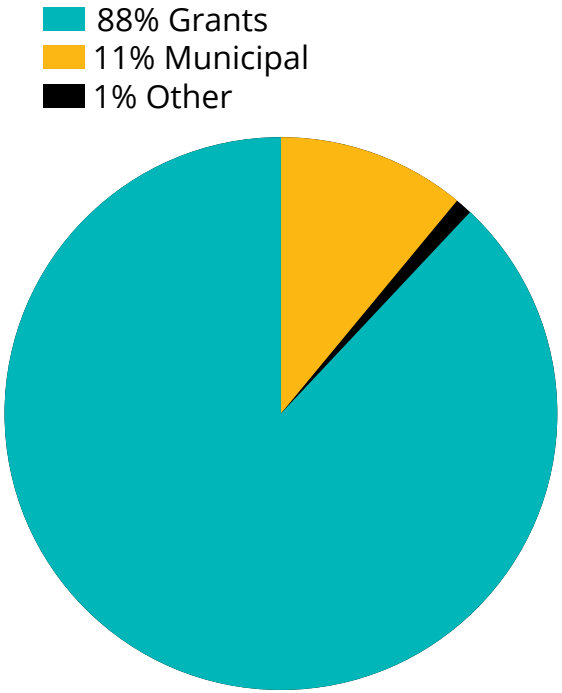
AIPC will continue working with the R.I. Department of Environmental Management and non-profit organizations such as Save The Bay to ensure that a significant portion of the bond benefits Aquidneck Island projects.

Newport Polo Exhibition at Easton's Beach
Photo: AIPC

Organizational Excellence

AIPC is a growing organization. With growth comes the need to expand and improve governance and business systems. In 2016, AIPC completed a major initiative to update our fiscal and budgetary policies, procedures, and technology, working with some of the region's leading accountants and bookkeepers. In early 2017, we completed AIPC's first independent fiscal audit—exceeding state requirements for budgetary review and reporting. Looking ahead, we'll continue our commitment to rigorous financial oversight, public transparency, and continuous improvement of our organization.

Sources of Income



Financial Summary — Audited
Fiscal Year 2016 — Nov. 1, 2015 to Oct. 31, 2016

Support and Revenue

Grants	$429,004
Municipal Income	$54,000
Contributions	$1,000
Other	$899
In-Kind	$4,200
Total	$489,103

Expenses

Program Services	$217,366
Management & General	$50,852
Fundraising	$2,807
Total	$271,025

Changes in Net Assets	$218,078
Net Assets—Beginning of Year	$137,705
Net Assets—End of Year	$355,783

Aquidneck Island
PLANNING COMMISSION

Thank you!

AIPC is grateful to all of our funders, partners, and supporters for your commitment to Aquidneck Island and your contributions to our work.

van Beuren Charitable Foundation

Rhode Island Foundation

Prince Charitable Trust

City of Newport

Town of Middletown

Town of Portsmouth

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

AIPC Staff

Thomas Ardito, *Executive Director*
Allison McNally, *Project Manager*
Liza Burkin, *Program Specialist*
George Johnson, *Consulting Senior Planner*
Abigail Burrows, *Development & Communications Coordinator*

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- Diana Campagna Skaggs
- Linda Finn, *Sustainability & Advisory Committee Chair*
- Gladys Lavine

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- Peter M. Janaros, P.E., *Vice Chair*
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- Dean Workman, MBA, PMP

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Linda L. Ujifusa, Portsmouth
Katheryn E. Leonard, Newport

Advisory Committee

Erin Donovan-Boyle, Newport County Chamber of Commerce
Cornelia Mueller, Naval Station Newport

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Allison McNally

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George Johnson

Abigail Burrows

AIPC Board Middletown

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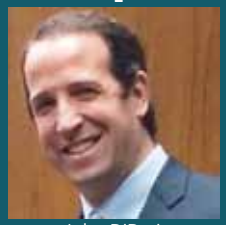
AIPC Board Newport


John DiBari

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Snowy Owl at Sachuest Point
Photo: Bob Weaver, courtesy of Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge

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