

Chapter II Land Use

West Warwick Comprehensive Plan

CHAPTER II LAND USE

"Designates the proposed general distribution and general location and inter-relationship of land use for residential, commercial, industry, open space, recreation facilities, and other categories of public and private uses of land. The land use element is based upon the other elements contained in the Plan and it will relate the proposed standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of the land and available or planned facilities and services. A land use plan map, illustrating the future strategy and land use policy of the municipality as defined by the comprehensive plan, is required. The land use plan must contain an analysis of the inconsistency of existing zoning districts, if any, with the land use plan. The land use plan should specify the process by which the zoning ordinance and zoning map shall be amended to conform to the comprehensive plan." -- Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act

II.1 Historic Development Patterns

West Warwick is located near the geographical center of Rhode Island, and is one of the most densely populated communities in Rhode Island. In the eighteenth century, the Town was home to a thinly scattered farming population, and the common unit of settlement was the family farm. Agriculture remained the principle economic activity in the Town throughout the century.

During the nineteenth century, West Warwick was transformed from a farming area into one of Rhode Island's most heavily industrialized towns. Textile mills were built along the Town's rivers and became the nuclei of small villages. The creation of these villages - Centerville, Crompton, Natick, Lippitt, Phenix, Riverpoint, Clyde, and Arctic - gave the Town its characteristic arrangement and flavor which it retains even now.

Later in the century, some of these villages, especially Phenix and Arctic, grew into genuine urban centers. As the scale of production increased in the Town's mills, the growth of the villages surrounding them kept pace. The mill villages, which began as small hamlets, acquired many of the institutions which would serve the needs of the community - schools, churches, post offices, stores, and banks - and became the focus of the area's economic and social life.

In 1913, West Warwick was incorporated as a separate town. Development in the preceding century had not focused on a single institution or commercial center; the Town was essentially a federation of mill villages. Although West Warwick remains a factory town, the decline of the textile industry after World War I affected great physical and social changes, almost as great as the change from agriculture to manufacturing a century earlier.

Recent Development Patterns - Since the end of World War II, most residential building has followed a suburban pattern, and large tracts of single-family houses have been built, such as those in the Cowesett Farm area in the southern part of town, at the Knight Farm in Westcott, and in the area off Wakefield Street. In recent years, some multi-family buildings have also been constructed, including elderly housing projects, apartments and condominiums. The open spaces which once separated the mill villages are now filling up with such developments.

Increasing use of the automobile and highway and commercial improvements have diminished the dominance of the mill villages. Changes in the Town's highway system have been both a reflection of and an encouragement to the new growth. State Route 2 and Washington Street in Arctic are the sites of many businesses which serve the automobile-oriented public, and the construction of Interstate 95 in the 1960's has provided a convenient link from West Warwick to other parts of the metropolitan region. Industrial development also has been influenced by automobile-oriented patterns. While some manufacturer's have continued to use the nine-

