

**Chapter V**  
**Natural and Cultural Resources**  

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*West Warwick Comprehensive Plan*



## CHAPTER V NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

*"Shall provide an inventory of the significant natural resource areas such as water, soils, prime agricultural lands, natural vegetation systems, wildlife, wetlands, aquifers, coastal features, flood-plains and other natural resources and the policies for the protection and management of such areas. The element shall include policies for the protection of historic and cultural resources of the municipality and the state. The policies and implementation techniques must be identified for inclusion in the implementation program element." -- Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act*

### V.1 Introduction

West Warwick is one of the most densely populated towns in Rhode Island with more than five people per acre. Of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns, West Warwick has the 12th largest population with 27,026 people in 1980, and is ranked 36th in land area with 5,090 acres. Many of West Warwick's natural resources have been exploited to accommodate development. As of 1975, 56 percent of the Town's area was committed to either residential, commercial, industrial, transportation, or other types of land use which are considered irreversible.<sup>1</sup> Some of the 2,230 acres of non-committed land in 1975, has since been developed, mostly for residential use. Much of the land which remains undeveloped today is limited by the presence of wetlands, water bodies, steep slopes, and soils with properties unsuitable for most types of development.

The natural systems which remain in undeveloped areas are typically surrounded by development and do experience direct and indirect impacts as a result of that development. Because there are so few natural areas left in the Town it is of vital importance that they be recognized as valuable resources which add to property values and quality of life. Proper use and protection of natural resources may require greater initial expense, but it is generally far less costly to anticipate environmental problems and take measures to avoid them than to correct past mistakes.<sup>2</sup>

**Topography** - In terms of topography statewide, West Warwick sits in the middle of a thin band of Narragansett Lowland which separates the Interior Uplands to the west from the Narragansett Bay Area to the east. The Narragansett Lowland landform ranges in elevation from sea level at the mouth of the Providence River to about 400 feet above sea level in Cumberland. Most of the land is low level coastal plain with some rolling hills and glacial boulders.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the Town consists of gently sloping, round-topped hills which are underlain primarily with granite. The highest elevation (390 feet) is reached at Andrews Hill in the extreme southern part of the Town near the East Greenwich boundary. Natick Hill, along the northern Town boundary, reaches an elevation of 280 feet, as does the hill on which St Joseph's cemetery is located. West Warwick High School, on Prospect Hill, reaches an elevation of 260 feet above sea level. The lowest elevations occur along the rivers. Both the north and south branches of the Pawtuxet River enter the Town at approximately 150 feet. The Pawtuxet

- 1 Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Planning, Land Use 2010: State Land Use Policies and Plan, June 1989.
- 2 Developer's Handbook, State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Allen Carroll, reprinted February, 1984, page 4.
- 3 RI Department of Environmental Management Planning and Development Department. A Survey of the State's Scenic Areas. 1990.

