

# PLANNING DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Coventry Planning Commission

**FROM:** Doug McLean, Director of Planning and Development

**DATE:** April 21, 2026

**SUBJECT:** DRAFT 2026 Comprehensive Community Plan Update

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## I. Background Information

The Town of Coventry proposes a Comprehensive Community Plan Update to replace the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, which expired in 2004, and provides a much-needed update to the Town's policy structure moving forward. The DRAFT 2026 Comprehensive Plan includes elements focused on the following policy areas: land use, natural resources, open space and outdoor recreation, cultural and historical resources, housing, economic development, community services and facilities, energy and renewable energy, and natural hazards and climate change.

As historic background, a previous draft of the Comprehensive Plan Update was initially prepared by BETA Group and sent to the Division of Statewide Planning for advisory review in Fall of 2023. The State identified several deficiencies throughout the Plan, with a particular focus on the lack of affordable housing strategies. In 2024, Town staff and BETA Group drafted revisions to address deficiencies in an attempt fill in those gaps, however the DRAFT Plan still needed adequate "buy in" from local stakeholders on affordable housing strategies.

In April 2025, Planning Staff convened an ad-hoc group of community stakeholders and housing policy experts to review the draft Housing Chapter and offer comments. Staff also used existing technical assistance funds (at no cost to the Town) to support expert consultant review of the DRAFT Housing Chapter to target specific improvements. In November 2025, the Town obtained additional free technical assistance through RI Housing's Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP) to fund a more significant re-write of the Housing Chapter to better address the strategic goals and objectives and protect community character and ensure viability. The Town's consultant anticipates that the revised Housing Chapter will be finalized in the fall of 2026.

## II. Local and State Adoption Process

The Town is now prepared to locally adopt the DRAFT 2026 Comprehensive Plan, starting with the Planning Commission's review and recommendation. The local adoption process is further outlined in **RIGL § 45-22.2-8**, which tasks the Planning Commission with preparing the draft comprehensive plan, including the implementation program. The Commission is also tasked with gathering oral or written feedback from citizens, conducting a minimum of one public hearing, and submit recommendations to the municipal legislative body (the Town Council) regarding the adoption of the plan. Following the Planning Commission's recommendation, the Coventry Town Council will hold a separate public hearing and vote on the adoption of the DRAFT 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update. At this time, no Town Council hearings on this matter have been scheduled.

The Division of Statewide Planning is the agency responsible for the state-level review and adoption of this document. The state adoption process is further detailed in RIGL § 45-22.2-9. Prior to the initiation of this current local adoption process, the Division of Statewide Planning informed Planning staff that most components of the DRAFT 2026 Plan remain generally consistent with state Comprehensive Planning standards since their 2023 review. However, the Division noted deficiencies within the Housing and Economic Development chapters. The deficiencies in the Housing Chapter, in addition to any comments received as part of this local adoption process, will be addressed in the revised version.

The current DRAFT Economic Development Chapter was considered deficient primarily because it contained obsolete data. Staff updated the tables, charts, and graphs with more recent (2024 or newer) data, where available. Statewide Planning returned comments to the Town on April 6, 2026, which have been addressed in the latest version.

### **III. Latest Revisions to DRAFT Comprehensive Plan**

The Planning Commission held a public workshop discussion to gather initial public feedback on the DRAFT Comprehensive Plan on April 9, 2026. The previous Staff Report, dated March 20, 2026, summarized all public comments received as part of the Planning Commission's review.

The DRAFT Plan has been revised following the meeting to reflect the Planning Commission's desired changes and to incorporate comments from Town staff and members of the public. The following revisions have been made to the following chapters:

Chapter 1 – Land Use: Minor edits were made to this chapter in response to comments from a resident to remove a sentence on page 1, which stated that potential deviation from the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is appropriate. Staff also adjusted an incomplete sentence related to density in sewer areas on page 5 and deleted errant references to nonexistent maps. These revisions did not result in any significant policy changes.

Chapter 2 – Natural Resources: This chapter was revised to reflect feedback from Planning Commission members on the inclusion of Conservation Commission and Land Trust members in the Technical Review Committee. Per their feedback, Planning staff will share development plans and materials with those boards rather than add their representatives as formal TRC members. This policy shift also resulted in a change to Volume I, specifically Natural Resource Goal 2 – Policy 4 (page 36). The needs and opportunities section was revised to include specific calls for bald eagle protection in the Lake Tiogue area, in response to concerns from residents.

Chapter 3 – Open Space and Outdoor Recreation: The latest version of this chapter incorporates comments and suggested edits from the Director of Parks and Recreation. These edits were straightforward and included post-pandemic updates to data and/or information on Town parks, athletic fields, and playgrounds, and other recreation services. These revisions did not result in any significant policy changes.

Chapter 4 – Historical and Cultural Resources: The latest version of this chapter reflects minor edits from the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), which were generally straightforward. The HPC asked for staff to add the original Town Clerk's office to the list of historic buildings, offered minor formatting edits, and provided additional context on the Town's historic cemeteries. These revisions did not result in any significant policy changes.

Chapter 7 – Community Services and Facilities: The chapter was revised based on feedback from the Town Engineer, Police Chief, Library Director, Central Coventry Fire Chief, and Director of Human

Services. These comments and suggested edits were straightforward and generally consistent with the needs and daily operations of those departments. Note that Table 7.2 was revised to reflect anticipated Kent County Water Authority's Capital Improvement Projects for the FY 2027-2031 period. These revisions did not result in any significant policy changes.

Chapter 9 – Transportation: The latest version of this chapter includes minor edits from the Town Engineer, as well as the deletion of an inaccurate statement about the school bus depot per feedback from the Town Manager and a resident. These revisions did not result in any significant policy changes.

Chapter 10 – Natural Hazards and Climate Change: Planning staff updated Chapter 10 to better align with and reflect the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) from 2025, through additional references to specific HMP action items.

#### **IV. Comprehensive Planning Goals**

Staff has conducted an orderly, thorough, and expeditious review of this proposed DRAFT Comprehensive Plan Update for alignment with the goals of the **Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act**, RIGL 45-22.2-3(c) and finds as follows:

***RIGL § 45-22.2-3(c) Goals.*** *The general assembly hereby establishes a series of goals to provide overall direction and consistency for state and municipal agencies in the comprehensive planning process established by this chapter. The goals have equal priority and are numbered for reference only.*

*(1) To promote orderly growth and development that recognizes the natural characteristics of the land, its suitability for use, the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services and facilities, and is consistent with available resources and the need to protect public health, including drinking water supply, drinking water safety, and environmental quality.*

1. The DRAFT Land Use Element, which consists of relevant goals, policies, and action items delineated in Volume I and the Implementation Plan, as well as the existing conditions and needs study in Volume II – Chapter 1 and its Future Land Use Map (FLUM), addresses the promotion of orderly growth and development in Coventry.
2. The DRAFT Land Use Element recognizes the natural characteristics of the land, the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services and facilities and ensures consistency with available resources and the need to protect public health. The land use goals encourage the preservation of open space, forests, and agricultural areas and encourages growth in areas that are serviced by existing or planned community services.
3. The DRAFT Community Services and Facilities Element, which consists of the relevant goals, policies, and action items delineated in Volume I and the Implementation Plan, as well as the existing conditions and needs study in Volume II – Chapter 7, also addresses the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services.

*(2) To promote an economic climate which increases quality job opportunities and overall economic well being of each municipality and the state.*

4. The DRAFT Economic Development Element, which consists of the relevant goals, policies, and action items delineated in Volume I and the Implementation Plan, as well as the existing conditions and needs study in Volume II – Chapter 6, promotes an economic

climate which increases quality job opportunities and overall well being of Coventry for the next decade.

*(3) 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.*

5. The DRAFT Housing Element, which consists of the relevant goals, policies, and action items delineated in Volume I and the Implementation Plan, as well as the existing conditions and needs study in Volume II – Chapter 5, promotes the production of year-round housing and the preservation of government subsidized housing for persons and families of low- and moderate-income.
6. This DRAFT Housing Element also considers local, regional, and statewide needs and recognizes the affordability of housing as the responsibility of Coventry through a variety of goals and action items.
7. The DRAFT Housing Element considers local, regional, and statewide needs through a variety of goals, policies, and action items. These needs are expressed in Chapter 5 – Housing, and will be expanded upon in the concurrent Housing Chapter update.
8. The DRAFT Housing Element will help achieve a balance of housing choices through Goal 3, which calls upon the Town to enable housing types beyond single-family detached homes to accommodate diverse housing needs, and also Goal 4, which recommends that the Town expand homeownership options for low- and moderate-income households. These goals are supported by specific policies and action items.
9. The DRAFT Housing Element takes into account growth management and the need to phase and pace development in areas of rapid growth through specific calls for infrastructure planning in the Centre of New England region and identification of priority growth areas. Goal 2 and the specific policies and action items within directly address housing growth.
10. The DRAFT Housing Element addresses economic growth in Goal 4, which includes specific action items aimed at conducting housing-employment analysis and exploring employer interest in workforce housing partnerships.

*(4) To promote the protection of the natural, historic and cultural resources of each municipality and the state.*

11. The DRAFT Natural Resources Element, which consists of the relevant goals, policies, and action items delineated in Volume I and the Implementation Plan, as well as the existing conditions and needs study in Volume II – Chapter 2, promotes the protection of natural resources in Coventry.
12. The DRAFT Historical and Cultural Resources Element, which consists of the relevant goals, policies, and action items delineated in Volume I and the Implementation Plan, as well as

the existing conditions and needs study in Volume II – Chapter 4, promotes the protection of cultural and historical resources in Coventry.

*(5) To promote the preservation of the open space and recreational resources of each municipality and the state.*

13. The DRAFT Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Element, which consists of the relevant goals, policies, and action items delineated in Volume I and the Implementation Plan, as well as the existing conditions and needs study in Volume II – Chapter 3, promote the preservation of open space and recreational resources in Coventry.

*(6) 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.*

14. The current DRAFT Housing Element (Volume II – Chapter 5) provides performance-based standards for development through the specific LMI housing production projections tied to each specific affordable housing strategy.
15. The DRAFT Plan encourages the use of innovative development regulations and techniques such as conservation development ordinances (action item NR-10), archaeological survey requirements for indigenous sites (HC-6), zoning ordinances to allow two-family and multi-family housing (H-14), incentives for renewable energy and energy efficiency (ER-5), and sidewalk regulations for private developments (T-15). These tools would promote the development of land suitable for development while protecting the Town’s natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources.

*(7) 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.*

16. This DRAFT Comprehensive Plan will be consistent with state actions and programs and reflects state goals and policies. Each chapter is based upon the appropriate state guide plans (for example, the Land Use Element and FLUM draws from *Land Use 2025*) and the state goals and policies contained therein.

*(8) To ensure that adequate and uniform data are available to municipal and state government as the basis for comprehensive planning and land use regulation.*

17. This DRAFT Comprehensive Plan ensures that adequate and uniform data are available to Coventry and the State through the provision of maps, tables, graphs, and charts.
18. Chapter 6 – Economic Development was updated with data from 2024 or newer in response to comments from the Division of Statewide Planning, to ensure State approvability.
19. Chapter 5 – Housing contains obsolete data that will be updated in the concurrent Housing Chapter update.

*(9) To ensure that municipal land use regulations and decisions are consistent with the comprehensive plan of the municipality, and to ensure state land use regulations and decisions are consistent with state guide plans.*

20. All elements of the DRAFT Plan point to specific updates to the Coventry Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations where appropriate. The following land use action items, LU-1 and LU-2, address the above goal directly:
  - a. LU-1 states: “Revise the Town Zoning Ordinance in accordance with the State Zoning Enabling Legislation and the new Comprehensive Community Plan. This will include revising, updating, and officially adopting town zoning maps to provide accurate and up-to-date information on Zoning District boundaries.”
  - b. LU-2 states: “Revise Town Subdivision and Land Development Regulations in accordance with the Comprehensive Community Plan.”
21. As stated in the finding above, all elements of the DRAFT Plan are consistent with the requisite state guide plans.

*(10) To encourage the involvement of all citizens in the formulation, review, and adoption, or amendment of the comprehensive plan.*

22. The previous Planning staff held three public meetings on the DRAFT Comprehensive Plan on May 25, 2022 (to introduce the planning process), October 12, 2022 (to review goals and develop policies and actions), March 20, 2023 (to present the implementation plan).
23. The previous Planning staff also conducted multiple meetings with an ad-hoc Comprehensive Plan advisory task force throughout the Comprehensive Planning process in 2022-2023. The current Planning staff held a final, follow-up meeting with the task force in March 2026 to gather comments.
24. The current Planning staff sought feedback on the DRAFT Housing Chapter from local stakeholders and housing policy experts to ensure adequate local “buy in” on affordable housing strategies in Chapter 5, and goals, policies, and action items.

## **V. Planning Department Recommendation**

Staff finds proposed Comprehensive Plan Update to be consistent with the State goals set forth in RIGL § 45-22.2-3(c). Staff therefore recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the documented findings of fact and forward a **positive recommendation** to the Town Council.