

1.0 LAND USE

1.1 INTRODUCTION: A FUTURE LAND USE VISION FOR COVENTRY

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is a required element for all Rhode Island comprehensive plans, based on the statewide land use plan laid out in *Land Use 2025*, produced by Rhode Island's Statewide Planning Program. The State of Rhode Island asks communities to produce a Future Land Use Map (FLUM) in their Comprehensive Plans which shows what desired land uses will look like in 20 years' time. Map 1.1 is Coventry's FLUM, created with input from Town Staff, the public, and the consultant team. The FLUM should conform with density requirements based on the land use categories identified in *Land Use 2025* (see Table 1.1) but should also reflect each community's vision for how development will look over the next twenty years.

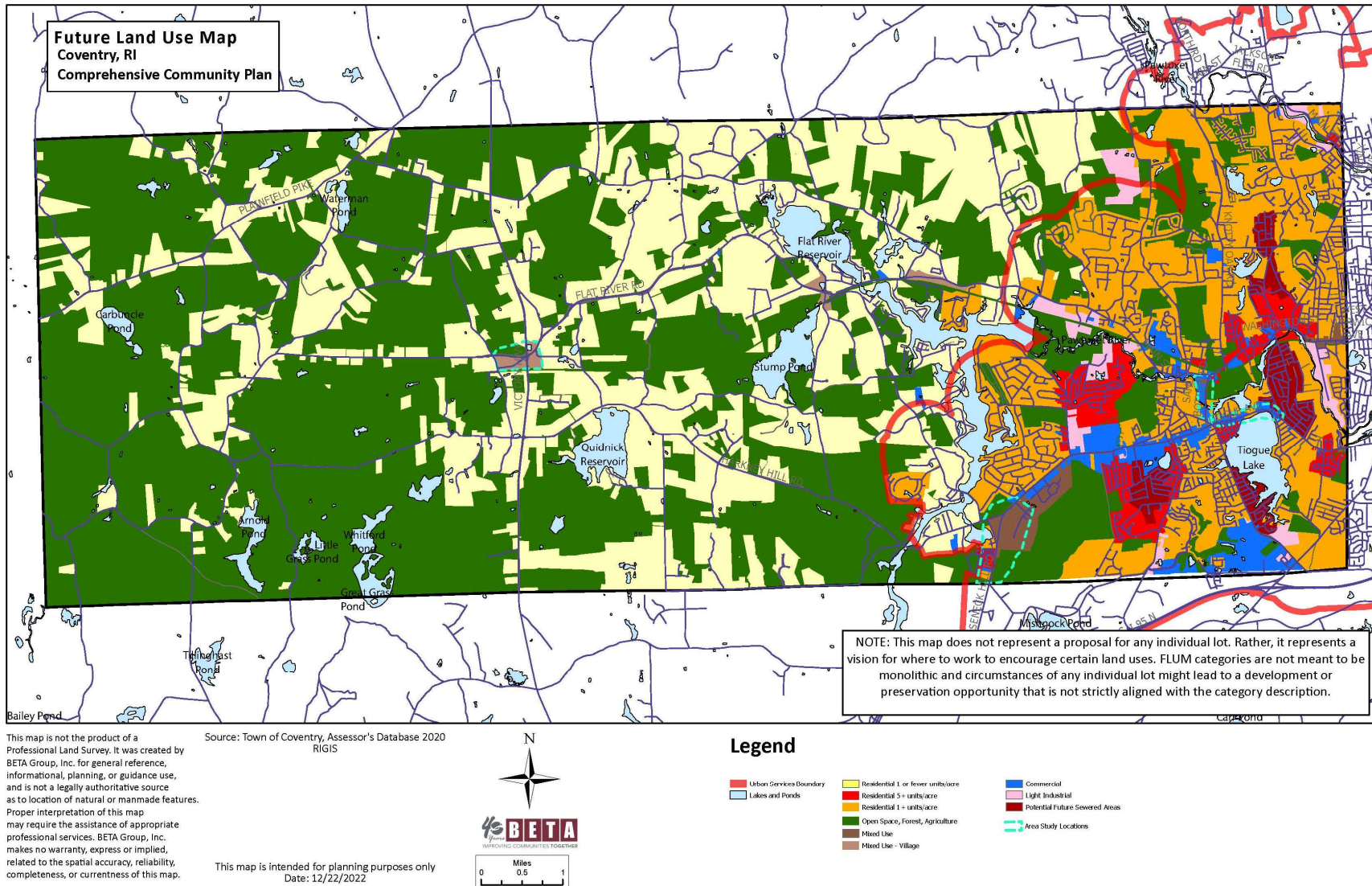
While, by necessity, every square foot of land in Coventry has been assigned a color on the FLUM, the map should not be taken to constitute a literal development proposal on any individual lot. Rather, the FLUM is a type of vision statement for the Town, showing what kind of development should be encouraged in what area. The goals laid out in the FLUM may be met through rezoning, other kinds of regulatory reform, policy and leadership decisions from Town government, or other effective methods.

1.1.1 MINIMUM DENSITIES

FLUM standards describe minimum and maximum residential densities, and density can and will vary within areas with the same designation. For example, areas described as "Medium Density" should have regulations that encourage residential development of at least one unit per acre, but there will likely be variations in existing density between different neighborhoods. New residential development and redevelopment at a density of 5 units per acre or more should be encouraged in sewered areas, whereas medium density areas are not high-priority targets for zoning changes to allow more density than already exists.

1.1.2 URBAN SERVICES BOUNDARY

Drawn from *Land Use 2025*, the Urban Services Boundary designates areas with access to existing public services and infrastructure where new development can be accommodated. In Coventry, the Urban Services Boundary matches up roughly with the divide between the east and west parts of Town (see Map 1.1)



Map 1.1. FUTURE LAND USE MAP

1.1.3 RURAL GROWTH CENTERS

While *Land Use 2025* encourages the concentration of growth in areas that are already substantially developed, the plan recognizes the need for smaller local centers in rural areas. That plan defines growth centers as:

“having ‘a core of commercial and community services, residential development, and natural and built landmarks and boundaries that provide a sense of place,’ making them dynamic and efficient centers for development.”¹

Coventry has one designated rural growth center at Summit Village, which is represented on the FLUM as a “Mixed Use – Village” area to the west. This FLUM category fits the intent of the rural growth center by maintaining a primarily commercial character while allowing for some new mixed-use development.

1.1.4 RECOMMENDED STUDY AREAS

As discussed in this chapter, Coventry covers a large land area with many neighborhoods, villages, and corridors with drastically different streetscapes, development patterns, and history. Many Coventry residents feel that the Town lacks a center or traditional downtown. The Town should initiate a series of supplementary small-area studies throughout the life of this Comprehensive Plan to better plan for the future of its most unique areas. Although others may be considered, the highest-priority areas highlighted on the FLUM are:

- Summit Village (Rural Growth Center)
- Southern Tiogue Ave – Potential Sewer Expansion
- Tiogue Ave – North of Lake Tiogue
- Sandy Bottom Road Corridor

1.2 FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORIES

This section describes each of the land use categories shown on Map 1.1 “Future Land Use Map” and the basic rationale for how parcels were classified. Table 1.1 provides a brief summary of the contents of this section [and its recommendations for additional study](#).

Table 1.1: Description of FLUM Categories			
FLUM Category	Proposed Residential Density	Existing Regulations	Proposed Changes
Low Density Residential	1 dwelling units per 2-5 acres	Mostly RR5 and RR3 with some RR2; primarily	None

¹ “Land Use 2025: Rhode Island State Land Use Policies and Plan.” Rhode Island Department of Administration Division of Planning Statewide Planning Program. 2006.

		single-family and agricultural uses.	
<i>Medium Density Residential</i>	<u>Consider</u> A minimum 1 dwelling unit per acre <u>throughout</u> .	Located mostly in R20, which meets the standard, although RR2 does not.	Examine the zoning of RR2 districts within the urban services boundary <u>to consider rezoning areas of RR2 to R-20</u> . Otherwise, the R20 district already complies.
<i>High Density Residential</i>	<u>Consider</u> A minimum 5 dwelling units per acre.	Located in R20 or commercial districts, no zoning district in Coventry meets the density requirement.	<u>Examine the zoning of R-20 district to consider possible Rrezoning</u> to allow multifamily by right in these areas, tied to sewer access.
<i>Open Space & Agriculture</i>	Maximum 1 dwelling unit per acre.	No existing zoning specifically for preservation – all zoned residential.	Create an Open Space & Agriculture overlay to address sensitive rural areas. Residential densities in these areas are already below the maximum. For open space in eastern Coventry, encourage conservation restrictions on valuable properties without them.
<i>Commercial</i>	<i>None</i>	Existing GB and BP zones	None
<i>Light Industrial</i>	<i>None</i>	Parcels with existing industrial uses.	None
<i>Mixed-Use – High Density</i>	<u>Consider</u> A minimum 5 dwelling units per acre.	Located along main roads within the Urban Services Boundary in areas that would otherwise be HDR or Commercial.	Village Commercial districts already allow mixed-use, but <u>residential uses</u> it -should be considered in other commercial areas. Set as a receiving area for TDR
<i>Mixed-Use Village</i>	<u>Consider</u> 2 units per acre	Corresponds with VRC	Village Commercial districts already allow mixed-use; review regulations to <u>encourage consider</u> mixed-use in other zones.
Source: Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual; Coventry Zoning Bylaw			

1.2.1 MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)

Land Use 2025 calls for most new development to be focused within the Urban Services Boundary at moderate to high densities. MDR is the “default” land use category for residential land within the boundary without access to sewer. The R20 district already meets MDR minimum density requirements and does not require any amendments to meet FLUM objectives. The Town should, however, consider rezoning areas zoned RR-2 inside of the Urban Services Boundary to R20.

1.2.2 HIGH DENSITY SEWERED RESIDENTIAL (HDSR)

For parcels that do not tie into a larger wastewater treatment system, the need to reserve space for on-site treatment significantly limits residential density. Areas in the Urban Services Boundary with access to sewer should be examined to consider ~~allow~~ residential development of 5 units per acre by right. Areas shown as HDSR are either already served by sewer or are adjacent to existing sewer infrastructure and could potentially be connected if a project demanded.

HDSR areas are mostly in the R20 District, which allows one dwelling unit per 20,000 square foot lot by right. ~~To Examine R-20 zoning to consider changes to comply with provide for minimum 5 units per acre in targeted areas where deemed appropriate. density requirements without changing minimum lot size, up to three units per lot would have to be allowed by right.~~ This might be accomplished through adoption of an overlay district or other regulatory approaches for areas tied to immediate sewer availability.

1.2.3 FUTURE HDSR

The Town is developing a ~~2022-2023~~ Sewer Facility Plan Update concurrently with this Comprehensive Plan, which will include recommendations on high-priority areas to consider the expansion of sewer services. Coventry utilizes only a small proportion of the wastewater processing capacity it purchases from West Warwick, and the Town must consider the potential development benefits of sewer expansion with the costs. The FLUM incorporates the draft findings of the sewer plan² to designate some of the most likely future high-density growth areas. These areas, once sewered, will fall under the same set of recommendations as HDSR.

1.2.4 LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)

LDR areas are the more suburban or rural parts of Coventry where single-family homes on larger lots are the norm. The residential densities currently allowed in these areas already meet the statewide standard of a maximum of 1 unit per acre, so no changes are required.

² As of November 2022.

1.2.5 MIXED USE – HIGH DENSITY (MUHD)

This designation is applied to HDSR areas where a combination of commercial and residential uses should be encouraged at the same level of density as nearby HDSR areas. Most of Coventry's existing sewer infrastructure is located in primarily commercial areas, and it is important to maintain and strengthen the Town's commercial base. However, a residential element can be a key factor in making a project financially feasible for a developer and will also help the Town reach its affordable housing goals. Therefore, considering allowing mixed-use by right in certain areas of eastern Coventry is appropriate. Both vertical (commercial uses on the ground floor and residential uses above) and horizontal (different uses located in different structures on the same property) mixed-use should be considered.

1.2.6 MIXED USE – VILLAGE

The MUV category is based on Coventry's existing Village Commercial zones, which already allow some mixed-use development. The Mixed-Use Higher Density category describes sewered or potentially sewered areas that could support large-scale multifamily development, but development in MUV areas should be smaller-scale and designed to visually bolster the local character and act as rural and suburban centers. Residential density should be considered at a greater level than the surrounding rural or suburban areas, but exact standards would vary between different MUV sites and should be based on studies of local wastewater capacity.

1.2.7 COMMERCIAL

The FLUM imagines that Coventry has retained its commercial land, either as purely commercial or mixed-use areas. The Town should work to strengthen its commercial base along Main Street and in the Centre of New England and consider extending the Tiogue Ave. commercial corridor. Most areas targeted for the expansion of commercial uses are classified under one of the two mixed-use categories. All commercial areas should be evaluated to consider residential uses.

1.2.8 LIGHT INDUSTRIAL

The days of heavy industry are behind Coventry, but some less intensive industrial uses such as light manufacturing or biomedical facilities remain in Town. Like commercial uses, the FLUM assumes that existing industrial uses will continue in their current locations. Unlike commercial, light industrial uses should not be expanded without careful consideration as they can have significant impacts on neighboring properties. All industrial areas should be evaluated to consider residential uses.

1.2.9 OPEN SPACE AND AGRICULTURE

The residents of Coventry value their natural outdoor spaces throughout the Town and the historic agricultural landscape of western Coventry. The Open Space and Agriculture (OSA) designation encourages the preservation of land as-is and includes all existing permanently

protected open space as well as parcels that are currently classified as “Open Space, Forests, and Agriculture” by the Town’s Assessor.

Most of the land shown as OSA on the FLUM is zoned for single-family residential development without any conservation protections. While the Town cannot, through zoning, deprive landowners in these areas of all productive economic use of their property, it can offer incentives to redirect development away from environmentally sensitive and undisturbed areas into places designated for higher-intensity development. The main tool the Town should consider is a transfer of development rights (TDR) program, in which property owners can transfer their development rights to a different property elsewhere in Town. For example, the owner of an environmentally sensitive property in west Coventry where a single-family home could be constructed by right might be incentivized to transfer or sell the right to build that unit to a buildable parcel in eastern Coventry where infrastructure could support an additional unit. Under such a program, more land could be conserved without reducing the total amount of housing that can be built in Coventry.

1.3 INTRODUCTION TO LAND USE

Land use is a unique comprehensive plan element in that it examines the trends of other elements and asks: *where* is this happening, and why? This section explores the history of where residential, commercial, and industrial development have taken place in Coventry and lays out a vision for where the community would like to encourage development in the future.

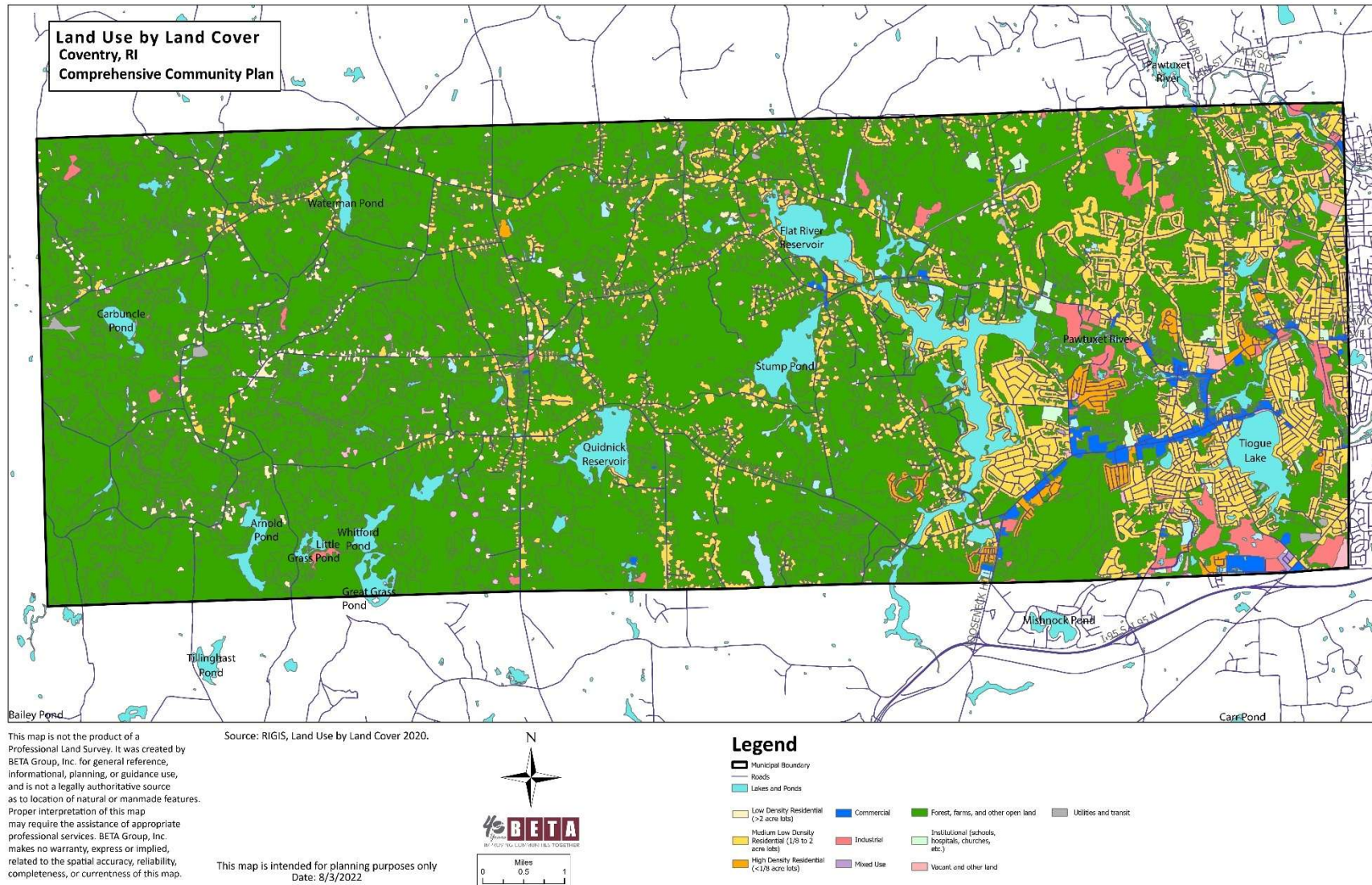
1.4 OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

1.4.1 EXISTING LAND USE TRENDS

1.4.1.1 TOWN-WIDE LAND USE PATTERNS

In 2022, Coventry is a primarily residential community, but in the thousands of years humans have inhabited the area it has seen a diverse array of uses and development patterns across its 62 square miles. The Shawomet, a community of the Narragansett people, fished, hunted, gathered, and grew crops along Coventry’s rivers. When European settlers arrived and founded the Town of Coventry 300 years ago, they engaged in many of the same agricultural activities. After incorporating in 1741, the nineteenth century saw the town embrace industry with major mill development in the east. Today’s Coventry is comprised of a loose grouping of villages, centers, and neighborhoods, each with a unique character, but the Town lacks a central downtown. Textile mills, rural agricultural homesteads, and modern suburban subdivisions have all contributed to the Town’s look and feel, to varying degrees from neighborhood to neighborhood.

[Map 1.1](#) shows the current land uses in Coventry using the latest satellite land cover data to differentiate between developed and undeveloped land, and describes the specific type of use for each area of developed land. Table 1.2 lists each use category by its total land area.



Map 1.2. LAND USE BY LAND COVER

Table 1.2. Land Use by Land Cover

Land Use	Acres	% of land
Forests (all)	26,598.47	66.5%
Residential (all)	6,812.68	17.0%
Water	2,186.17	5.5%
Agriculture (utilized and unutilized)	1,430.18	3.6%
Wetlands	781.19	2.0%
Industrial & Mining	629.00	1.6%
Commercial	428.84	1.1%
Recreation (Developed)	220.4	0.6%
Vacant & Open Land (Urban)	295.36	0.7%
Institutional (schools, nonprofits, etc.)	174.33	0.4%
Utilities & Energy	123.95	0.3%
Other	290.87	0.7%
Total	39,971.44	100.0%

Source: RIGIS

Over two-thirds of the land in Coventry is forested, and only about 21 percent is developed (not including agricultural land like fields and pastures). Table 1.3 lists the uses for only this developed land, showing that the vast majority of development in Coventry has been for housing.

Table 1.3. Land Use by Land Cover: Developed Land Only

Use	#	%
Residential (all)	6,812.7	81.2%
Industrial & Mining	629.0	7.5%
Commercial	428.8	5.1%
Recreation (Developed)	220.4	2.6%
Institutional (schools, nonprofits, etc.)	174.3	2.1%
Utilities & Energy	124.0	1.5%
Total Developed Area	8,389.2	21.0%

Source: RIGIS

The land use data in Table 1.2 and Table 1.3 was updated for the year 2020 as this plan was being drafted, allowing for a comparison between 2011 and 2020 data to see how land use patterns have changed in Coventry over the last decade. Changes were slow but showed steady development, as residential land increased while forested areas decreased, both by several hundred acres.

Land use patterns are far from uniform across Coventry, especially between the urban and suburban neighborhoods of east Coventry and the rural communities of west Coventry. Most of

the developed land in Table 1.2 and Table 1.3 is in east Coventry, whereas most forestland is in the west.

In the east, industrial villages like Anthony developed in the nineteenth century, bringing with it high-density residential development to house workers. Today, little active industrial activity remains in town, but east Coventry remains the Town's commercial center, including the large mixed-use Centre of New England development along the border with West Greenwich and East Greenwich.

Most land in west Coventry remains undeveloped largely due to the areas' agricultural history, although few active farms remain today. New development in the western part of town takes the form of single-family homes on large lots in keeping with the area's rural character. The only notable commercial area in west Coventry is the Summit Village traffic circle, but even this center is largely undeveloped with only a handful of small businesses.

1.4.1.2 RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Once an industrial center in its own right, Coventry transitioned into a suburban commuter community in the postwar years of the twentieth century. The clusters of residences that developed around mill villages were mainly built before World War I, whereas many of the subdivisions in Town were built between 1970 and 1990. Most single-family subdivisions up to the present day have been built in the previously undeveloped parts of east Coventry and in Central Coventry.

West Coventry is characterized by low-density residential development along major roads, with few subdivisions. Homes in this area are larger and newer, on average, than homes in the east, with a median year built of 1980. West Coventry also has clusters of historic buildings in village centers, but most existing housing was built post-1970.

While Coventry has few apartment buildings, the 2010's saw two major mill redevelopment projects in Anthony and Harris villages that added 279 rental units. Several large condominiums projects were constructed since 2010, notably adding hundreds of units to the Centre of New England site in the southeast. Coventry has several large mobile home parks in the eastern part of town, containing around 700 total manufactured homes. Two of these developments, Ramblewood Estates and Mapleroot Village, have permanent restrictions on some units making them affordable to low-income households³.

1.4.1.3 COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Coventry's commercial activity is centered on Tiogue Avenue/Route 3, an automobile-oriented corridor lined with national fast food restaurant chains, medium-sized retail establishments,

³ In Rhode Island state law, an affordable homeownership unit is a housing unit where housing payments (including mortgage payments, taxes, and insurance) make up no more than 30 percent of a household's total income, for households with 120 percent or less of the area median income.

banks, gas stations, and some notable local businesses, though national businesses are more common. There are also a couple of large commercial plazas nearby off Main Street/Route 117. This area is characterized by “strip” style development with little to no landscaping or cohesive design.

The other major commercial area is the Centre of New England complex, located on Coventry’s southern border with direct access to Interstate 95. This 420 acre mixed-use development is anchored by big-box retailers like Wal-Mart and BJ’s and includes restaurants, hotels, and office space used by smaller local businesses, however much of the original 2003 buildout plan remains undeveloped. The Centre of New England is partially located in East Greenwich and West Greenwich, but the largest retailers are in Coventry. Most of Coventry’s businesses are adjacent to major transit corridors like Route 3 and I-95, although there are some scattered commercial sites elsewhere in east Coventry and along Flat River Road.

1.4.1.4 INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

While the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century gave rise to the distinctive brick mill buildings and dense worker housing development in the villages of east Coventry, little active industrial activity remains in those areas today. Coventry has a technology-oriented industrial park south of Route 117 by the West Warwick border, and the historic village of Harris in the northeast has several large mill buildings that have been redeveloped to house modern light industrial uses. Coventry has several active quarries scattered throughout Town that are also considered industrial land.

1.4.1.5 OPEN SPACE

Most of the land in Coventry is undeveloped, although only a fraction of that land is permanently protected from development. State and local conservation land constitute about 7,640 acres, or about 19 percent of Coventry’s land. The largest conservation areas are the Big River Management Area on the West Greenwich border and the Nicholas Farm Management Area on the Connecticut border. State and federal environmental regulations also limit the ability to develop land adjacent to bodies of water, wetlands, and other sensitive natural habitats.

1.4.1.6 LAND USE BY TAX PARCEL

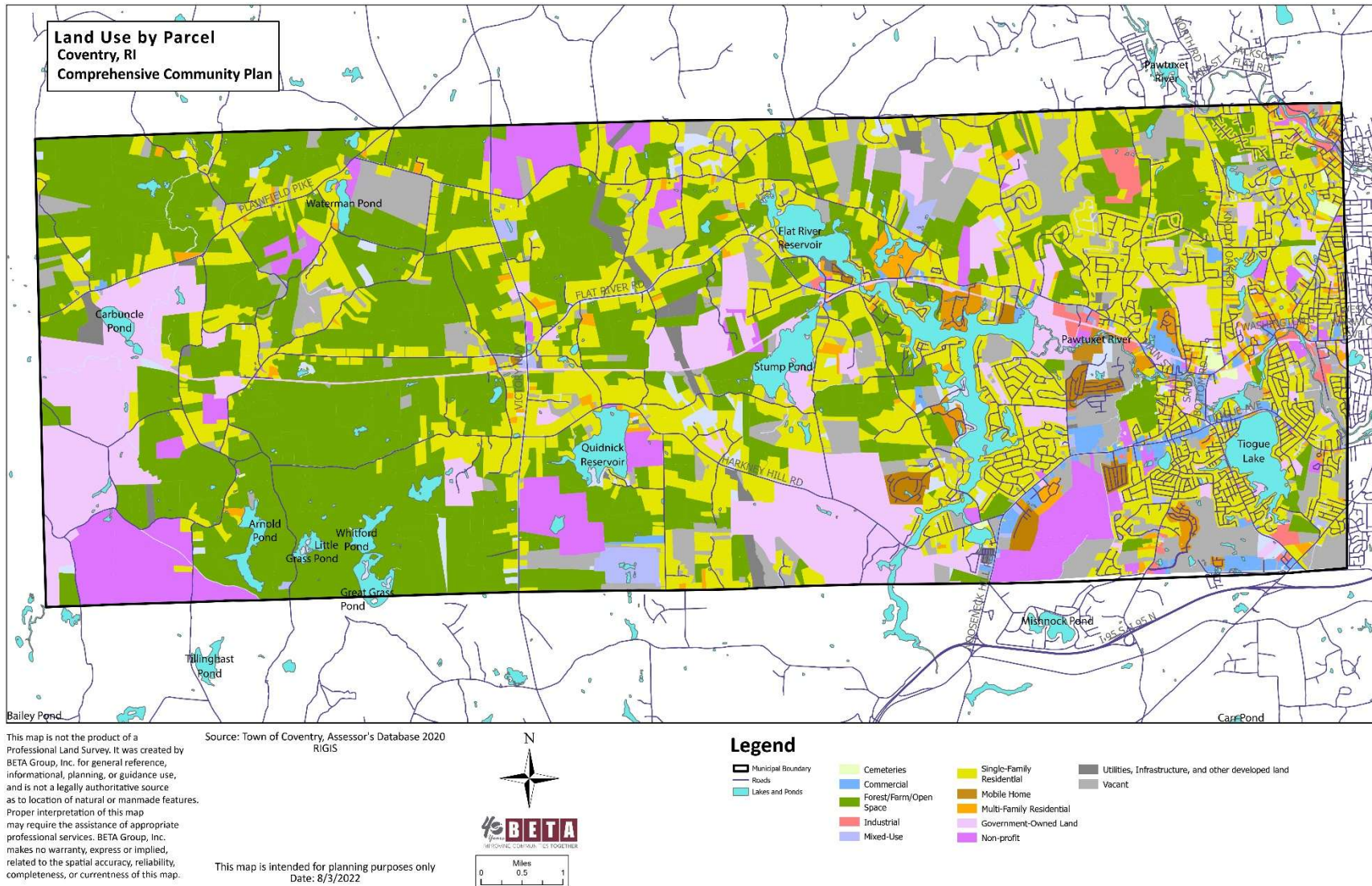
Table 1.4 uses local Tax Assessor data⁴ to provide an alternate view of land use in Coventry (also shown on Map 1.3). The Assessor's Database classifies each tax parcel under one primary use, whereas land cover data differentiates between developed and undeveloped land on a single parcel. Assessors are also concerned with different land use categories than those in [Table 1.2. Land Use by Land Cover](#), especially those with tax implications such as government or nonprofit land. Comparing Table 1.4 and Table 1.2, the total area of open space is much greater than the area of parcels that contain *only* open space, indicating that much of Coventry's forestland and farmland is on parcels that also contain a primary structure. These parcels are mostly large lots with a single residential structure where most of the land area has remained forested.

Table 1.4 shows that nearly 20 percent of Coventry is owned by the municipal or state government, and that about 10 percent of land is considered vacant. Vacant land is potentially developable with no permanent legal protections, as opposed to conservation land that can never be built upon. It is possible that vacant land may be difficult or impossible to develop for other reasons, such as not meeting the dimensional requirements in Coventry's zoning ordinance. Map 1.3 shows that most vacant parcels are in east Coventry, although large pieces of vacant land are found throughout Town. Some Town-owned parcels may also be vacant with some development potential, depending on local policy.

Table 1.4. Land Use by Tax Parcel

Land Use	Acres	% of total
Open Space (inc. farm/forest)	12,680.5	35.5%
Single-family residential	10,299.8	28.8%
Municipal land	3,750.9	10.5%
Vacant land	3,383.1	9.5%
State Land	2,652.6	7.4%
2+ family residential	646.2	1.8%
Other Developed	598.1	1.7%
Commercial	486.2	1.4%
Mixed use - commercial/residential	360.0	1.0%
Industrial	278.7	0.8%
Utilities & Infrastructure	232.5	0.7%
Schools	179.9	0.5%
Churches/Religious	92.2	0.3%
Cemetery	65.7	0.2%
Seasonal/Beach Property	22.6	0.1%
Total	35,729.0	100.0%
<i>Source: Coventry Tax Assessor's Office, 2020</i>		

⁴ Most recently updated in 2020.



Map 1.3. LAND USE BY PARCEL

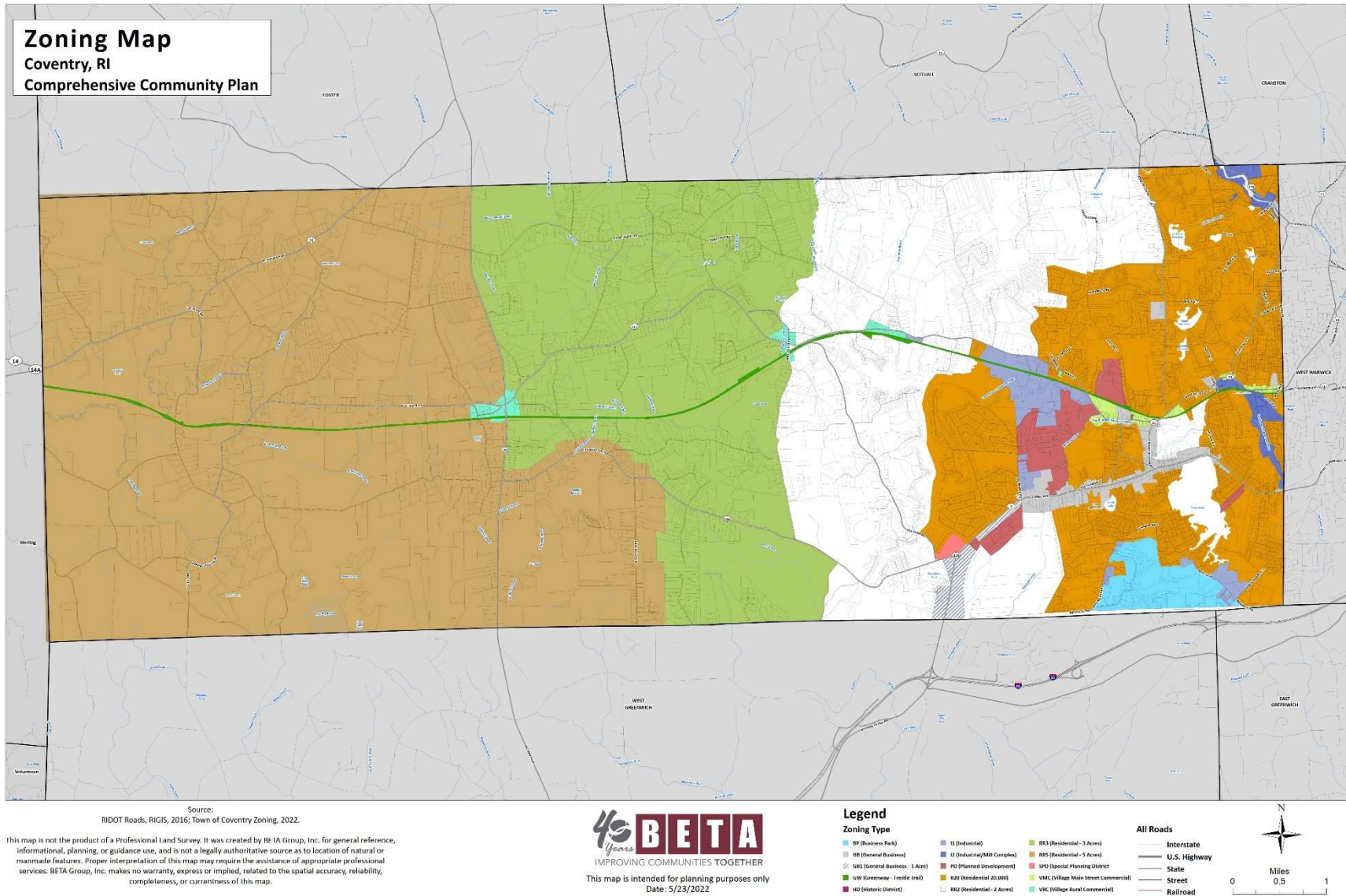
1.5 ZONING DISTRICTS

A Town's zoning ordinance is its primary tool for regulating land use within its borders. Zoning shapes land use in two main ways:

- Regulating built form by requiring new construction conform to certain dimensional standards, such as the distance between buildings and lot lines or how much of a lot can be rendered impervious. These regulations affect the look and character of an area.
- Regulating allowable uses, ensuring that only activities compatible with the surrounding area can be proposed.

Zoning splits municipalities up into different zoning districts, where different sets of regulations apply. In this way, a town can require that, for example, only commercial uses may be proposed in a certain area, or new buildings must be sited far back from the road in another.

Coventry has twelve zoning districts on its zoning map (see [Map 1.4](#)), with an additional two "floating" zoning districts and two "overlay" districts (see "Other Districts" section). Table 1.5 lists each zoning district by major use type (residential, commercial, and industrial) alongside selected dimensional regulations that are representative of the district's built form.



Map 1.4. Zoning districts

Table 1.5. Summary of Regular Zoning Districts

District Name	Min. lot area	Frontage (feet)	Setbacks (front/side/rear)
Residential Districts			
Rural Residential 5 (RR5)	5 acres	300	100/85/150
Rural Residential 3 (RR3)	3 acres	225	50*/50/90
Rural Residential 2 (RR2)	2 acres	225	45/50/90
Residential (R20)	20,000 sq. feet	120**	35/20/40**
Commercial Districts			
Village Rural Commercial (VRC)	40,000 sq. feet	125	20/15/25
Village Main Street Commercial (VMC)	7,500 sq. feet	80	10/10/20
General Business (GB)	15,000 sq. feet	125	10/10/30
General Business 1 (GB-1)	1 acre	200	10/10/40
Industrial Districts			
Industrial 1 (I1)	60,000 sq. feet	150	50/30/50
Industrial/Mill Complexes (I2)	N/A	N/A	50/30/50
*Does not include floating zones or overlay districts			
**Dimensional standards in R20 are more intensive for single-family dwellings without public water and for two-family dwellings			
Source: Town of Coventry Zoning Ordinance			

1.5.1 RESIDENTIAL ZONING DISTRICTS

Coventry is overwhelmingly zoned for residential development. The Town's four residential zoning districts comprise 94 percent of its total area (see Table 1.6), meaning that barring other regulatory restrictions single-family homes are allowed "by right"⁵ almost anywhere. No non-residential district comprises more than 1.1 percent of the Town's total area.

Table 1.6. Coventry Zoning Districts by Area

District	Area (acres)	%
Rural Residential-5 (RR5)	16,483.2	41.7%
Rural Residential-3 (RR3)	7,761.9	19.7%
Rural Residential-2 (RR2)	7,197.6	18.2%
Residential-20 (R20)	5,859.3	14.8%
Planned Development (PD)	436.2	1.1%
Business Park (BP)	419.6	1.1%

⁵ A use allowed by right is one that does not require any special permissions from the Town. An as-of-right use must be permitted to move forward so long as all other applicable legal standards are met.

Industrial (I1)	389.4	1.0%
General Business (GB)	358.8	0.9%
Industrial/Mill Complexes (I2)	184.1	0.5%
General Business-1 (GB1)	182.6	0.5%
Village Rural Commercial (VRC)	119.5	0.3%
Village Main Street Commercial (VMC)	91.5	0.2%
Total	39,483.7	100.0%

Source: Town of Coventry

Coventry's residential zoning districts clearly delineate the divide between east and west. The **Residential (R20) District** covers the areas in east Coventry where traditional mill village settlement patterns dominated before zoning was adopted. R20 allows the densest residential development in Coventry (see Table 1.5). Notably, the R20 district has more intensive dimensional standards for lots without access to municipal water.

Almost 80 percent of Coventry's land is zoned under one of the three "rural residential" zones, including nearly all land west of the Flat River Reservoir. All three zones are similar in intent and differ mainly in their dimensional requirements, allowing more density in the east and less in the west. The zoning ordinances assume that rural residential districts will not have access to municipal water or sewer services and will therefore require larger lots to accommodate private wastewater systems. Most land in the rural residential zones is undeveloped forest or farmland.

The number in each rural residential district name is the minimum buildable lot size, in acres; for example, the **Rural Residential 5 (RR5) District** requires a five-acre lot to construct a single-family dwelling and requires the largest setbacks from property lines of any residential district (see Table 1.5). RR5 is the largest district in Town, covering west Coventry, and is "designed to preserve the rural character of the Town and to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive land."⁶ A few non-residential uses related to agriculture and other customarily rural activities like logging and traditional craftsmanship are permitted, and some agriculturally oriented commercial uses like garden supply shops can be allowed by special permit.

Rural Residential 3 (RR3) District covers most of Central Coventry, and like RR5 discourages intensive development to protect the environment and groundwater reserves. Use regulations are less permissive than the RR5 district but may still allow select non-residential uses consistent with a rural character. **Rural Residential 2 (RR2) District** covers part of Central Coventry and the less-developed parts of east Coventry. Most of the non-residential uses permitted in the more rural districts are prohibited here, and many of the neighborhoods are more suburban in character than rural.

⁶ Coventry Zoning Ordinance

1.5.2 COMMERCIAL ZONING DISTRICTS

All of Coventry's commercial zoning districts are in the east, except for the Village Rural Commercial district at Summit Village, home to a few small businesses. Most of Tiogue Avenue is zoned **General Business (GB)**, Coventry's primary commercial district. The lower part of Route 3 near West Greenwich, including Nooseneck Road, is zoned as **General Business 1 (GB-1)**, which allows the same uses as the GB District but with somewhat more intensive dimensional regulations. Most common types of retail, restaurants, and supermarkets are allowed by right in GB and GB-1.

Village Rural Commercial (VRC) and **Village Main Street Commercial (VMC)** are "traditional mixed use village nodes" that follow older, more traditional commercial development patterns than the GB District. The VMC District is located along Main Street in the traditional commercial centers of east Coventry's mill villages. VMC mixes with the GB District west of the intersection of Main Street and Sandy Bottom Road. The VRC District is in the Summit Village area at the Route 117/102 intersection in west Coventry.

Both village commercial districts allow commercial, residential, and mixed-use development, subject to special design and development standards meant to preserve the historic character of the area. Some limited retail uses are allowed by right, and multifamily apartments above commercial space are allowed by special permit.

The **Business Park (BP)** District is contiguous with the Centre of New England development on Coventry's southern border. The BP District denotes "major commercial, office and industrial centers,"⁷ and allows the most intensive uses of any commercial district with many types of light manufacturing and industrial storage allowed by right. The zoning also states "Proposals shall ensure a coordinated development plan where uses, traffic controls, open space needs, buffering, and site appropriateness can be evaluated."

1.5.3 INDUSTRIAL ZONING DISTRICTS

Coventry has two primarily industrial zoning districts, both located in east Coventry. The **I1 District** is located largely south of Route 117, east of the easternmost point of the Flat River Reservoir. I1 is home to several industrial-oriented retail facilities, light manufacturing, and an asphalt quarry. The **I2 District** is designed to facilitate redevelopment of historic mill sites. Coventry's two I2 districts are located in the northeast corner of town by the old Harris Mill complex and along the Pawtuxet River near the border with West Warwick. Both I2 districts have seen major residential mill redevelopment projects but still host modern industrial parks and complexes. Most types of manufacturing allowed in Town are allowed in both industrial districts, although I1 is more permissive. The original intent of the Mill Redevelopment District, discussed below, was to replace the I2 district and prioritize reuse of mill structures for

⁷ Coventry Zoning Ordinance

residential use. However, this vision was never properly adopted for these areas and the original I2 district remains.

1.5.4 OTHER ZONING DISTRICTS

The **Planned Development District (PD)** allows a wide variety of residential, commercial, and industrial uses including mixed-use and multi-family developments. Projects proposed in the PD zone are called **Land Development Projects (LDP)**.

LDPs are a flexible type of application that can be applied to “residential, commercial, institutional, recreational, open space, and/or mixed uses.”⁸ The Planning Commission has discretion in approving LDPs if the applicant can demonstrate that deviating from the dimensional regulations of underlying zoning will not have a negative impact on the surrounding area and will further important Town goals.⁹ Some use regulations may also be waived, such as proposing a residential development in a non-residential zone. At least 40 percent of an LDP site must be preserved as open space.

Three sites are currently zoned as PD, all in east Coventry and all residential: the Washington Village condo development, Woodland Manor apartments, and the Westwood Estates mobile home park.

Coventry has one “floating district,” **Residential Mobile Home (RMH) District**, that does not currently appear on the zoning map ([Map 1.4](#)) to regulate mobile home parks. A mobile home park in the RMH district requires a minimum of ten acres, and at least 10 percent of land must be set aside as open space.

The **Special Planning District (SPD)** is one of two overlay districts, a “second layer” of zoning regulations that are applied in addition to the underlying zoning district. The SPD was adopted specifically to “revitalize and develop Tiogue Avenue/Nooseneck Hill Road and Sandy Bottom Road so as to dramatically improve the functioning and appearance of this arterial corridor, create redevelopment opportunities and create jobs.”¹⁰ The district is especially concerned with the appearance and visual character of Coventry’s main commercial corridor, and requires a design review process by the Planning Commission to avoid further “strip” style development. The SPD has no impact on the allowed uses in the district.

The **Floodplain Overlay District**¹¹ was established in the flood hazard areas identified by FEMA to prevent an increase in flood risk due to new development in environmentally sensitive areas.

⁸ Coventry Zoning Ordinance

⁹ Factors for the Commission to consider in making this determination include impact on public services, impact on public health, whether the proposed design is appropriate for the site, and unique characteristics of the site that might allow it support additional density, among others.

¹⁰ Coventry Zoning Ordinance

¹¹ Established in Coventry’s general ordinance rather than its zoning ordinance.

Development proposals in the Floodplain Overlay District must comply with additional design and construction standards, including elevating new buildings above the base flood elevation and designing septic systems to avoid contaminating nearby water bodies.

1.5.5 OTHER ZONING REGULATIONS

A **Residential Cluster Development (RCD)** is an alternate approach to the traditional suburban subdivision that prioritizes creative design to preserve as much of the natural environment as possible. Buildings are clustered together at a higher density in a smaller portion of the property than would otherwise be allowed, allowing more land to remain undeveloped and minimizing impervious surfaces like driveways. An RCD may be proposed in any residential district, with the total number of units not to exceed what would otherwise be permissible in the district. However, a developer can earn a density bonus of up to 20 percent more units by preserving at least half of the site as open space or preserving particularly valuable historic or natural features. Minimum lot size of 20 acres in the RR5 District, 10 acres in the RR2 District, and 5 acres in the R20 District are required.

Accessory Dwelling Units are small residential units that may be added to an existing dwelling or parcel. They may be either attached to the main structure or detached. The ADUs must be subordinate to the main dwelling and the overall size the ADU can be built is regulated by the number of bedrooms.

Minimum parking requirements can have a significant effect on the viability of a project. As an example, Coventry requires two parking spaces per unit for all residential uses, which significantly increases the amount of land required for projects with a large number of units. Most retail uses require one parking space per 150 or 200 square feet of gross floor area, depending on the total gross floor area.

1.6 FLUM FINDINGS

Residents have expressed their desire to avoid further development of West and Central Coventry to maintain the areas' rural character. While this desire seems at odds with the designation of Summit Village as a rural growth center, it remains to be seen whether residents would accept carefully planned development that is mindful of local character and history while improving west Coventry's access to goods and services.

1.7 NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Coventry did not adopt zoning ordinances until 1981, so many lot lines were drawn and structures were built before zoning regulations were enforced in the Town and may not comply with those regulations as they exist today. These “nonconforming” structures or lots require a variance from the Zoning Board for any extension or expansion, no matter how minor. Planning staff report that as a result, the Board must hear many applications for inconsequential alterations on nonconforming properties.

- Planning staff report that the current Table of Uses has caused the Planning Commission difficulties. It is simultaneously too detailed, containing many unusual uses that are rarely or never proposed, and missing some key uses that has made interpretation difficult.
- Public input collected for the Comprehensive Plan update process and past planning efforts indicate a desire to see most undeveloped land preserved as-is, and a focus on redevelopment and reuse in urban areas.
- There are opportunities to expand commercial and mixed-use development along corridors like Route 3, especially if adequate sewer access becomes available.

1.7.1 BUILD-OUT ANALYSIS

Please refer to the buildout analysis provided in Appendix LU. The following build-out analysis attempts to estimate the amount of development that is possible in Coventry using assumptions based on current conditions. To produce an estimate of the number of residential units and the associated population growth, Table 1.7 shows the total land area for each zoning district where residential uses are allowed by right. Dividing the total land area (minus an assumed proportion of undevelopable land) by the minimum lot size required per unit gives a count of the theoretical maximum number of units that could be legally constructed in that district. Multiplying the predicted number of units by Coventry's average household size gives a rough estimate of how many residents might be expected to live in the new homes.

The build-out analysis is obviously not without its flaws. The entire exercise is based on assumptions: that the maximum allowable density for each of Coventry's zoning districts will not change, that the average household size will not change, that no more land will be permanently protected, etc.

Table 1.7. Residential Build-out Analysis

Land-Use Category	Total Land Area (acres)	Buildable Land-Area*	Percent Land-Area	Max.Res Density	Res.-Develop Potential (units)	Population capacity**
RR5	16,483	12,362	41.7%	0.20	2,472	5,935
RR3	7,762	5,821	19.7%	0.33	1,921	4,610
RR2	7,198	5,398	18.2%	0.50	2,699	6,478
R-20	5,859	4,394	14.8%	2.18	9,579	22,992
PD	436	327	1.1%	-	-	-
Commercial	1,172	879	3.0%	-	-	-
Industrial	574	430	1.5%	-	-	-
Total	39,484	29,643	100.0%	-	16,671	43,845

* Buildable Land Areas reflect a 25% reduction from Total Land Area due to wetlands, roads, and other unbuildable areas.
 ** Average population per household in Coventry derived from 2020 Census is 2.63 persons/household.
 Source: Town of Coventry

Table 1.8 recreates the build-out analysis in Table 1.7 using the residential densities proposed on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM). In this alternative scenario, despite a slight majority of the

Town's land area being set aside to preserve as open space, the estimated number of units at buildout increased. This is primarily due to the increased residential density allowed in east Coventry. There is no guarantee that this many units will ever be built in Town or when such a buildout might be reached, but Tables 1.7 and 1.8 suggest that Coventry can both protect its natural resources and open space while growing its population and economy.

Table 1.8: Buildout Analysis Based on Future Land Use Map

FLUM Category	Land Area (acres)	% of land	Est. Res. Density	Est. Units at Buildout*	% of units at buildout	Population at Buildout**
Open Space	19,676.55	50.9%	0	0	0.0%	-
Low Density	11,293.02	29.2%	0.4	3,614	19.6%	9,504
Medium Density	5,044.12	13.1%	2	8,071	43.8%	21,226
High Density	729.01	1.9%	6	3,499	19.0%	9,203
Commercial	727.02	1.9%	0	0	0.0%	-
Future Sewer	414.96	1.1%	6	1,992	10.8%	5,238
Light Industrial	395.08	1.0%	0	0	0.0%	-
Mixed Use—High Density	256.31	0.7%	5	1,025	5.6%	2,696
Mixed Use—Village	94.38	0.2%	3	227	1.2%	596
Total	38,630.45	100%	N/A	18,427	100%	48,463
*Excludes 20% of land to account for setbacks, open space, etc.						
**Based on the 2020 average household size of 2.63						

1.8 GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

A complete list of goals, policies, and actions regarding the economic development of Coventry, Rhode Island can be found in Volume 1 of the 2026 Coventry Comprehensive Plan.