



Introduction

This Comprehensive Plan has been updated to guide future growth and change in Cranston. This Comprehensive Plan Update lays out the means and methods to create the best possible future for Cranston for the next five years and beyond.

Understanding how this City is built and populated, and where it is headed, helped formulate this Plan. The data collected helped describe the City as it is today and the people who participated in the outreach effort helped determine where the City should direct its future efforts and resources.

The City Administration, City Council, Planning Commission, and Planning Department will take lead roles in many of the proposed actions. However, what will make this Plan viable is the participation and commitment of Cranston residents. Strong community support for this Plan will turn the plans vision into a reality. Consider this Plan as an invitation to your participation in shaping Cranston's future.

Where is Cranston Now?

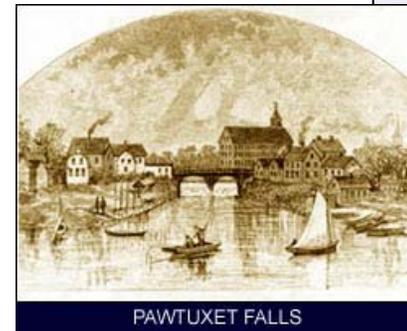
Cranston has valuable assets and resources in its people, buildings and environment. The following summary statistics will help create a recent picture of the City.

Land Use

- There is an equal amount of land programmed for residential purposes as there is for institutional, commercial and industrial combined.
- Public agencies (local, state, and federal governments) and non-profits (churches, schools, and private hospitals) use over 13% of the land in Cranston.
- Over 11% of the land in Cranston is vacant and designated for residential uses.

Demographics

- The population of Cranston has grown 0.15 to 0.25% per year for the past eight years, while the number of households in western Cranston has grown approximately 2.3% per year, during the same period.
- Cranston's central census tracts contain nearly 2/3 of the City's population and almost 3/4 of its households.
- The change in population and number of households are expected to remain below 1% for eastern and central Cranston, but are expected to increase more than 2% for western Cranston.
- The median family income for Cranston was \$55,241 in 2000.
- Household incomes in western Cranston are approximately 80% higher than in central and eastern Cranston.



PAWTUXET FALLS



Retail

- The Garden City Center is the largest retail center in Cranston.
- Cranston's retail businesses capture a substantial net inflow of consumer spending by capturing dollars from people that live outside of the City.
- New development at Chapel View is expected to compete with other high-end retailers in the Providence region.



Rolfe Square

Natural Resources Facts

- Key partnerships were established between the West Bay Land Trust, Champlin Foundation, RIDEM, and the City to acquire open space.
- The City acquired more than 350 acres of mostly undeveloped land as protected open space over the past 12 years.
- The Historic Scenic Farm Loop was created in 2002 to help support protection and acquisition of agricultural land in western

Where is this City Headed?

There have been some significant changes in Cranston; the City's future holds the promise of more to come.

Housing Facts

- Housing prices increased more than 3 times the average annual % increase in personal income between 1998 and 2003.
- Almost 38% of the housing units in Cranston are multifamily units, and 33% of all housing units are rental.
- More than 55% of Cranston's housing units were built before 1960.
- The majority of new residential construction (71%) between 1993 and 2003 has been in western Cranston, and more than 99% of these were for single-family homes.

What is working?

Finances

The City budget is back on track. The City has benefited from a surplus in recent years.

Infrastructure

The City continues to invest in its schools, emergency services, and utility systems to the benefit of many neighborhoods and commercial areas.

Growth

City growth has been relatively slow, but is being managed with a combination of policies, regulations and review procedures.

What needs work?

Growth Management

Development in the City can be redirected to improve the local businesses and neighborhoods. Connecting new public policy goals with tailored, specific development will position the City as sustainable for future generations.

Pastore Center

The state is leasing office space in Providence. However, here in nearby Cranston, large, beautiful, historic buildings lay vacant and awaiting maintenance at the Pastore Center. Some of the buildings are now too deteriorated to use, but others provide an opportunity for reuse and historic preservation.

Natural and City History

Historic and natural resources are still being lost to development, particularly the former farm lands and open spaces in the western neighborhoods and in many of the older historic districts in the eastern areas.

Reinvigorating Neighborhood Centers

Tools to improve the character of commercial areas along the major City roads have been in place since the previous Comprehensive Plan. However, safety, architectural character, parking, and accessibility in the village centers remain prominent issues.



Pastore Center, abandoned building

How Do We Get There?

To address these issues and continue on the right path, the City must make a commitment to complete certain actions through policies, financial commitments and other actions. We call these the means and methods, as laid out in the Implementation section. The means and methods generally involve:

Means: Forming coalitions and finding advocates, such as local business coalitions and citizen advocacy groups; approving the funding and obtaining grants from public and private sources; garnering State

support through policies and procedures, such as reinvestment in the Pastore Center.

Methods: Following the steps for action as outlined in the Implementation section, the City may adopt the policies of Smart Growth and create new standards for development. The City may also program public investment to support community goals such as extending public utilities to new private development when other public goals are met.

The heart of a Comprehensive Plan is the program of land use choices and decisions. However, as suggested, the full implementation of the Plan will require many different actions by many different people and entities. This Plan shows ways to achieve its goals and objectives.

Planning History

The City of Cranston has a strong history of planning. It regularly reviews and periodically updates its Comprehensive Plan to ensure that it remains a valid tool for guiding growth in the City. The last full Comprehensive Plan process was completed in 1992, which has represented the framework for land use and development in the City along with the many amendments that have kept the Plan up-to-date. The Comprehensive Plan includes goals, policies, and strategies for the City to employ in guiding its own actions and those of others— both public and private – as Cranston continues to grow and develop.

This Comprehensive Plan Update continues this tradition of planning. As Cranston approaches the build-out of its residential, commercial and industrial-zoned land, it becomes more critical to identify ways of successfully developing and redeveloping the City’s economic resources, while protecting its natural and cultural resources, maintaining quality public services and facilities, and ensuring the long-term affordability of its housing stock. These are some of the more important issues that guided the Comprehensive Plan process.

Planning Process

The Comprehensive Plan Update was developed through phases involving multiple, interrelated tasks. Each phase resulted in a product designed to contribute directly to the development of a comprehensive plan, by incorporating the action steps required to implement the plan.

The initial stage of the Plan Update process involved gathering information on the existing conditions and trends within Cranston through research of existing documents and studies, surveys, and meetings with key City representatives. The information was grouped into key topics: natural resources, open space, historic resources, demographics, land uses, housing, economics, circulation, and services and facilities.

The next stage involved three facilitated public visioning sessions in which the existing conditions information was presented and attendees were able to help formulate the preferred goals and objectives for Cranston's future.

Strategies and actions were then developed that ensure that the challenges identified in the existing conditions analysis could be overcome and that all of the opportunities within Cranston are fully realized in accordance with the City's goals and objectives.

Community Participation

Overview of the Community Involvement Effort

When initially designed, the Community Participation Strategy for the Cranston Comprehensive Plan was aimed at getting input from residents and making them aware of the public process to manage growth and change in their community.

In actual practice, the meaningful and effective involvement of the community was an integral and critical component in developing this Plan and the public was involved in each step of the process. The public participation process made a positive contribution to the planning process through a variety of media types and effort including workshops, a survey, interviews, newspaper articles, and a website.

Public Outreach

The public outreach component focused on informing the public of the basic issues at appropriate points of the planning process. Specifically,

public workshops and meetings were advertised in two local newspapers, the *Cranston Herald* and the *Providence Journal*. Information was posted on a web site created specifically for the Plan. A questionnaire was distributed to seek public input about the City's services, resources, and needs (see Figure 1.1).

Public Input

Residents, City staff, and key stakeholders provided a collective source of information, which was very helpful in forming the recommendations.

Public Meetings and Workshops

A series of public meetings and workshops were held in the course of updating the Comprehensive Plan. At the first workshop, participants were asked to identify and prioritize important issues and needs as they relate to the plan elements. Participants broke into small groups to review and discuss their views. At the second and third public meetings, residents commented on the proposed recommendations that were based on the analysis of the existing conditions.

Interviews

Interviews were held in person and by phone with key stakeholders, representatives, and agencies that have interests with the city's resources, assets, services, and programs. Their valuable input helped determine the needs and potential solutions to improve the City and manage its growth.

Survey

A mail survey was conducted by the City Planning Department to inform the public of the planning process and to collect their input about city issues and services. The primary purpose of the survey was to reach out to the community to take a "pulse" of public opinion on the potential goals and ways to improve the City through the planning process. The Planning Department and the consultant used the responses to formulate Plan actions for the City.

Group or Method	Type of Involvement
Public Meetings and Workshop	Provided the community's views on existing and potential land uses
Community Planning Department	Helped direct the planning process
Survey	Provided representative community view of existing and potential uses
Interviews with key agencies and users	Provided direct input into specific needs, constraints, and opportunities

Figure 1-1 Public Participation Program

State Requirements for Planning

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act of 1988 requires not only that the Comprehensive Plan be updated at least every five years, but also that each community's zoning be amended to conform with its Comprehensive Plan within 18 months after the Plan is approved by the Rhode Island Department of Administration, Statewide Planning Program.

The goals, polices, actions, strategies, and implementation schedule within all the elements of this Plan Update, when adopted by the City

Council and accepted by the State Planning Administration, supplement those of the previous 1992 Plan. This ensures a clear understanding of which documents and actions will be used during the approval and implementation process that is required by the Act.

Plan Format

This Comprehensive Plan Update is intended to provide new ideas and make any necessary modifications to the path dictated by the 1992 Comprehensive Plan. Many of the recommendations in the 1992 Plan were either implemented in accordance with that plan or are relevant today. Since this Update needs to be informed by the past efforts, the format of this document presents each element of the Comprehensive Plan in three sections:

- I. Summary and Accomplishments of the 1992 Plan
- II. Current Conditions and Issues
- III. Strategies and Actions

The first section of each Plan element reviews that section as it was presented in the 1992 Plan. It also contains the City's

accomplishments made while implementing the recommendations of that Plan in the interim years. The second section of each element summarizes additional and new information that is relevant to the element including new conditions, programs, census data, and other information that illustrates how issues affecting this element may have changed. The third section of the element is the proposed program of key recommendations and actions, which will attain the City's goals and objectives over the next five years.

The survey allowed people to state that:

- The most common reasons for living in Cranston were that it is a nice place to live, work, and grow;
- But, improvement of the character of the community is still desired (highest ranking, by at least 25% were signs, landscaping, accessibility, shopping, trees);
- They were split on residential growth issues such as how fast, how much, and where it should occur with 42% saying growth is too rapid and 39% saying it is about right;
- Expansion of the commercial/industrial tax base is a good idea to 60-70%, but 24-25% thought it should be limited to neighborhood services along Cranston Street and the existing industrial zones in western Cranston;
- Affordable housing remains as an issue to address according to 25%;
- Recycling is excellent (94% participation) and other City services are generally good, with the exception of snow removal (36% disapproval);
- The three most frequently used roads are Park Avenue, Reservoir Avenue and Sockanosset Crossroads (85% use them weekly); and these are also seen as the most unsafe roads (35-40%);
- The vast majority (84%) do not use public transportation; and,
- In the top ranked items, they want to see more open space in new residential development (25%), acquisition of new public spaces (25%), expansion of recreation areas (25%), and better access to Narragansett Bay (24%).

Overall Themes and Changes

This Comprehensive Plan Update has proposed certain actions that are new or modified from the 1992 Comprehensive Plan. The major changes are in the following areas:

Land Use

- Adoption of Smart Growth policies to guide development projects
- Modifying the proposal for a western Cranston village center to accommodate current ideas for mixed use, agricultural preservation, and cluster development
- Modifying zoning to ensure existing, built areas conform to the historic development pattern
- Promoting smart growth and mixed use development on sites around the City

Housing

- Creating a new Housing Task Force to guide affordable housing programs in Cranston
- Adopting inclusionary housing regulations that allow the market forces to help create new affordable units

Economic Development

- Proposing a Transit Oriented Development Project in the Elmwood/Wellington industrial area
- Targeting key redevelopment projects in other sites spread throughout the City

Natural Resources

- Adopting a farm-based retail program to help preserve agriculture in western Cranston
- Adopting low-impact and green development standards for new development

Historic Preservation

- Establishing local historic districts in Edgewood, Pawtuxet Village and Norwood Avenue

Services and Facilities

- Use connections to the water and sewer lines to promote conservation of resources and agriculture, as well as the creation of a village center in western Cranston

Open Space

- Use of innovate tools for land use and development to protect open space
- Create a series of linked green ways and blue ways for connected open space

Circulation

- Acting on a new program to address the safety and congestion on Park Avenue
- The creation of a Transit Oriented Development project at the Elmwood/Wellington industrial area to encourage alternative transportation options.