

# 3. Land Use

## Introduction

Bristol a community with character and historic heritage that is recognized and valued by its residents. Through a firm community commitment to environmental quality and historic preservation, the Town has preserved and protected its historic character and sensitive natural lands. The great sense of community, scenic beauty, and livable downtown area are part of what makes up the character of the community, conveys a “small town feeling,” and, are the most highly valued features of the Town. Most of the residents are very satisfied with the quality of life in the Town and feel that the quality of life is staying the same or getting better, according to the resident survey conducted as part of the 2008 comprehensive planning process.

Downtown is the cultural center, pedestrian oriented and can be seen from the waterfront. Bristol is very fortunate to have a pedestrian oriented downtown with the Post Office, Library and Town Hall all located in the downtown and within very close proximity. There are also two grade school buildings, Colt and Andrews, located within the downtown which have just undergone major additions and renovations. The School Committee decommissioned the Byfield and Reynolds Schools and the Town is now leasing space in these two former schools as a way to raise revenue to help with the maintenance of the buildings and as an affordable alternative to assist startup businesses.

The Town library, located on Hope Street next to the Post Office, has been renovated and expanded into a state of the art fully ADA compliant facility. The Town has a strong commitment to keeping the government offices in the downtown as an anchor to the other downtown uses.

In keeping with the pedestrian nature of downtown, the permanent closing of Bradford Street to vehicular traffic between Hope Street and Center Street is proposed to create a new school campus area between the two elementary schools. There is considerable foot traffic between the schools during daytime hours in order to share the use of the gymnasium and the auditorium which up to now has been accommodated by the temporary

closing of Bradford Street to traffic. The current situation does little to provide pedestrian safety as there is no place to drop off and pick up the school children without blocking traffic along busy Hope Street (HWY 114) and no place for parents or school busses to park. A protected vehicular drop off area at each end of this park-like campus will be designed to provide a secure place to drop off and pick up the school children without blocking traffic along busy Hope Street.

The Town also has a commitment to keeping residential uses in the downtown. The Stone Harbor Condominiums, which redeveloped the former Premier Thread waterfront mill buildings into 82 residential units is now complete. This project included a segment of the Town's Downtown Harbor Boardwalk from Independence Park to the Thames Street Landing property. There are currently plans in the review process for converting the Robin Rug waterfront mill into a mixed use development with residential uses on the upper floors and with parking and commercial uses on the first floor. The project will also include a major link in the Town's Downtown Harbor Boardwalk which will run from the Town's property at the Armory at Church Street to the Elks Lodge at the end of Constitution Street. The owner of the Robin Rug property has deeded the riparian rights of this property to the Town and currently there is a concept plan in place to develop a town-owned marina at this location.

There has been a lot of redevelopment activity in the downtown in recent years, some of which was sparked by the Downtown Redevelopment Plan that was adopted in 2005 and required developers of blighted properties to return them to active use – one such property was the former Belvedere Hotel. Work has been completed on the former Belvedere Hotel rehabilitation into residential condominiums with commercial uses on Hope Street, including renovation of the carriage house and a parking deck. Plans are also in process by the same developer to construct additional improvements and a new mixed use building on Thames Street which will wrap around the corner at State Street with residential on the upper floors and commercial on the street.

In light of the above-mentioned buildings becoming decommissioned, in addition to the Walley School on the Common that is currently closed, the Town has commissioned a Downtown Public Building Study which was completed in June 2008. This study was funded by a grant from the Rhode Island Historical and Heritage Preservation Commission. The Town Council has recently created a Committee to take the study into a plan including potential funding needs for capital improvements. It will be important to complete the plan to provide for the reuse and restoration of these buildings that are significant to the downtown area and all located within the Historic District.

The Rhode Island Scenic Roadway Board designated the entire length of Route 114 (Hope Street and Ferry Road) through Bristol and High Street as a Scenic Road and in 2005 a Scenic Roadway Corridor Management Plan was prepared. This plan includes recommendations for preservation of the visual qualities and enhancements to those areas that are in need of improvements along the roadway.

Concerns expressed by the community include increased commercial development on Metacom Avenue that results in traffic impacts. In 2007, with a Challenge Grant from Rhode Island Statewide Planning, the Town commissioned a study of Metacom Avenue, “The Metacom Avenue Corridor Management Plan”. This study addressed traffic and land use issues and includes recommendations for parking lot connector roadways, linkages through neighborhoods, roundabouts at key intersections, design guidelines, and low traffic generating uses. The Metacom Avenue Corridor Management Plan won the Smart Growth and New Urbanism Award from the RI Chapter of the American Planning Association in 2008.

The community survey done as part of the previous Comprehensive Plan indicates that the residents of Bristol have a desire to retain Bristol’s small town character and natural beauty. Part of the strategy to retain the Town’s rural character is to implement conservation development techniques for future development. Conservation development is a design strategy to protect and preserve onsite and offsite natural resources from development impacts. As development sites are planned, topography, soils, vegetation, natural drainage patterns, and other sensitive or unique landscape features are considered as important resources deserving of protection and enhancement. Stormwater best management practices (BMPs) are also integrated into the development site, with the primary goal of protecting and restoring natural hydrology, preventing flooding, and protecting habitat and water quality.

Conservation development is intended to be density neutral (except where a density bonus is offered). Rhode Island law requires that the same number of lots are built in a conservation subdivision as would be built in a conventional subdivision. Thus, a conservation subdivision maintains the same level of density as a conventional subdivision. Conventional lot-by-lot subdivisions spread development evenly throughout a parcel without consideration to environmental or cultural features.

Density bonuses can be offered only to promote a mix of housing types, reduced roadway pavement, and to achieve certain public purposes such as preservation of open space, historical and cultural resources; provision of recreation amenities; and necessary housing alternatives. Density bonuses are not intended in areas that have no public water or sewer facilities.

**Map 1** on the next page depicts Planning Areas that are referenced in various parts of this Plan.

On September 19 and 25, 2013 a forum was held entitled Vision for Bristol. This forum was attended by approximately 140 volunteers to gain ideas and directional vision for the future development and growth of Bristol. The top six themes and concerns of the forum were infrastructure/traffic especially along Hope St. and Metacom Ave., economic development, education, waterfront, environmental/natural resources and recreation/entertainment. Details of the forum are included in the Vision for Bristol Forum Report prepared by the forum facilitator Diana Campbell and appended to this 2014 Comprehensive Plan (see Appendix \_\_).

## Accomplishments

The Town's land use pattern has not changed substantially since the 2009 Update. However, much progress has been made in moving forward with implementation of actions from the 2009 plan.

In 2010, the Town adopted the recommended Metacom Mixed Use Zone for parcels along Metacom Avenue. This zone has been applied on two properties to create a new mixed use zone development with retail/office uses on the first floor and up to ten residential units above with a mix of market rate and affordable units. This project received Master Plan approval from the Planning Board and is still in the permitting process.

The Town Council also approved zoning map change petitions for two properties on the north side of Tupelo Street. Both of the zoning map changes were consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Update of 2009 to encourage more industrial uses in that area. One of the properties was a former lumber yard that had been vacant for many years and fell into a blighted condition. The property has been rehabilitated with the construction of two new incubator buildings that are occupied by a variety of manufacturing and industrial uses including sail makers and boat builders. (insert picture). This revitalization has been a considered a huge success and a benefit to the Town. The other property that was the subject of the zone map change to manufacturing is owned by Tri-Mack, one of Bristol's largest employers. The change facilitated construction of a large addition on the existing building for expansion of their facility.

In 2013, the Town purchased two significant parcels along the west side of the Bristol Harbor in the downtown waterfront area. These parcels were key since they were the only parcels not in public ownership from the State Street Dock to Church Street Dock. One of the parcels, the Prudence Ferry

Dock, will continue to be used for downtown parking and long and short term ferry parking. The Town will also continue to lease the dock for a ferry service which will be run by a new ferry company. The ferry will make daily trips from this dock to Prudence Island and Hog Island which are both part of the Town of Portsmouth.

The other parcel is improved with two historic buildings that were formerly mixed use residential and commercial. The Town received a Certified Local Government grant to commission a study of potential future reuses of these buildings. There is a large amount of open space on this parcel which is also being used by the Town as an area for a dinghy/kayak rack, a small community garden, and an area for the Harbormaster to work on dock repairs.

Having continuous public ownership will also allow the Town to complete the downtown public boardwalk which will eventually extend from the East Bay Bike Path along the waterfront to Constitution Street. Portions of this boardwalk have been completed over the years through the development process and pedestrians can now walk on the boardwalk from Independence Park to State Street Dock. With the completion of the linkage on the Town's properties, the boardwalk will be a wonderful pedestrian amenity.

In 2013, the Town commissioned the Community Partnerships Center of Roger Williams University to complete a Master Plan for the Town-owned properties from the State Street Dock to the Downtown Naval Reserve Armory (Harbor Master's Office). The plan looked at ideas to reuse the two historic waterfront buildings and ways to link the boardwalk, and included ideas for benches, signage, lighting and landscaping.

## Statement of Goals and Policies

**Land use planning and management, in a sustainable manner that respects Bristol's environment and unique character for present and future generations, is paramount and is intended to support all other comprehensive planning goals of the Town of Bristol.**

Based on the critical issues described in the Introduction and the overarching goal stated above, this section presents the goal and policies developed by the Town of Bristol to guide its land use planning. This goal encompasses goals expressed in the other elements of this plan.

**Goal 1. Manage land in a manner that supports the comprehensive planning goals of the Town of Bristol.**

*Policies to implement Goal 1:*

- A.** Protect Bristol's natural landscape and resources for present and future generations.
- B.** Respect the historic resources that link Bristol's present with Bristol's past and use these resources as guidelines for managing future growth.
- C.** Plan for both passive and active recreation, conservation, and open space, using a comprehensive approach and giving consideration to development trends and to the demands of the community.
- D.** Maintain a strong tax base, favorable tax rate and identify alternative revenue sources.
- E.** Maintain the character of Bristol and make sure that new development does not adversely impact the integrity of the Town.
- F.** Embrace Smart Growth principles, conservation development zoning and encourage sustainability of our resources in all land use decisions made by the Town of Bristol.
- G.** Update and modernize the Town's zoning ordinance.

# Implementation Actions

#	ACTION	TIME FRAME <sup>1</sup>				RESPONSIBLE AGENT
		S	M	L	O	
LU-1	Plan services and facilities for a build-out population of between 24,000 and 26,000 people. Plan on a period of between 30 and 80 years for build-out to occur.				√	Town Council and Community Development Department
LU -2	Continue to examine the feasibility of purchasing the Mt. Hope Planning Area for preservation. Continue to protect the Mount Hope Planning Area with preservation of the maximum amount of open space, cultural, historical and natural resources. Take action to educate the public and to open the greenbelt and pathway system in the Mt Hope Planning Area which has its terminus at RWU and continue efforts to improve the greenbelt and trail linkages to the Planning Area.		√	√		Town Administrator, Town Council, Planning Board, and Community Development Department.
LU -3	Define land use standards specific for Mount Hope Planning Area that take into consideration the surrounding densities and topography and links to other community resources that border the planning area, such as, Roger Williams University and the land adjacent to the town's landfill. Examine a strategy that considers low intensity, low impact and limited mixed-use and active recreational development.			√		Planning Board, Community Development Department, Town Administrator, and Town Council.
LU -4	Commission a study to determine viable uses for the landfill (Minturn Farm area), such study to include benefits and drawbacks of each option, inherent costs and maintenance costs over time, Consider various methods for funding this study, including but not limited to grants and public-private partnership arrangements. DW to double check this. I don't think the cap on the landfill allows much else here. May only be able to do solar energy.					Department of Public Works, Community Development Department and Town Council.
LU -5	Examine developing a set of neighborhood compatibility standards for each planning area in		√			Community Development

<sup>1</sup> S: short-term; M: medium-term; L: long-term; O: ongoing

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	town. These criteria would define land use performance standards that would guide development in established neighborhoods. Criteria would include traffic speed and character, buffer sizes and locations, landscaping criteria, needed public improvements, critical cultural and historic resources, critical environmental resources, existing neighborhood character, and neighborhood planning objectives as defined in the Comprehensive Plan.					Department.
LU -6	Strongly enforce maintaining all industrially and commercially zoned land. Do not allow industrial and commercial zoned parcels to be converted to residential zones.				√	Town Council and Planning Board
LU -7	Follow a policy that maintains and does not significantly expand the town's current supply of commercial land, with the following exceptions: Allow increased commercial activity along the waterfront within the guidelines established by the Waterfront Zoning District, as may be amended (See the Natural, Historical and Cultural Element). Control development through the special use permit process and through town development of parking areas. Any proposal for changing the zoning of land to commercial use should be carefully examined for compliance with the comprehensive plan's objectives.				√	Town Council and Planning Board
LU -8	Continue to protect the following critical areas in Bristol: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The open fields in the Kickemuit planning area visible from Metacom Avenue.</li> <li>b) The natural and historic areas of the Mt. Hope Planning Area, with emphasis on public access.</li> <li>c) Silver Creek and Tanyard Brook Watersheds.</li> <li>d) Provide public access to and through the North Central wetlands area from the Warren town line to the mouth of Silver Creek adjacent to the Eastbay Bike Path for</li> </ul>		√			Planning Board, Town Council, Community Development Department and Parks and Recreation Department.

#	ACTION	TIME FRAME <sup>1</sup>				RESPONSIBLE AGENT
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	<p>pedestrians and bicycles or for agricultural uses.</p> <p>e) The Estates planning area and all views and public access to the water along existing public rights of way.</p> <p>f) Protect the historic character of Poppasquash.</p> <p>g) Permanently identify, preserve, protect and maintain all public rights of way and access points.</p> <p>h) Continue to actively support and encourage open space preservation and agriculture.</p>					
<b>LU -9</b>	Expand and implement the Silver Creek Watershed Drainage Study from the headwaters north of Gooding Avenue to the mouth at Bristol Harbor and complete the recommended Phase 2 Tanyard Brook improvements.		√			Town Council, Department of Public Works, and Community Development Department.
<b>LU -10</b>	<p>a) Periodically review the future land use plan and zoning map for consistency between the zoning, and the Comprehensive Plan.</p> <p>b) Develop a community or municipal zone to encompass schools, parks, town common, community center, town beach, all cemeteries and other publicly owned or controlled properties. Adopt a cultural arts overlay zone for the decommissioned buildings on the Town Common to provide flexibility for uses such as visual and performing arts,</p> <p>c) Reclassify all open space parcels, both existing and acquired in the future, as Open Space on the towns zoning maps.</p> <p>d) Consider the adoption of agricultural zoning to help protect the few remaining farms in Town.</p> <p>e)</p>	√				Community Development Department, Planning Board and Town Council.
<b>LU -11</b>	Adopt the following land use objectives for each				√	<b>For all LU-11</b>

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	<p>planning area:</p> <p><b><u>The East Shore</u></b></p> <p>a) Northeast: Maintain and protect the residential and commercial character of the area.</p> <p>b) Kickemuit: Protect the area as open space as the first objective of the Town. If this is not feasible, continue to guide any development in a manner that protects significant amounts of the area as farmland open space, such as through conservation development zoning. Place top priority on open space protection and links to Metacom Avenue, with improvements as recommended in the Metacom Corridor Management Plan.</p> <p>c) The Narrows: Protect the residential character of the area. Consider improved north-south movement within the area through links of existing streets. Monitor the Veteran’s Home for future proposed changes.</p> <p>d) Hopeworth: Protect the residential character of the area. Examine the potential for the future use of the old Hopeworth landfill, located at the end of Roosevelt Drive, consistent with its open space designation. Consider this area as a potential future public dog park.</p> <p>e) Mt. Hope: Protect the area as open space as the first objective of the town. If this is not feasible, guide any development in a manner that protects significant amounts of the area as open space while allowing for a mixture of uses and densities that promote open space protection, such as through conservation development. Explore a variety of means to ensure this protection.</p> <p>f) Work with Brown University and the local Native American community to preserve and</p>					<p><b>land use objectives:</b></p> <p>Planning Board, Town Council, and Community Development Department, Parks and Recreation Department, Harbor Commission, Historic District Commission and Harbormaster.</p>

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	<p>protect the area encompassing the Haffenreffer Museum, King Philip’s Seat and the site of his death for its historic and natural open space value through acquisition, conservation agreement or easement. Further, work with Brown University and the local Native American population to open area of significant historical interest to public access.</p> <p>g) Roger Williams University (RWU): Continue to work with the University in its plans for facility expansion on the Ferry Road campus through the Master Plan process of the Educational Institutional Zone and the Metacom Avenue Corridor Management Plan.</p> <p><b><u>The Central Corridor</u></b></p> <p>h) North Central: Maintain the land use pattern presently in place while allowing for only minor infill development. Do not allow the wetlands to be diminished or degraded. If the area is to be developed, guide such development in a manner that protects significant amounts of the area as open space while allowing for a mixture of uses and densities that make the open space protection economically feasible, such as through conservation development. Maintain the residential character of the East side of Hope Street.</p> <p>i) Industrial Area: Maximize and protect the remaining interior land for industrial use by keeping land in industrial zoning. Encourage mixed commercial and industrial development along eastern and southern borders of the area. Integrate all development consistent with the Metacom Corridor Management Plan for Metacom Avenue between Tupelo and Gooding.</p>					

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j)	Re-examine the future use of land acquired as open space within the existing industrial area: consider returning all or a substantial part to its natural wetlands state thus protecting the source of Silver Creek watershed. Pursue development of a walking and bike path through the Central Corridor (see LU-8d).		√			
k)	High School: Encourage the continuation of the basic land use patterns in place. Protect Silver Creek from pollution and degradation. Protect the residential character of the surrounding neighborhood.					
l)	Downtown Core: Maintain and consider appropriate expansion of historic district protection. Seek ways to provide parking without impacting the historic fabric. Encourage the economic reuse of older buildings. Maintain the physical scale of the waterfront in any proposed development plans. Increase public access to the water. Extend the boardwalk and public access to Constitution St. Monitor the Coast Guard Station for future use changes. Maintain a walkable, pedestrian friendly downtown.		√			
m)	Develop a strategy to improve the access to and ease of locating parking downtown especially for visitors. Consider establishing a means to facilitate parking for special events, weddings or evening dining as these are important business generators for local establishments. Analysis may include improved signage, off-site parking areas with trolley service or valet parking permitting.	√				
n)	To preserve and enhance the pedestrian character of the downtown area and enhance the safety of the area frequented by young students, consider permanently closing Bradford Street to vehicular traffic between Hope Street and Center Street to create a new school campus area between		√			

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	the two elementary schools, Colt and Andrews Schools.					
	o) Downtown Neighborhoods: Maintain the mixed use character of the area. Establish use guidelines for reuse of older buildings to protect the character of the neighborhood.					
	p) Continue to encourage Bristol Industrial Park development and support its economic growth in a manner consistent with the economic interests of the town and the character of its neighborhood.					
	q) The Estates: Work with owners to assist in land use planning so as to maintain the overall landscape character of the area. Monitor Sisters of St. Dorothy and Columban Fathers properties for future use changes and seek development rights to those and other private parcels.					
	<b><u>The West Shore</u></b>					
	r) Northwest: Maintain and protect the residential character of the neighborhood and encourage conservation of the remaining open land.					
	s) Highlands: Protect the residential character of the neighborhood. Prohibit commercial development along this corridor except in areas already in commercial use. Examine the need for and feasibility of minor street connections to facilitate neighborhood movement by residents and service vehicles. This neighborhood has many historic structures and a settlement pattern that would make it eligible for National Register of Historic Places designation. Work with the neighborhood association on the nomination to the National Register.					
	t) State Park: Protect the park use. Continue to maintain and improve the Sports Complex and Town Beach. Continue expansion of the					

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	Town's recreation use with the opening of and continued development of the Bristol Recreation Center "Quinta Gamelin Community Center"					
	u) Poppasquash: Discourage high-density development that would require a small wastewater treatment facility, town sewers or would impact existing wells.					
	<b><u>The Waterfront</u></b>					
	v) State Street Dock: Recent major renovations known as phase one have been completed at this location. Phase two which include lighting, signage and stripping are scheduled to begin once the funding is secured. Continue a policy of equitable use by fishermen and residents. Maintain the existing sticker controlled parking regulations.	√				
	w) Phase three of the State Street Dock renovation is a proposed town owned docking facility within the town's riparian rights at the west end of State Street along the northern wall which abuts the Thames Street Landing property – Double check this.. may not be feasible. A portion of this dockage should be for transient tie up as well as seasonal rentals. A critical component of phase three completion requires dredging of the boat ramp area at the west end of State Street. The town should encourage and financially support the completion of this project known as phase three of the State Street Dock Plan.			√		
	x) Maintain the west end of State Street Dock as deepwater access for fishermen and commercial craft. Do not permit permanent leasing of this space as dockage. Do not permit storage of fishing gear, traps,					

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	equipment or other materials that block access, views or use by recreational fishermen.					
	y) Implement the Maritime Center Development and improvements to the adjacent town owned waterfront structures and parking facilities.					
	z) Encourage the expansion of marina facilities from the south side of the State St. Dock to Constitution St. including the area west of the proposed development at Robin Rug facility. Consider including additional transient dock and dingy tie-up space within the town's waterfront property with access to the public boardwalk. Consider incorporating a fueling dock within the town's marine facilities from the south side of the State St. Dock to Constitution St. Preserve the working waterfront character by encouraging compatible maritime businesses.	√				
	aa) Consider creating a transient docking facility within the town's riparian rights area at the west end of Constitution Street adjacent to the Elk's Club seawall.		√			
	bb) Encourage introduction of a Newport to Bristol Ferry and supporting reintroduction of summer ferry service to Hog Island. Use public resources only if financial feasibility can be demonstrated.	√				
LU -12	a) Continue to work with the State Scenic Roadways Board on the implementation of the Stewardship Plan for Route 114 Scenic Roadway of June 2005.					Community Development Department, Planning Board, and Town Council.
	b) Expand the plan to include the portion of Metacom Ave. (Rte. 136) between Mt Hope Ave. and the junction of Routes 114 and 136. Coordinate on the enforcement and implementation of the plan, amending this		√			

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	plan as necessary.					
LU -13	Pursue a variety of public and private sources for funding the purchase of development rights, agricultural land and open spaces, including but not limited to targeted impact fees, bond issues, a revitalized land trust and state transfer tax income.				√	Community Development Department, Planning Board, Town Administrator, Town Treasurer, Town Tax Assessor, and Town Council.
LU -14	The town should continue to implement, update and maintain the current Geographic Information System (GIS) program. The development of a regional GIS with other Towns should be explored.	√			√	Community Development Department, Planning Board, and Town Council.
LU -15	The Town adopted the recommended design guidelines and zoning from the Metacom Avenue Corridor Management Plan in 2010 but the plan's maps and illustrations should still be used as guidance for layout of land use, design of buildings, and transportation activities implemented within its area of application.				√	Community Development Department, Planning Board, and Town Council.
LU -16	Continue to implement the recommended actions from the Marine Trades Route Study.		√			Community Development Department, Planning Board, Town Council,
LU -17	Protect the Town Common as open public space. Preserve the integrity of the structures on the Town Common and limit redevelopment of the Byfield and Walley School buildings to protect its historic character. Residential use shall not be permitted on the Town Common. (See LU-10)	√				Community Development Department, Planning Board, and Town Council.
LU -18	The Town should work with the State of Rhode Island to redefine and/or amend the current affordable housing guidelines.	√				Town Council.

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LU -19	Consider the installation of a wave attenuator structure as part of the proposed Church Street Dock Extension to reduce the impact of major storms and their associated wave action on the waterfront district. The structure should be located where it will create a protected docking, marina and anchorage area without degrading the water quality for shell fishing and other activities.	√				Community Development Department, Planning Board, Town Council, and Harbor Commission.
LU -20	Consider adopting appropriate land use related recommendations, not contained in the LU elements previously listed, that are contained within the Visions for Bristol Community Forum Report, 2013. Need to see what these are...					Community Development Department, Planning Board, and Town Council.
LU -21	Define land use standards specific to those areas of the town especially low lying coastal areas and within defined watersheds that will be subject to increased periodic flooding or gradual permanent inundation due to generally increasing sea levels. Develop a strategy for addressing these changes in concert with the appropriate federal and state authorities through a well thought out series of actions that may include protection, reconfiguration, relocation, acquisition and passive surrender.		√	√		Community Development Department, Planning Board, and Town Council.