

CITY OF CRANSTON, RHODE ISLAND
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2024

Adopted by City Council on September 30, 2024

Kenneth J. Hopkins, Mayor

CITY PLAN COMMISSION

Michael E. Smith, President – City Plan Commission

Jason M. Pezzullo, MCP, MPA, AICP, City Planning Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|-------------|
| INTRODUCTION | 1-1 |
| DEMOGRAPHIC AND COMMUNITY PROFILE | 2-1 |
| IMPLEMENTATION | 3-1 |
| NATURAL RESOURCES | 4-1 |
| HOUSING | 5-1 |
| ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT | 6-1 |
| HISTORIC & CULTURAL PRESERVATION | 7-1 |
| MUNICIPAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES | 8-1 |
| ENERGY | 9-1 |
| OPEN SPACE & RECREATION | 10-1 |
| TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION | 11-1 |
| NATURAL HAZARDS | 12-1 |
| LAND USE | 13-1 |

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan serves as a blueprint for the future development and growth of Cranston. It outlines the community's vision, goals, and policies that will shape the City over the next twenty years. The Plan is designed to be a living document, flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and robust enough to provide clear guidance for decision-making.

The development of the Comprehensive Plan is an important step in preparing Cranston for the future. This preparation for the future attempts to balance the needs of the residents while recognizing and protecting the City's important resources and character.

1.2 Legal Basis for the Plan

In 1988 the State of Rhode Island enacted the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (the Act) requiring all 39 cities and towns in the state to prepare and adopt a local Comprehensive Plan. The Act, RIGL §45-22.2, was amended in 2011 and requires that all municipally adopted comprehensive plans be brought into conformance with the updated Act by June 1, 2016. This plan was prepared in response to that mandate and supersedes all previous Comprehensive Plans for the City of Cranston.

The Act sets forth the following goals, which are intended to guide both State and municipal decision making.

1. To promote orderly growth and development that recognizes the natural characteristics of the land, its suitability for use, the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services and facilities and is consistent with available resources and the need to protect public health, including drinking water supply, drinking water safety, and environmental quality.
2. To promote an economic climate which increases quality job opportunities and the overall economic well-being of each municipality and the state.
3. To promote the production and rehabilitation of year-round housing and to preserve government subsidized housing for persons and families of low and moderate income in a manner that: considers local, regional, and statewide needs; that achieves a balance of housing choices for all income levels and age groups, recognizes the affordability of housing choices for all income levels and age groups, recognizes the affordability of housing as the responsibility of each municipality and the state; takes into account growth management and the need to phase and pace development in areas of rapid growth; and facilitates economic growth in the state.
4. To promote the protection of the natural, historic, and cultural resources of each municipality and the state.
5. To promote the preservation of open space and recreational resources of each municipality and the state.
6. To provide for the use of performance-based standards for development and to encourage the use of innovative development regulations and techniques that promote the development of land suitable for development while protecting our natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources, and achieving a balanced pattern of land uses.

7. To promote consistency of state actions and programs with municipal comprehensive plans and provide for review procedures to ensure that state goals and policies are reflected in municipal comprehensive plans and state guide plans.
8. To ensure that adequate and uniform data are available to municipal and state government as the basis for comprehensive planning and land use regulation.
9. To ensure that municipal land use regulations and decisions are consistent with the comprehensive plan of the municipality, and to ensure state land use regulations and decisions are consistent with state guide plans.
10. To encourage the involvement of all citizens in the formulations, review, and adoptions or amendment of the comprehensive plan.

The Act was designed to create a reciprocal system, where State goals and policies are reflected locally, and local plans assist in guiding State actions. All local comprehensive plans are required to be submitted to the State of Rhode Island Division of Planning for review and approval. The Division of Planning is responsible for ensuring consistency with the goals and intent of the Act and the State Guide Plan. The State Guide Plan is Rhode Island's long-range planning document, assembled as a collection of plans that have been adopted and amended over many years. This collection covers a wide range of topics and provides an important connection between local municipal comprehensive plans and the State Guide Plan documents. This cohesive comprehensive planning structure ensures:

- That local discretion of land use decision-making is maintained.
- That each municipal comprehensive plan meets delineated minimum standards.
- That local zoning provisions are consistent with the municipality's comprehensive plan.
- Provides for a mandatory review and amendment process of local comprehensive plans no less than every ten years.

The purpose of the Cranston Comprehensive Plan is to set a vision and chart the future for the community by outlining long range goals and accompanying policies and actions required to achieve them. The City of Cranston first adopted a comprehensive plan in 1992 and completed and update of that plan in 2012. This re-write is part of an ongoing evolution of policy setting and decision making as the City continues to grow and move forward with each passing year.

1.3 Importance of Updating the Plan

Regular updates to the Comprehensive Plan are essential to ensure that the Plan remains relevant and reflective of the community's needs and aspirations. The current update builds upon the successes and lessons learned from previous plans, incorporating new data, public input, and emerging trends. This update is particularly significant as it addresses critical issues such as climate change, housing affordability, and sustainable development, which have become increasingly important for the well-being of Cranston's residents.

1.4 Structure of the Plan

This introduction section provides an overview of the comprehensive plan landscape in Rhode Island as well as a brief description of the history of Cranston and the overarching issues facing the community. This is followed by a brief discussion of the background of the comprehensive plan in Cranston. The plan then presents the planning horizon for the next 20 years, outlining major focus areas for the City over the course of that timeframe. A demographic profile for the community is presented to inform each of the 11 chapters that follow, as well as an overview of the process and the public participation approach that was implemented. The goals, policies, and actions associated with each element are presented at the front part of the document, as this provides the essential roadmap

that will guide policy decisions and actions the community will engage in moving forward. This section is followed by the following eleven chapters:

- Land Use
- Natural Resources
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Recreation and Open Space
- Services and Facilities
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Housing
- Natural Hazards and Climate Change
- Energy

Each chapter in the plan contains an overview of existing conditions and a summary of challenges and opportunities related to that chapters. The goals, policies, and actions for each chapter are not contained within the chapter but instead within the Implementation Plan at the front of the document. The placement of this Implementation Plan highlights that first and foremost, the City is focused on taking the necessary steps to move the City forward. The remainder of the plan plays an important role in supporting those efforts.

1.4.1 Existing Conditions

The foundation of the Comprehensive Plan is built on a thorough understanding of existing conditions. The current status of the City provides a snap shot in time that helps us understand what is currently working and where improvements need to be made. When we combine this information with public feedback from community engagement efforts, we are able to develop policy that will assist the City in achieving its goals for the future. For the development of existing conditions in this plan the following steps were taken:

- **Literature and Resources Review:** Analyzing current local and regional initiatives, relevant documents, and previous comprehensive plans.
- **Site Visits and GIS Analysis:** Conducting site visits and utilizing GIS technology to map current conditions and identify areas of opportunity and concern.
- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Engaging with City staff and key stakeholders to gather insights and validate data.
- **Demographic and Socio-economic Trends:** Documenting trends to inform actionable goals and policies, including updating existing data and assessing changes over the last decade.
- **Data Updates:** Updating data points through online research, census data, and staff interviews and inquiries.

1.4.2 Challenges and Opportunities

This section of each chapter draws on the findings of the existing conditions analysis as well as that from the public engagement feedback to identify where the City faces challenges that must be addressed and opportunities that should be capitalized on to advance the City.

The City of Cranston provides a variety of opportunities to enhance the quality of life of residents:

- **Scenic Resources:** From farmland to waterfront to urban core, the City has a diversity of scenic resources.
- **Economic Development:** The City has large areas zoned for nonresidential development, providing ample opportunity for businesses to locate.

While Cranston boasts many strengths, it also faces several challenges that need to be addressed:

- **Affordable Housing:** Ensuring a sufficient supply of affordable housing for all income levels.
- **Economic Disparities:** Reducing economic disparities and providing opportunities for all residents.
- **Aging Infrastructure:** Upgrading aging infrastructure to meet current and future needs.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Addressing environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and natural resource preservation.
- **An Auto-Centric Transportation Network:** Though there are many sidewalks on the Eastern side of the city, most of them are either disconnected or are at various states of disrepair. For those seeking or who require the use of bicycles as either a primary or a supplementary mode of transportation, the City lacks any notable network of bicycle infrastructure. Public Transportation does service the City, but notably lacks meaningful east west connections.

1.4.3 Goals, Policies, and Actions

The goals, policies, and actions are contained within the Implementation Plan section of the plan. This is where the rubber meets the road and the City lays out the action plan to achieve its long-term goals for its future growth and development. See the Implementation Plan for a detailed description of the differences between goals, policies, and actions and how the Implementation Plan is organized.

1.5 Plan Approach

Due to changes in state enabling legislation adopted in 2023, the review, drafting, and adoption of this comprehensive plan took a unique approach. The change to enabling legislation mandated that any comprehensive plan that was older than twelve years old would not be permitted to be used to deny a land use decision. In September of 2024 the City's previous comprehensive plan, which was approved by the State in September of 2012, turned 12 years old. The City initiated work to completely update the 2012 comprehensive plan in the summer of 2023. Recognizing that they would not be able to conduct the level of public engagement desired for the full update of the plan by the September 2024 deadline, they developed a two phased approach to updating the plan. This document represents Phase I of that approach.

The approach adopted by the City was to conduct a full data update of the 2012 comprehensive plan, a review and update of the goals, policies, and actions, and to conduct an appropriate amount of public engagement to achieve these efforts within the short time-frame available for Phase 1. This was done with the understanding that Phase 2 of the update would continue after Phase 1 was adopted by the City Council. Phase 2 was designed to be public engagement heavy, ensuring that the citizens of Cranston were provided with ample opportunity to participate in the planning process and have their opinions on the future of the City incorporated into the plan.

This first phase of the comprehensive plan provides the City with an updated plan that represents current data and conditions, goals, policies, and actions that have been consolidated into a concise

Implementation Plan, and updated challenges and opportunities that are reflective of current conditions. During Phase 2 additional public engagement activities, such as a survey and multiple public workshops, will be conducted to further refine the goals, polies, and actions in the Implementation Plan to ensure that community input and public opinion are properly reflected.

1.6 Community Engagement

The City of Cranston recognizes that community engagement is a cornerstone of a successful planning process. Community engagement is critical to ensuring that the public supports the goals, policies, and actions of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan should reflect the needs and desires of the citizens of Cranston. Their vision for the City is meant to be reflected in the development of those action items that guide City decision making over the 20-year life of the plan. This can only occur successfully when a robust public engagement process is conducted as part of the drafting of the plan.

Various techniques were employed to invite participation in the development of the Comprehensive Plan:

- **Public Forums and Workshops:** Hosting a series of public events to gather input on the community's vision, goals, and policies is fundamental to the comprehensive plan process. The first public workshop was held in September 2023, serving as a kick-off event for the public engagement process. An additional workshop was held on February 22, 2024 and public comment was taken at various open meetings of the Plan Commission. As part of the second phase of the plan update, Cranston will hold a series community workshops on individual plan elements to deeper conversations about the goals, policies, and actions in each plan element.
- **Dedicated Project Website:** The project website serves as a central hub for project information, updates, and engagement tools. The website includes a project status board, timeline graphics, interactive maps, and tools for public feedback.

1.7 Acknowledgments

The preparation of this Comprehensive Plan would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of many individuals and organizations. Special thanks go to the City Administration, City Council, City Plan Commission, Planning Department, and all the residents and stakeholders who contributed their time and insights throughout the planning process. Their commitment and collaboration have been instrumental in creating a Plan that truly reflects the aspirations and values of the Cranston community.

1.8 Plan Adoption and Amendments

The City Council adopted this Comprehensive Plan on September 30, 2024 by a vote of 9-9 after a public hearing of the City Council on September 26, 2024.

The City is permitted to amend the Comprehensive Plan four times each year. Amendments to the Plan serve an important purpose, allowing the City to adapt to changing times, shifts in policy, and to be flexible in serving the needs and desires of the community. An amendment to the Plan is required to hold a public hearing by both the City Plan Commission and City Council and the consistency of the amendment with the remainder of the Plan should be a consideration when adopting the amendment. The Plan should be considered a living document that is adaptable to changing circumstances.