

THE North End Equitable Development Strategy

NEWPORT, RI



Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

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Contents

Acknowledgments	i
1. Introduction	1
The Intent of the North End Equitable Development Strategy	2
2. A Roadmap for Addressing Residents' Priorities	4
Community Priorities	5
Who is the North End Equitable Development Strategy for?	6
3. What is Equitable Development and Why is it Important to the North End?	7
What Would Equitable Development in the North End Look Like?	9
Community Empowerment	9
Housing Affordability and Mitigating Displacement	10
High-Quality and Publicly Accessible Open, Green, and Civic Spaces	10
Workforce Development and Economic Diversification	11
Neighborhood Development: Locally-Oriented Retail and Service and Cultural Amenities	11
Road Safety and Connectivity	11
4. How Did the North End Get to Be the Way It Is?	12
A History of Disparities	13
A Planning Timeline	15
The North End Urban Plan (NEUP)	17
5. How Can the NEEDS Help to Achieve the Community's Priorities?	21
6. Conclusion	35
Summary of Tools for Equitable Development	36
Equitable Development Resources	37
Links to Key City of Newport Documents	37

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North End Local Advocacy Group

Charles Gonzalez, Co-Chair
Julie Maraziti, Co-Chair
Gabby Brown
Lisa Castillo
Dianne Ford
Nat Harris
Lola Herrera-Ximenez
Meagan Landry
Maggie Martin
Cynthia Moreino
Phyllis Mulligan
Aida Neary
Melody O'Brien
Pauline Perkins-Moye
Ellen Pinnock
Belita Ribeiro
Lisa Wright

Newport Health Equity Zone

Neyda DeJesus
Rex LeBeau
Jean Riesman
Jessica Walsh

Friends and Supporters

Christian Belden
The Honorable Angela McCalla
Church Community Housing
Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Rhode Island Department of Health
Rhode Island Foundation Fund for a Healthy Rhode Island
Prince Charitable Trusts
van Beuren Charitable Foundation

Smart Growth America

Katharine Burgess
Becca Buthe
Victoria Fanibi
Marta Goldsmith
Tola Myczkowska
Christopher Zimmerman

Principal Author – Robert Ogilvie, OgilvieLabs

Design – Auras Design



Southwest view in the
North End towards the
Claiborne Pell Newport
Bridge at sunset

Photo by Rex LeBeau

1. Introduction

For the last 50 years, the residents of the North End neighborhood in Newport, Rhode Island have watched their city change and their neighborhood suffer from decline and neglect. Urban renewal, the construction of bridges, and a freeway cut the North End community off from the rest of the city. Additionally, the closure of three major U.S. Navy installations in the area led to significant job loss in the region. At the same time, the rest of Newport has continued to be a magnet for wealthy residents and summer tourists from major cities along the Mid-Atlantic.

The Intent of the North End Equitable Development Strategy

While Newport leaders have undertaken many planning efforts intended to reverse the trends described above, North End residents were marginally engaged in those efforts, and follow-through was, in many cases, minimal. Residents feel that these plans have been overwhelmingly done for them, about them, or to them, rather than with them. This **North End Equitable Development Strategy (NEEDS)** has evolved over months of collaboration with North End community leaders, who have come together to form a Local Advocacy Group (LAG), which has been increasingly active in local planning discussions. With the support of the Newport Health Equity Zone—a city-wide coalition mobilizing residents and resources in the North End neighborhood—the LAG has co-created this strategy with Smart Growth America (SGA) to advance policy changes that will make their neighborhood a place where everyone can thrive.

The North End Neighborhood and the Innovation Hub

The North End neighborhood has Newport's highest concentration of low- and moderate-income residents, as well as the highest percentage of Black and Latinx residents. As in the rest of the city, housing in the North End is becoming increasingly unaffordable. The North End has been a focus of city decision-makers in recent years, although not all the attention has been experienced as collaborative by the residents who live there. The most recent effort to chart the North End's future is the 2021 North End Urban Plan (NEUP), which according to the plan's introduction, is "seen as Newport's last economic development opportunity neighborhood," a description that current North End residents believe overlooks their interests.¹

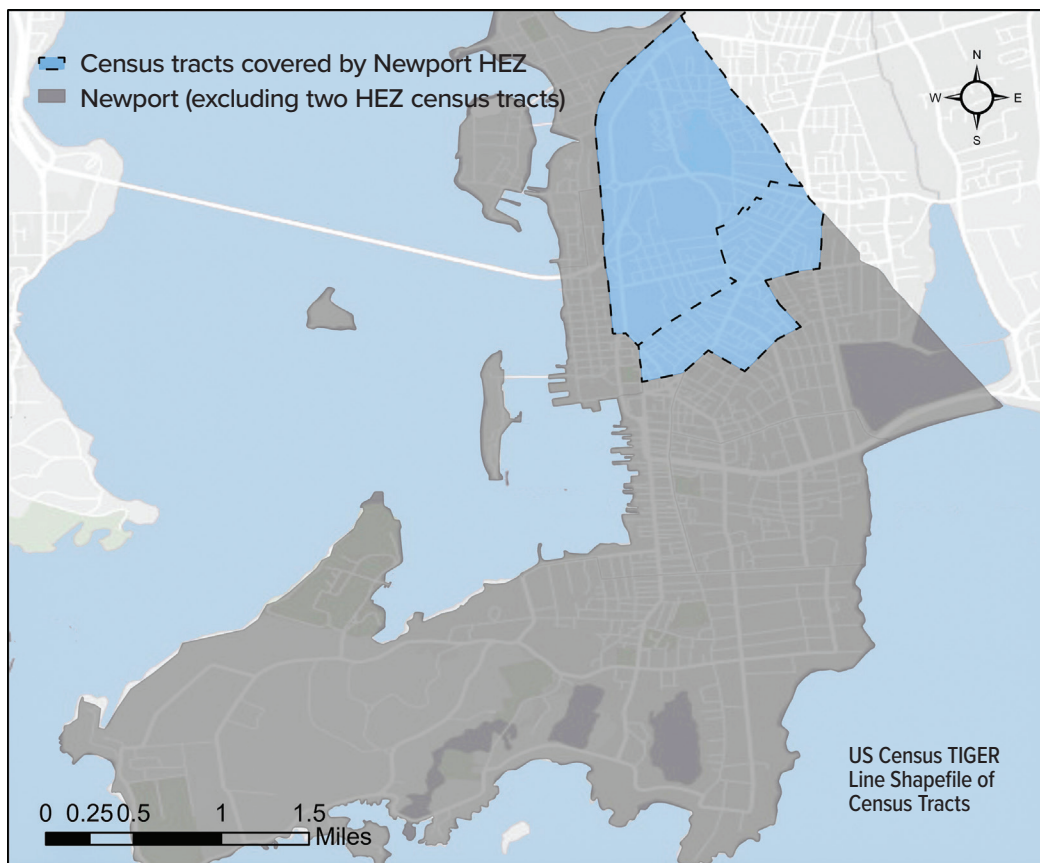
While that plan also noted that "equity is another important part of the effort," the NEUP clearly places a higher priority on turning the center of the North End—previously zoned for commercial and industrial uses—into a mixed-use, research, and technology "Innovation Hub" with up to 1,200 estimated new high-paying jobs.²

The NEUP pays minimal attention to priorities of the existing residents who live in the areas surrounding the Innovation Hub or the impact that the anticipated redevelopment will have on housing prices and the resulting displacement, which is already occurring.

The Local Advocacy Group

The process that the City followed to write and adopt the NEUP—and the resulting document—brought into sharp focus the need for residents of the North End to be better organized to advocate for their own interests. In June of 2022 the group changed its name from the Local Advisory Group to the Local Advocacy Group to reflect how they see their role in the future. The Newport Health Equity Zone (HEZ) helped bring together the North End Local Advocacy Group—a committee of seventeen community leaders to identify and advocate for the existing residents’ priorities for redevelopment in their neighborhood. The HEZ’s partner was the national organization, Smart Growth America (SGA), which...*envision[s] a country where, no matter where you live or who you are, you can enjoy living in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient. SGA empowers communities through technical assistance, advocacy, and thought leadership to realize our vision of liveable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity.*

Map 1: North End Location in Newport Rhode Island



The North End, like most neighborhoods, does not have geographically fixed boundaries agreed upon by everyone living in or around the neighborhood. For the analysis presented in this report, SGA used data for the two census tracts served by the Newport Health Equity Zone, which include the area most commonly referred to as the North End.

2. A Roadmap for Addressing Residents' Priorities

In the past few decades, numerous plans have been adopted by the City of Newport, which were intended to revitalize the North End and pledged to provide a better future for its residents. The most recent of these, the Newport North End Urban Plan, seeks to:

“...direct redevelopment in Newport’s North End in conformance with the vision of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan, and in ways that help address historic inequities and offer more diverse economic opportunities while creating a safe, comfortable built environment that balances Newport’s history with its aspirations for the future.”³

The North End Equitable Development Strategy has been created to serve as a roadmap to implement the 2021 NEUP, according to the North End residents’ priorities for equitable development and with their ongoing participation.

This North End Equitable Development Strategy:

- ← Clearly lays out the priorities of the residents;
- ← Identifies key audiences—the people and organizations who can influence the future of the North End;
- ← Defines “equitable development” and explains why it is the best route forward for the North End and the City of Newport;
- ← Describes the strategies, tools, and resources that North End residents can advocate for and use to achieve their aims;
- ← Outlines implementation steps that the City of Newport must take to make the strategic goals a reality; and
- ← Proposes a way to track progress.

Community Priorities

The Local Advocacy Group identified six priorities for redevelopment in the North End. They are:



Community empowerment



Housing affordability and mitigating displacement of existing residents



Public access to high-quality open, green, and civic spaces



Neighborhood development—including locally-oriented retail and services and cultural amenities



Workforce development and economic diversification



Road safety and connectivity

The first step in creating the NEEDS was for the members of the LAG to describe the problems they wanted solved in each of their six priority areas introduced above. They then described their vision of success for each priority area and discussed some of the short-term actions and long-term strategies that could get them there. Most of these actions will require collaboration among several actors, including the city and other government agencies, local non-profits, developers and businesses, and the residents themselves. The results of these discussions are described in detail for each priority area in Section 5 of the NEEDS.

Who is the North End Equitable Development Strategy For?

The NEEDS is intended for those organizations and individuals who are committed to making equitable economic development in Newport a reality, including all of the city's elected and appointed officials responsible for development policy and implementation, as well as other leaders and allies. This broad audience includes:

- 1. Members of the Local Advocacy Group.** Created following the adoption of the North End Urban Plan in early 2021, the LAG is a group of North End residents who advocate for equitable development in their neighborhood. With HEZ's support, the LAG worked with Smart Growth America to develop the NEEDS and continues their work to ensure future development in the North End directly engages and benefits residents.
- 2. Allies & Partner Organizations.** Advancing equitable development requires alliances with partner organizations, who share the LAG's priorities and bring important capabilities to the partnership. Key partners include: Involve Newport, Aquidneck Land Trust, The Arts & Culture Alliance, Bike Newport, Church Community Housing, and the Women's Resource Center. A more extensive list of potential allies can be found in Section 5 of the NEEDS.
- 3. City Council, Planning Board, City Staff.** Many of the resources and programs to achieve equitable development require city action and support. Residents must continue to work with city staff and elected leaders to advocate for these programs and inspire decision makers to enact them. Many of these resources and programs will benefit both North End residents and the City of Newport as a whole.

3. What is Equitable Development and Why is it Important to the North End?

Equitable development is an approach and a mindset that, to be successful, must be shared by everyone who plays a role in the redevelopment process—residents, business owners, public officials, city staff, developers, and investors. For marginalized communities, like the North End, equitable development is the path for reconciling past inequities and ensuring that those who are most impacted by new development have the opportunity to remain in their neighborhood and thrive.

Characteristics of Equitable Development Include:

- ← A process that ensures that everyone participates in and benefits from the region’s economic transformation—especially low-income residents, communities of color, immigrants, and others at risk of being left behind.”⁴
- ← A place-based approach to community economic development that empowers residents—especially those in disinvested neighborhoods—and allied organizations to set priorities for redevelopment. This approach also will depend on resident partnerships with public and private entities to create strong and livable communities, which will benefit both current neighborhood residents and the city as a whole.
- ← A means to further social justice, while “meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant.”^{5 6}
- ← An approach that “strives to eliminate racial inequities, allow lower-wealth residents to live in healthy, safe neighborhoods that reflect their culture, provide them with economic opportunities, and enable the residents to influence decisions that affect their neighborhoods.”⁷

One of the best-known examples of an equitable development policy is Minnesota’s Equitable Development Principles & Scorecard.⁸

These Principles Include:

Equitable Community Engagement—Those community members most likely to be affected by new development (especially low-wealth people, people of color, neighborhood groups, community organizations, people living with disabilities, and new immigrants) play a role in deciding how some of the benefits from public action and private investment will accrue to the surrounding community.

Equitable Transportation—The project creates places where people of all abilities, ages, and incomes can get around without relying only on cars.

Equitable Housing—Households of all income levels have access to housing that costs no more than 30 percent of their household income.

Equitable Economic Development Policies and Programs—The creation of high-quality jobs and sustainable wealth opportunities are a policy priority. Community-based financial intelligence training is available to help minimize unwanted displacement of residents and locally-owned small businesses.

Equitable Land Use—The community vision, land use plan, and implementation strategies take account of local communities’ assets, aspirations, potential, and preferences. Land use strategies are designed to keep current residents in place and include new projects that promote people’s health, well-being, and prosperity.

What Would Equitable Development in the North End Look Like?

Below are some examples of what a successful equitable development strategy would look like for each of the six priorities identified by the Local Advocacy Group.



Equitable community empowerment would look like:

- ← Newport City Council members support the priorities identified by neighborhood residents and adopt many, if not all, of the policies proposed by the LAG.
- ← North End residents can point to tangible changes in their community that resulted from their advocacy and that benefit existing and future residents.
- ← North End residents understand the rules and regulations that govern public decision-making in Newport. They know how legislative and administrative actions are initiated and implemented and they work successfully within that framework to achieve their objectives.
- ← Newport City Council and staff continuously engage North End residents in discussions and decisions affecting the North End’s future.



Housing Affordability and Mitigating Displacement

Equity in housing affordability and displacement mitigation would look like:

- ← The North End has an adequate supply of housing—rental and for sale combined—in the North End that is affordable to those who want to live there, regardless of household income. For example, there should be an adequate supply of housing for residents who have the following jobs or who are in occupations which have comparable incomes.

PUBLIC SECTOR

- ← Elementary school teacher \$64,841 average / \$72,000 median⁹
- ← Police officer \$54,661 average / \$61,762 median¹⁰
- ← Firefighter/EMT \$51,420 median¹¹

PRIVATE SECTOR

Salary ranges vary, based on seniority.

- ← Registered nurse \$34,872–\$106,112 / \$61,854–\$110,939¹²
- ← Hotel general manager \$94,700–\$139,000¹³ / \$51,909–\$86,462¹⁴
- ← Housekeeper \$26,132 and \$32,541¹⁵



High-Quality and Publicly Accessible Open, Green, and Civic Spaces

Equitable open green and civic spaces would look like:

- ← Residents of the North End have public access to the waterfront in their neighborhood and to other high-quality public open spaces.
- ← A wide variety of high-quality open spaces—civic spaces, parks, playgrounds, plazas, pedestrian paths, sidewalks, and other public gathering places—are available to the public throughout the neighborhood.
- ← These spaces are maintained to the same standards as comparable places in more affluent parts of the city.
- ← Stormwater runoff is managed sufficiently to protect both public and private property in the neighborhood.



Workforce Development and Economic Diversification

Equitable workforce development and economic diversification would look like:

- ← There are a wide range of jobs available in the North End, which are suitable for people at different skill levels and offer upward mobility.
- ← North End residents have the opportunity to develop their skills to compete for and hold many of these positions.
- ← Many of these new jobs are in industries that are currently underrepresented in Newport.



Neighborhood Development: Locally-Oriented Retail and Service and Cultural Amenities

Equitable neighborhood development would look like:

- ← Many new, locally-owned businesses flourish in the North End and meet the needs of North End residents.
- ← Existing neighborhood-oriented North End businesses, such as Bishop's Diner, continue to thrive in their current locations.
- ← Resident-led arts and cultural institutions offer a variety of vibrant programming and events representative of all segments of the population.



Road Safety and Connectivity

Equity in road safety and connectivity would look like:

- ← The North End is connected to the rest of Newport with easily accessible, safe, and inviting surface roads, bike lanes, and pedestrian passages.
- ← Residents of all ages and abilities will be able to get around the North End and to other parts of town easily and safely without a car.

4. How Did the North End Get to Be the Way It Is?

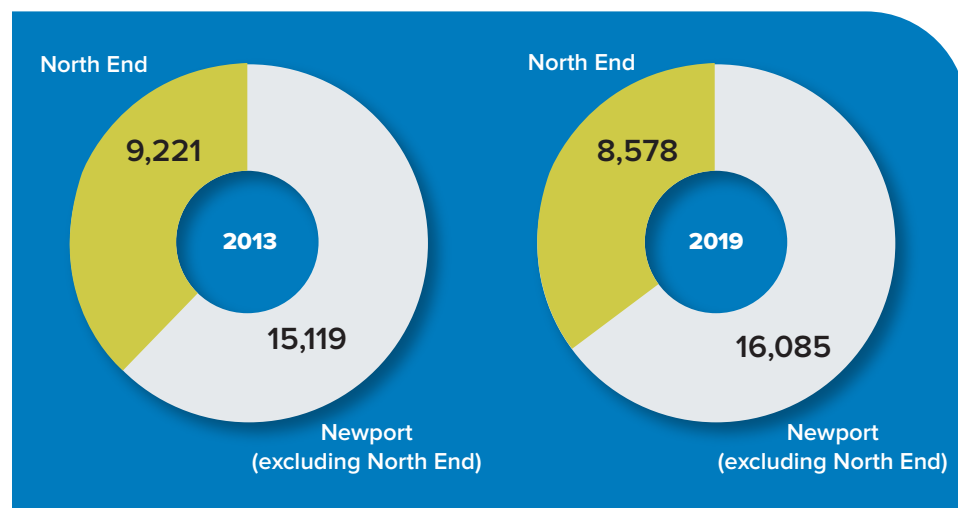
Newport, Rhode Island's North End is a 900-acre district located, as the name suggests, at the North End of the city. A long-standing neighborhood, the North End is quite different from the image that so many hold of Newport as a city filled with mansions, yachts, tennis clubs, and tourists. The neighborhood is the home of necessary but unglamorous functions that enable a city to operate and, like similar neighborhoods in other cities, it has suffered a fate of disinvestment, disregard, and neglect. The Newport Water Department's wastewater treatment plant is in the North End, as is the former dump—which became the jai-alai courts and then the slots parlor—and the trash-transfer station, the Newport Department of Public Works' City Yards, and the big-box mall with the Walmart. The neighborhood has been cut off from the rest of the city physically and psychologically by the Pell Bridge ramps and has suffered from the heavy hand of urban renewal.

A History Of Disparities

Along with Newport as a whole, the North End's population has declined continually since its peak in 1960. In 2019, the North End was home to 8,578 people or 38 percent of Newport's population. Though the rate of citywide population decline has leveled off, the North End's population is projected to continue its decline due—at least in part—to the ever-higher cost of living.¹⁶

One factor driving the loss in population has been the US Navy's reduced presence in Newport, including the Navy's decision to move the warship fleet, the Cruiser-Destroyer Atlantic force, out of Newport in 1973. This move accelerated the shift to a service-sector and tourism-based economy, which characteristically includes high- and low-wage jobs, with very few in the middle-income range.

Figure 1: Population estimates in the North End and Newport, 2013 and 2019



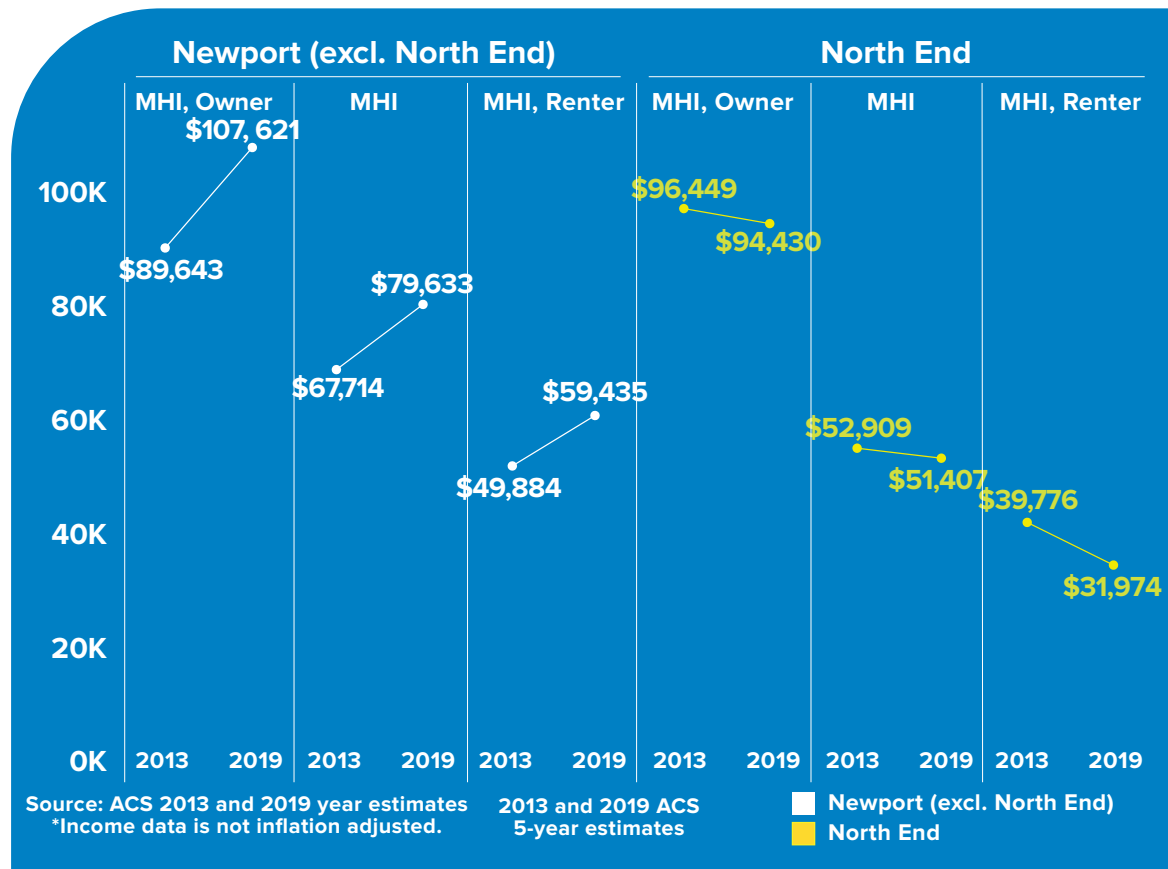
2013 and 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates

While the rest of Newport has seen an increase in median household income (MHI), the North End has seen a decline. Between 2013 and 2019, Newport's MHI rose from \$67,714 to \$79,633. During the same period, the North End's MHI fell from \$52,902 to \$51,407. This means that between 2013 and 2017, the MHI in the North End fell from 78 percent to 65 percent of the Newport median household income.¹⁷

This growing disparity between incomes in the North End and those in the rest of the city has put increasing financial pressure on residents who would like to remain in their neighborhood. As of 2020, 5,550 North End residents (64 percent) are renters. Of these, 49 percent are housing

cost-burdened, meaning these households spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing. In addition, 18.3 percent of all households—renters and non-renters combined—spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing. These households are considered *severely* housing-cost-burdened.¹⁸

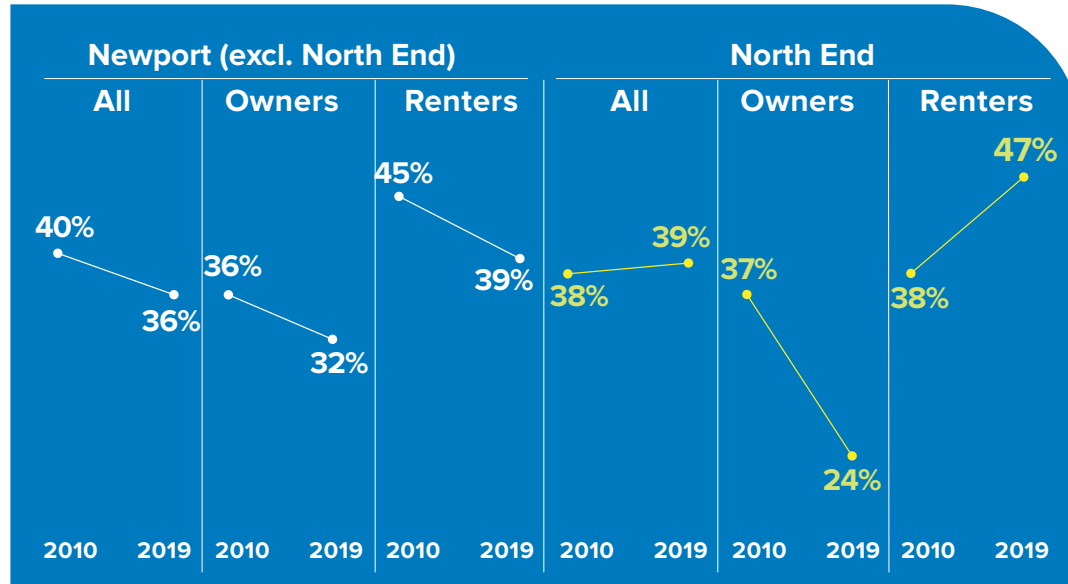
Figure 2. Change in Median Household Income by Area



2013 and 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates

There is an historic concentration of people of color in the North End—currently, double the percentage as the rest of Newport. Overall, white households in Newport earn 3.3 times more than Black households and 2.3 times more than Hispanic/Latinx households. The percentage of the population below the federal poverty level, citywide, is 3.9 times greater for Black households and 2.9 times greater than Hispanic/Latinx households.¹⁹

Without increased attention to—and expansion of—both housing affordability and improved employment opportunities, the percent of housing-cost-burdened households will increase.

Figure 3: Housing Cost Burden Over Time

2013 and 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates

A Planning Timeline

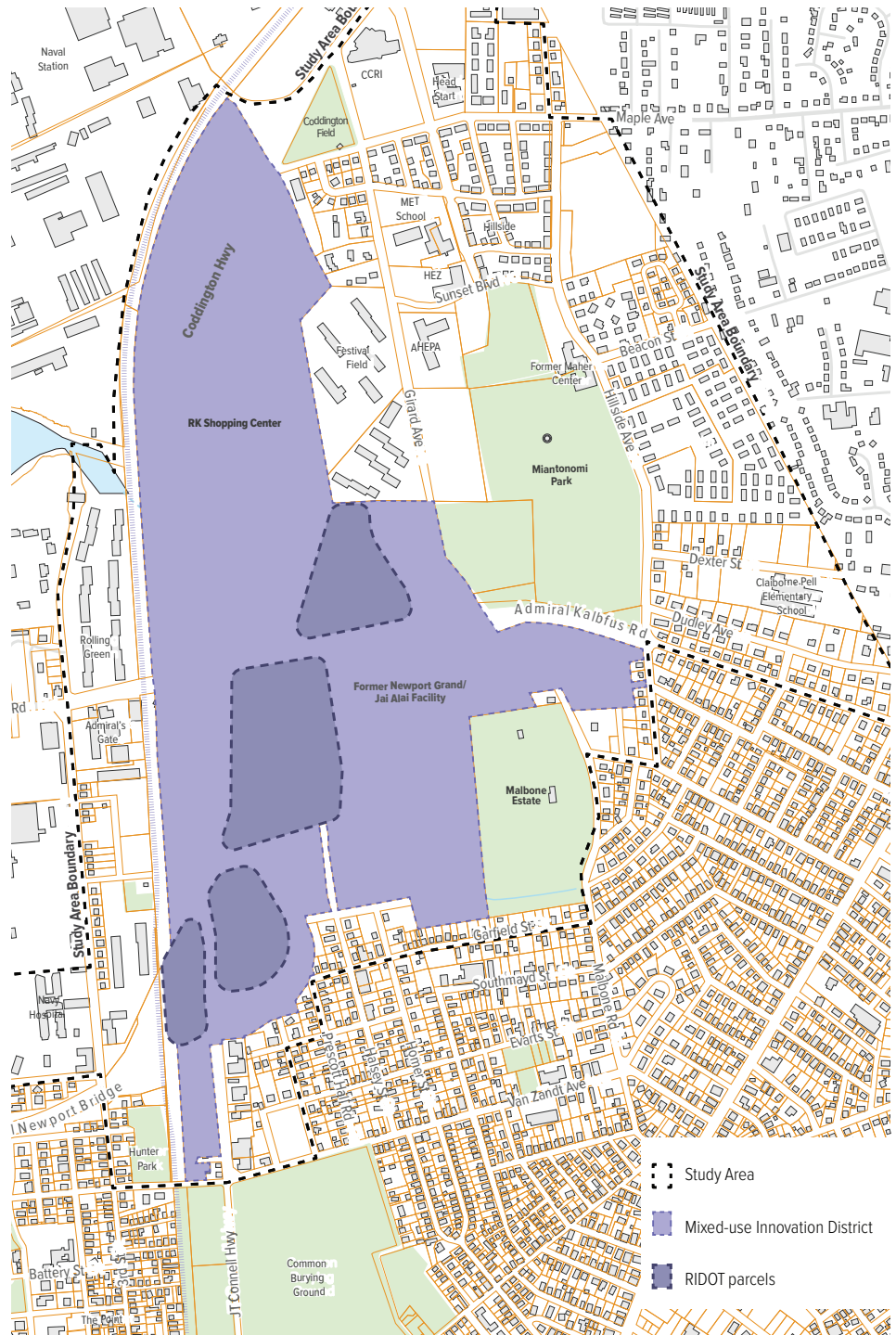
Like other American cities with declining populations and a declining number of blue-collar jobs, the City of Newport has worked over the years to diversify the local economy and at the same time to make Newport a greener, more resilient city. The timeline of planning efforts, prepared by SGA, summarizes the plans that the city has adopted—which include the North End—in the last 25 years. Among them are:

- ← Newport Harborfront Plan, 1997
- ← Calthorpe Plan, 1999
- ← Newport Harbor Management Plan, 2001
- ← Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, West Side Master Plan, 2005
- ← Newport North End Master Plan, 2006
- ← Aquidneck Island Transportation Study, 2011
- ← Newport Innovation Hub Vision Plan, 2015
- ← City of Newport, Comprehensive Land Use Plan, 2017
- ← The Newport Tree, Park, and Open Space Master Plan, 2017
- ← Newport North End Urban Plan, 2021

While the preparation of these plans, as required by law, included community engagement, residents of the North End, for the most part, expressed their view that these plans do not reflect their concerns or priorities. Furthermore, when developers propose projects in the North End, residents believe that,

because city leaders fear losing these developments to other cities, they are inclined to approve plans and projects that are not consistent with the needs and priorities of the neighborhood's existing residents.

Map 2: North End Urban Plan Area



North End Urban Plan

The North End Urban Plan (NEUP)

In the past 25 years, the city has prepared numerous plans with propositions for the North End's future. Many of these plans are summarized in the planning timeline developed by SGA as part of the NEEDS project. The 2021 North End Urban Plan (NEUP) is the most recent and is described on the City of Newport's website as "the neighborhood land use plan for an area of Newport seen as Newport's last economic development opportunity neighborhood." It was adopted into the Comprehensive Plan in February 2021.

North End residents maintain that, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic (and the resulting over-reliance on digital communication not fully accessible to many residents), the NEUP was drafted with limited meaningful consultation with residents. As a result, they argue that the original draft of the NEUP failed to address adequately: 1) the impact that anticipated new development would have on current residents; 2) how the city would ensure that the neighborhood as a whole might benefit from new development; or 3) the role that North End residents would play in determining what those benefits might be. In response, the Newport Health Equity Zone, a city-wide coalition mobilizing residents and resources of the Broadway and North End neighborhoods to make Newport a place where everyone can thrive, organized the North End residents who successfully proposed amendments to the NEUP.

In Proposing Amendments to the NEUP, Residents Hoped to:

- ← Ensure housing affordability and mitigate displacement, particularly for current middle- and low-income residents of the North End;
- ← Prioritize development that would create higher-paying jobs, including for North End residents, and encourage companies and the city to work with residents to help them secure those jobs;
- ← Include a welcoming gateway to the city and the neighborhood as part of the Pell Bridge Ramp Realignment Project;
- ← Improve regional connections and provide more multi-modal transportation options for visitors and residents, including improved infrastructure for pedestrians and bicycles;
- ← Protect North End neighborhoods from large vehicle traffic;
- ← Expand Newport's urban forest in the North End;
- ← Promote the extension of the tree canopy in North End urban communities to help combat climate change; and

- ← Mitigate educational, wealth, opportunity, and geophysical disparities through public processes and community benefits agreements.

The Planning Board accepted these amendments, which were incorporated into the language approved by the City Council in February 2021. This NEEDS proposes to city leaders and staff ways that they can work with local residents to implement these provisions of the Comprehensive Plan.

New Zoning Ordinances for the North End’s “Innovation District”

Following the adoption of the NEUP, city officials drafted two zoning ordinances with two different regulatory schemes—the Base Zone and the Float Zone—to implement the NEUP in the Innovation Hub, a sub-area at the center of the area covered by the NEUP.²⁰

The boundaries of the new Innovation Hub incorporate more than 40 acres and exclude most of the residential areas, which were included in the North End Urban Plan study area. These two ordinances replace the existing zoning for the commercial part of the North End, which was predominantly limited to industrial and strip retail uses. The stated intent of the rezoning is to, “...foster twenty-first-century jobs and lifestyle choices (with),... open spaces,... more walkable and bikeable streets and paths, and greater connectivity within and between the city’s neighborhoods and resources.”²¹ The new zoning allows for residential uses within the Urban Village subdistrict.

The Base Zone ordinance (Chapter 17.65) is the underlying zoning for the entire Innovation Hub and regulates development of smaller parcels of land within the Innovation Hub—those which are smaller than 75,000 square feet, or meet other criteria outlined in the Ordinances—which are within the three mixed-use subdistricts: the Urban Village District, the Maker District, and the Maker-Tech District.

The Innovation Hub Floating Overlay Zone (Chapter 17.66) applies primarily to larger parcels—more than 75,000 square feet, almost 2 acres—within the Innovation Hub’s Urban Village subdistrict. The Float Zone allows for building heights up to 65 feet (four-five floors), which could be increased to 90 feet (seven-eight floors)“ . . . provided there is a commensurate benefit to the community and no substantial adverse impact on viewsheds or neighboring properties.” The intention of the Float Zone is to allow for more flexibility in the Urban Village subdistrict, giving the city the ability to waive constraints on developments, when the developer provides a proportional public benefit.

On September 8, 2021, the Newport City Council Adopted the New Innovation Hub Base and Float Zone Ordinances.

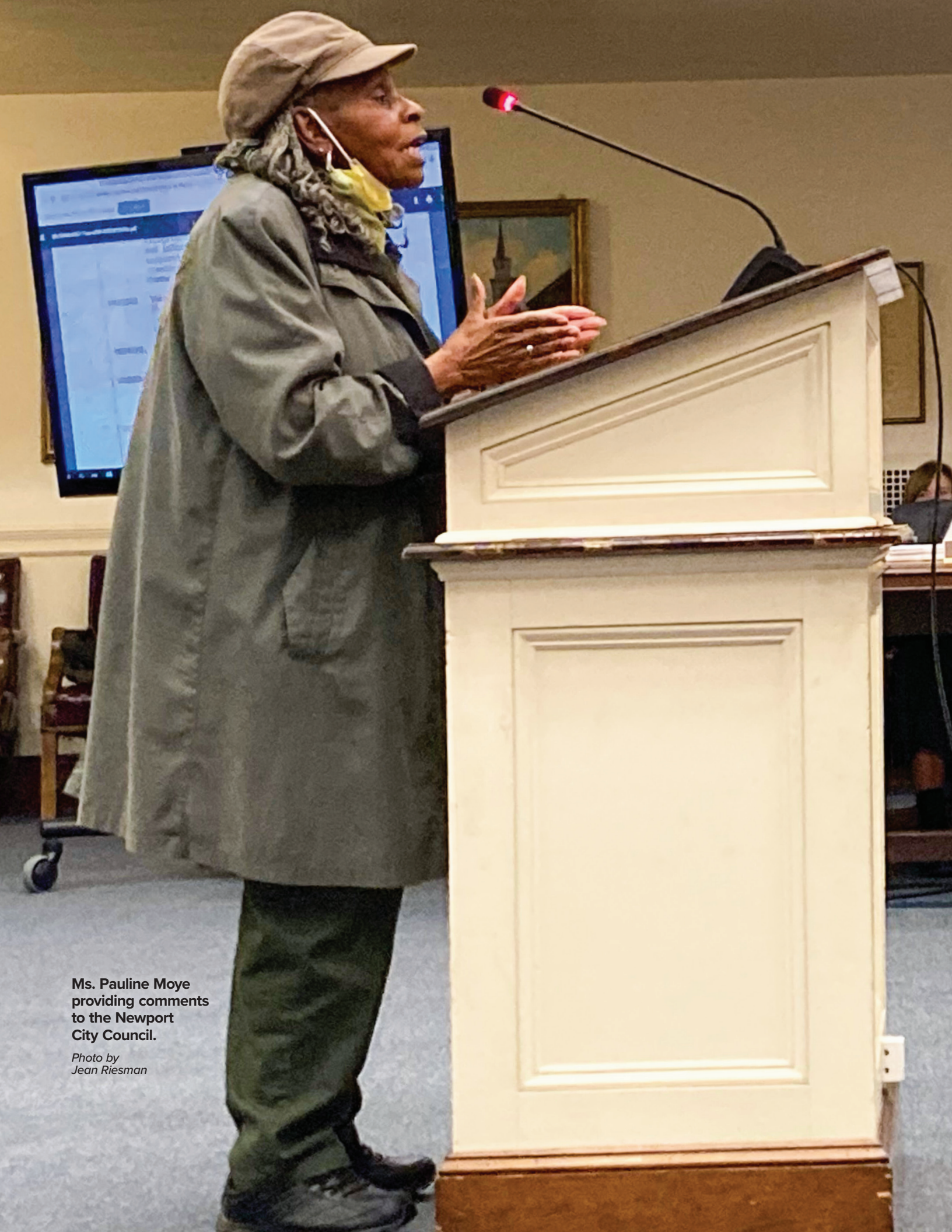
LAG proposed amendments to the Innovation Hub ordinances—a first step in implementing the NEEDS.

Although these new ordinances address some of the goals outlined in the North End residents' amendments to the NEUP, LAG members were concerned that the ordinances did not go far enough to ensure that their priorities would be met. In response, the LAG drafted and advocated for amendments to the Base and Float Zone Ordinances, which clarify and strengthen the language related to three of their six priority areas: community empowerment, housing affordability and mitigating displacement, and high-quality and accessible green and civic open space. The LAG amendments clarify the intent of the zoning ordinances in these three areas and ensure that the city and developers are held to the intended standard, as stated in the NEUP. The Planning Board approved the LAG amendments in March of 2022 and the City Council adopted them unanimously in May of that year.

This initiative to amend zoning laws that directly impact their neighborhood is an excellent example of how residents can advocate for equitable development at the grass-roots level. The LAG:

- ← Partnered with SGA's zoning experts and a local land use attorney to draft the zoning amendments;
- ← Consulted with the city planning director and city solicitor to ensure that their amendments are consistent with Rhode Island law and the staff's ability to administer the ordinances;
- ← Received training on collaboration, coalitions, and advocacy;
- ← Conducted an outreach campaign to build support including circulating a petition, meetings with other grassroots organizations to find common ground and garner their support, and preparing talking points for allies, advocates and the press;
- ← Invited community members to join them at the City Council hearing to ensure that the council chamber was full of supporters, when the amendments are considered; and
- ← Contacted city councilors to ensure that they understood the language and intent of the proposed amendments.

Even before this NEEDS was complete, the LAG and their supporters were well on their way to building an influential presence to advocate for equitable development in their neighborhood.



**Ms. Pauline Moya
providing comments
to the Newport
City Council.**

*Photo by
Jean Riesman*

5. How Can the NEEDS Help to Achieve the Community's Priorities?

Implementing the NEEDS will require a multi-year, collaborative community redevelopment process, which includes short-term actions and long-term strategies, some of which are described in the following pages. Many of these solutions—such as negotiating community benefit agreements—are complex, require the engagement of many actors, and are politically controversial. Other actions—such as creating an “asset map” of all of the training programs available to North End residents—would be relatively simple to achieve.

To have the impact they envision, the LAG will need to grow in size and sophistication, and they must form alliances with other partners and supporters beyond their membership. They will need to build support among the community and find ways to work productively with city staff, as well as current and future and elected leaders.

The following sections describe each priority in terms of a vision for success, potential partners and tools, short-term actions and long-term strategies. Together, they constitute a roadmap for advancing equitable development in the North End and throughout the City of Newport.



What Success Would Look Like

North End residents can point to tangible changes in their community that they advocate for and that benefit them. Residents will understand the rules and regulations governing decision-making in Newport, know how to change them, and will succeed in working within that structure to achieve their objectives. The Newport City Council works with North End residents to meet the needs of the community, as identified by the residents, and adopts policies identified by the LAG and others. North End residents benefit from the private investment and development in their neighborhood.

Challenges

- ← The LAG is still in its early stages and needs to grow and continue to develop skills to effectively advocate for the neighborhood.
- ← Existing residents of the North End feel that their needs and priorities are not sufficiently considered in the city's decision-making processes.
- ← Newport's elected officials seem reluctant to ask developers to address community needs and priorities.
- ← North End residents and many city officials have not yet agreed on a shared vision for the future of the North End.

Actors/Partners/Advocates

- ← Local Advocacy Group (LAG)
- ← Newport Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Local Action Team
- ← Involve Newport
- ← Women's Resource Center
- ← Sankofa Community Connections
- ← Elected and appointed city officials and staff

Example Tools

- ← Community planning academy²²
- ← Zoning amendments
- ← Community benefits agreements²³

Short-Term Actions (One–Three Years)

- ← Strengthen the LAG by increasing its membership and its ability to frame and communicate a message.
- ← Develop a committee structure in the LAG so that there is a group dedicated to addressing each priority, similar to the example of the LAG zoning amendments task force.
- ← Continue technical assistance and training for members of the LAG and for other interested neighborhood residents in coalition building, citizen planning, communications, and advocacy.
- ← Build support among other residents and external organizational allies to advocate alongside the LAG.
- ← Continue to advocate for zoning reform and other city ordinances that serve North End residents' interests.
- ← Build a coalition of a majority of city council members who will work with North End residents to address their priorities.
- ← Negotiate community benefits agreements with developers that serve North End residents' interest with meaningful resident participation.

Long-Term Actions (Three Years and Beyond)

- ← Enforce community benefits agreements, in collaboration with residents.
- ← Expand the knowledge and capacity of North End residents to influence policy change that supports their priorities.
- ← Create a LAG “resource council” composed of local experts in a range of relevant topics, who can provide political and legal advice as well as technical support.
- ← Hold a “planning academy” for North End residents to develop their understanding and expertise on how to influence land use decisions about their community.



**Meeting
of the LAG**

*Photo by
Becca Buthe*



Housing Affordability and Protecting Against Displacement

What Success Would Look Like

The North End has an adequate supply of housing, both rental and for sale, that is affordable to those who live there, including sufficient supply that meets the federal definition of affordability for residents who earn 80% or less of the area median income. Residents are knowledgeable about the tools available and how to use/implement them to achieve their desired housing outcomes.

Challenges

- ← Low- and moderate-income residents are increasingly housing cost-burdened and are being displaced.
- ← Middle-income residents are facing a “cliff effect” where they no longer qualify for subsidized housing, but cannot afford market-rate housing anywhere in Newport.
- ← The growth in Newport’s second-home ownership and short-term rentals has contributed to an inflated housing market, having an adverse effect on current residents’ stability.
- ← Future development in the North End is expected to have a negative impact on neighborhood character valued by current residents.
- ← It is unclear whether or how future developments, which are largely enabled by public action, will benefit current residents and future generations.

Actors/Partners/Advocates

- ← Local Advocacy Group (LAG)
- ← Newport Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Local Action Team
- ← Aquidneck Land Trust
- ← Church Community Housing Corporation
- ← Developers of for-sale and rental workforce/moderate-income housing
- ← Newport Housing Authority

Example Tools

- ← Inclusionary zoning that requires or incentivizes mixed-income, affordable, and very affordable housing
- ← Rent-control ordinance
- ← Accessory dwelling unit (ADU) ordinance
- ← Homeowner rehabilitation and/or down-payment assistance

Short-Term Actions (One–Three Years)

- ← The City of Newport reviews existing programs for housing affordability and mitigating displacement to ensure that they are adequate and are targeted to the needs of North End residents.
- ← The city expands programs that are successful in mitigating displacement and increasing the supply of workforce and affordable housing.
- ← Government and nonprofit organizations expand residents' understanding of programs to increase housing affordability and mitigating displacement to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

Long-Term Actions (Three Years and Beyond)

- ← Preserve and develop more housing options at moderate-income price points across the city.
- ← Ensure construction of new workforce and affordable rental and for-sale housing in the North End.
- ← Consider advocating for the elimination of exclusionary zoning in Newport.
- ← Advocate for and create a land bank, or land trust, for the acquisition and preservation of affordable housing.

Housing in the North End

Photos by Rex LeBeau





High-Quality, Publicly Accessible Open, Green, and Civic Spaces

What Success Would Look Like

Residents of the North End have public access to the waterfront in their neighborhood and to other high-quality civic and public open spaces. Parks, plazas, playgrounds, picnic areas, civic gathering spaces, sidewalks, and pedestrian passageways are plentiful, publicly accessible, and maintained to the same standards as comparable places in more affluent parts of the city. Stormwater runoff is managed sufficiently to protect both public and private property in the neighborhood.

Challenges

- ← There is not enough high-quality open, green, and civic spaces in the North End neighborhood, especially those designed specifically for children.
- ← Miantonomi Park—the primary public park in the North End—is not easy to access for all residents, with limitations on how the residents can use the park, and it is unclear how decisions about its use are made.
- ← The North End currently has no public access or quality public spaces along its waterfront.
- ← Many of the existing public spaces are underutilized because they are poorly maintained or inaccessible.

Actors/Partners/Advocates

- ← Local Advocacy Group (LAG)
- ← Newport Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Local Action Team
- ← Involve Newport
- ← Aquidneck Land Trust
- ← Bike Newport
- ← Project for Public Spaces
- ← Friends of the Waterfront
- ← National Brownfields Coalition

Example Tools

- ← Zoning amendments
- ← Community benefits agreements
- ← Placemaking design interventions

Short-Term Actions (One–Three Years)

- ← Designate locations for public open space in the NEUP and Innovation Hub zoning map.
- ← Adopt LAG-proposed zoning amendments regarding open space.
- ← Require that every major new development include (or contribute to) a high-quality, publicly accessible open, green, or civic space.
- ← Use publicly-controlled land—for example the Navy Hospital site or land made available from the Pell Bridge ramp realignment—to increase the amount of high-quality public open space in the neighborhood.

Long-Term Actions (Three Years and Beyond)

- ← Provide a greater diversity of well-designed, public recreational spaces.
- ← Continue to negotiate and enforce community benefits agreement.
- ← Build better stormwater management infrastructure, through community benefits agreements or public investments.
- ← Rehabilitate wetlands and streambeds for better stormwater management.
- ← Protect open space and scenic vistas by confining development to designated growth areas.
- ← Secure funding for brownfields cleanup.
- ← Advocate for and create a land bank, or land trust, for the acquisition and preservation of publicly accessible open space, especially on the waterfront.



**The Big Blue
Bike Barn**

*Photo by
Rex LeBeau*



Workforce Development/ Economic Diversification

What Success Would Look Like

There is increased economic vibrancy in the North End. The neighborhood has plenty of jobs at a wide range of incomes, which are appropriate for and available to residents of the North End. Residents have the skills to compete for and hold those positions.

Challenges

- ← No clear policies link new development in the North End to jobs or workforce development for North End residents.
- ← Most current job growth is in the tourism and service sectors, which do not pay wages that match the cost of housing in Newport.
- ← Earning potential and income growth have stagnated for many residents.

Actors/Partners/Advocates

- ← Local Advocacy Group (LAG)
- ← Newport Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Local Action Team
- ← Newport Partnership for Families
- ← Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), Newport County Campus
- ← Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce
- ← Newport Public School District
- ← University of Rhode Island Extension Small Business Development Program
- ← FabNewport



Shuttered former casino property at the center of the Innovation Hub

Photo by Rex LeBeau



Newport Craft Brewing & Distilling - a growing local business

Example Tools

- ← All-in Cities Policy Toolkit
- ← Partnerships to advance youth apprenticeship
- ← Youth Apprenticeship Quality Assessment Tool
- ← Workforce development and hiring provisions in community benefits agreements
- ← Mid-career training programs

Short-Term Actions (One–Three Years)

- ← Create an “asset map” that includes all the training programs in the area, which are available to North End residents according to their skill level, as a resource for members of the North End community.
- ← Increase funding for vocational-training programs so that neighborhood residents benefit from the coming economic development in Newport.
- ← Identify gaps in training programs and identify sources and funds to create them in local community colleges or union training programs.
- ← Include workforce development and hiring provisions specific to North End residents in community benefits agreements.
- ← Create mid-career training programs and prioritize North End residents.
- ← Require prevailing wages (union wages) on large construction projects.
- ← Enact a local hire requirement on large construction projects.

Long-Term Actions (Three Years and Beyond)

- ← Monitor enforcement of the local workforce requirements included in community benefits agreements.
- ← Create attainable career development pathways that are available to recently graduated students and to working age adults of the North End.



Neighborhood Development

What Success Would Look Like

Many new and locally-owned North End businesses that meet the needs of residents are flourishing. Existing North End businesses, such as Bishop's Diner, remain and thrive. Community-based organizations that offer events and educational programs that promote the arts and culture endemic to the residents are highly visible and active in the community.

Challenges

- ← Current residents and businesses are being displaced as a result of rising housing costs, large-scale infrastructure projects like the widening of Admiral Kalbfus Road during the Pell Bridge Ramp Realignment Project, and new private investment envisioned in the NEUP.
- ← Commercial real-estate values are depressed, resulting from provisions in the new zoning ordinances that make many of the current commercial non-conforming.
- ← Distinctive local businesses are at risk of displacement with few resources to support relocation within the neighborhood or the creation of new neighborhood serving, locally-owned businesses.
- ← New development is expected to attract more up-scale commercial development that will not serve current residents' needs and will push out existing local businesses.
- ← The North End does not have a strong sense of identity, particularly one that incorporates, celebrates, and enhances the artistic and cultural character of its residents.

Actors/Partners/Advocates

- ← Local Advocacy Group (LAG)
- ← Newport Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Local Action Team
- ← Aquidneck Community Table
- ← Involve Newport
- ← Off Broadway Neighborhood Association
- ← The Point Association
- ← Boys & Girls Club of Newport County
- ← City of Newport, Department of Planning and Economic Development
- ← City of Newport Planning Board
- ← East Bay Community Action Program
- ← Newport City Council
- ← Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce
- ← South Eastern Economic Development Corporation

- ← University of Rhode Island Extension Small Business Development Program
- ← FabNewport

Example Tools

- ← Community Economic Development Handbook, Shelterforce
- ← Community Economic Development Resource List, National Community Action Partnership

Short-term actions (one–three years)

- ← Increase the number of food trucks and other locally-oriented businesses in the neighborhood by providing space and financial and technical support.
- ← Provide more locations and support for community gardens and expand the farmers market as ways to provide healthy and more affordable food options.
- ← Establish technical assistance programs for startup businesses working in the blue economy.
- ← Work with organizations such as FabNewport and the Boys and Girls Club to develop more programs for youth sports and STEM programs, camps, after-school activities.
- ← Work with University of Rhode Island Extension Small Business Development Program to provide free or low-cost consulting and coaching for small-business owners.
- ← Adopt local purchase and procurement requirements for City agencies to purchase goods and services.

Long-term actions (three years and beyond)

- ← Increased funding for educational and recreational programs for local youth.
- ← Provide more opportunities for locally-oriented businesses to flourish.
- ← Enact a local small business retention plan.
- ← Create a North End Business Improvement District.
- ← Give residents a stronger voice in providing and permitting the commercial development and neighborhood services in the North End.



Road Safety and Connectivity

What Success Would Look Like

The North End is physically integrated with and connected to the rest of Newport. Residents of all ages and abilities are able to easily get around the North End and to other parts of Newport without needing a car.

Challenges

- ← The streets are not safe for all members of the community, regardless of whether they choose to drive, walk, bike, or roll.
- ← Many pedestrian and biking routes are inconvenient or nonexistent.
- ← The North End is disconnected and isolated from the rest of the city.
- ← This lack of connectivity contributes to the pronounced racial segregation and social and economic isolation prevalent in Newport.

Actors/Partners/Advocates

- ← Local Advocacy Group (LAG)
- ← Newport Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Local Action Team
- ← Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT)
- ← Bike Newport
- ← City of Newport Planning Board
- ← Newport City Council
- ← City of Newport, Department of Planning and Economic Development
- ← Project for Public Spaces

Example Tools

- ← City of Newport, Green and Complete Streets Ordinance²⁴
- ← Complete Streets Resources, Institute of Transportation Engineers
- ← Complete Streets Resources, National Complete Streets Coalition

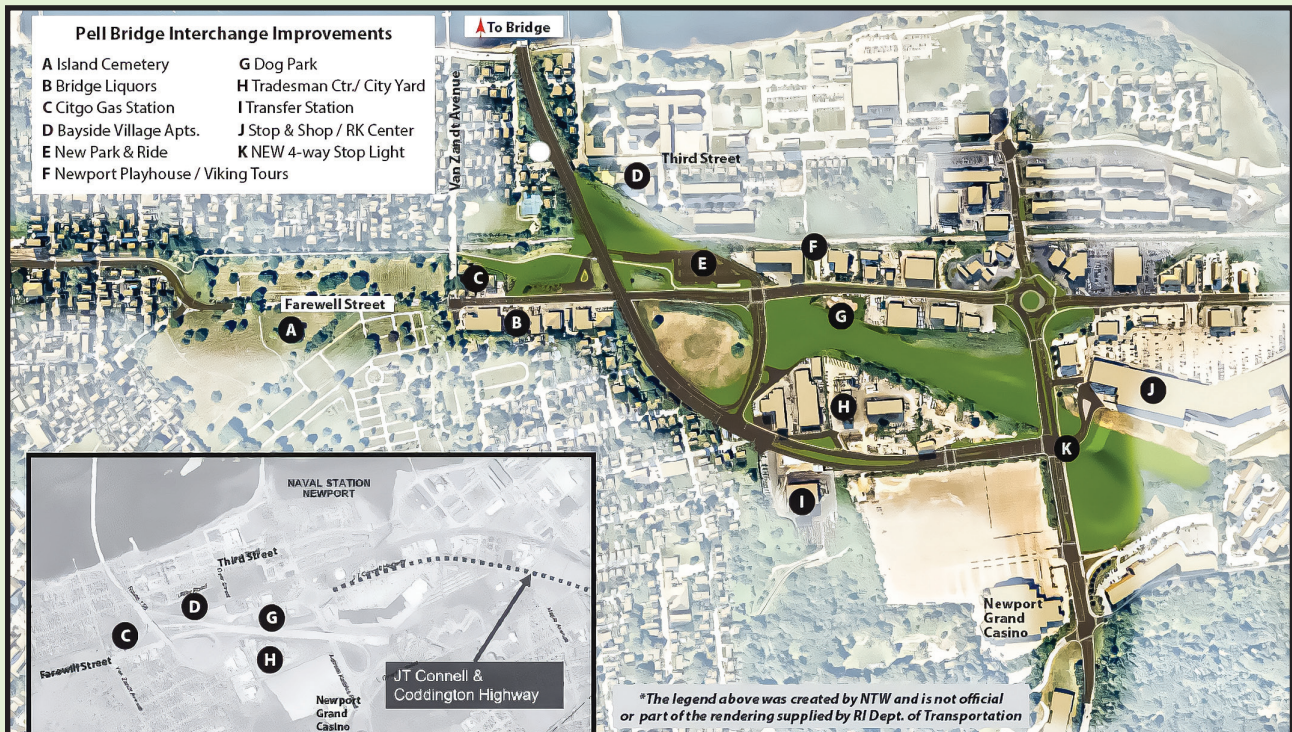
Short-Term Actions (One–Three Years)

- ← Make safety-oriented infrastructure improvements in target areas in the North End. These should include protected bike lanes, a complete sidewalk network, and safe routes to school and other important community institutions.
- ← Complete new streets and street maintenance projects in accordance with provisions in the Green & Complete Streets Ordinance.
- ← Experiment with pop-up streetscape demonstration projects to test new ideas for improvements.

Long Term Actions (Three Years and Beyond)

- ← Ensure that new street construction, renovation, and maintenance projects are completed in accordance with the Green & Complete Streets Ordinance.
- ← Monitor the Pell Bridge Ramp Realignment Project to ensure that the proposed improvements are completed in a way that meets neighborhood improvement priorities.

Map 3: Proposed Pell Bridge Interchange Improvements



Newport this Week edit of RIDOT Rendering



FLORENCE GRAY CENTER
COMMUNITY GARDEN



GROWING TOGETHER
AS A COMMUNITY

6. Conclusion

Residents of Newport's North End believe that the adoption of the North End Urban Plan (NEUP) has given their city a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape the North End as a place where they can live, work, and thrive to the benefit of all of Newport—but only if development is equitable. For this vision to become reality, the city must 1) require developers in the North End to engage local residents in a meaningful dialogue, 2) require that developers of larger projects negotiate community benefits agreements with residents, and 3) incorporate North End priorities into their vision for redevelopment. So far, this appears to be something that city officials are reluctant to do out of fear that placing too many requirements on developers will cause them to walk away.

North End residents do not share this fear. Instead, they believe that the North End is destined to become a place where people want to live and work. They are convinced that significant public investments in infrastructure improvements and well-crafted zoning for the area that allows increased density and a wider range of uses will make the neighborhood attractive to developers and investors, while meeting equitable development standards. North End residents call on the City of Newport to leverage this appeal for the benefit of current residents as well as the city as a whole.

With this NEEDS as a guide, North End residents have the roadmap they need to work with their elected officials on how to leverage these new investments to the benefit of all city residents—and, most especially, to the benefit of the residents whose lives and community are at the greatest risk of disruption, displacement, and exclusion from the benefits to be gleaned from new development.

Summary of Tools for Equitable Development

PRIORITY AREA	TOOL	LAG ROLE	GOALS
Community empowerment	Community Benefits Agreements (CBA)	Advocates Participants	Create a city-sanctioned, legal framework for residents to negotiate with developers for a package of community benefits that will accompany new developments in their neighborhood.
	Tax Increment Financing (TIF)	Advocates	Use the growth in tax revenues, generated by new development, to pay for public improvements in the neighborhood.
Housing Affordability and Mitigating Displacement	Inclusionary zoning	Advocates	Increase the supply of privately built, market-rate housing in the neighborhood attainable by moderate income households.
	Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance	Advocates Fundraisers	Increase the supply of smaller, moderately-priced housing units in predominantly single-family areas.
	Rent control / regulation	Advocates	Protect current residents from steep increases in rents.
	Homeowner rehab assistance programs	Advocates Fundraisers	Reduce the cost of home improvements to existing low/moderate-income homeowners.
	Eviction prevention and just cause eviction protections	Advocates	Educate renters on their tenant rights relative to eviction and right to purchase.
	Community land trust	Advocates Fundraisers	Reduce the cost of purchasing a home and maintaining moderate home prices for future purchasers.
	Preservation of low income housing	Advocates	Maintain a diversity of housing in the neighborhood, particularly at prices affordable to low-income households.
	Limitations on short-term rentals	Advocates	Maintain a sufficient supply of moderated-priced rental units for permanent residents in the neighborhood.
Open green and civic spaces	Open space standards in zoning ordinances	Advocates	Ensure that open, green and civic spaces are high quality and are available to residents in line with their needs and desires.
Neighborhood Development: Locally-Oriented Retail and Services, and Cultural Amenities	Street vending/food truck ordinances	Advocates	Decrease the barriers for entrepreneurs and increase neighborhood vibrancy
	Community garden/farmers markets	Advocates Fundraisers	Provide space for residents to grow or sell and purchase fresh produce.
	Youth programs for sports /summer camps/after school academics	Advocates Fundraisers Organizers	Provide opportunities for students to be engaged in diverse and structured activities outside of school.
Workforce Development / Economic Diversification	Business Improvement Districts (BID)	Advocates	Create a platform for local businesses to market collectively, connect with each other, and invest in improvements in their commercial areas.
	Technical assistance and mentoring programs for blue economy startups	Advocates Fundraisers	Support entrepreneurs and interested in participating in economic growth in new industries
	Vocational training programs	Advocates	Increase opportunities and lower barriers for residents to move into more stable, higher paying jobs
Road safety and connectivity	Green and complete streets ordinance	Advocates for enforcement and improvement of existing ordinance	Increase the appeal, connectivity, and safety of the street network in the North End for all street users
	Pop-up demonstrations for traffic calming, non-motorized transport, and road safety improvements	Identify locations for action and advocate for interventions	Demonstrate and test the benefits of new street designs for improved safety and accessibility of all street users

Equitable Development Resources

- ← All-In Cities Policy Toolkit. PolicyLink. 2022.
- ← How to Turn a Place Around: A Placemaking Handbook Project for Public Spaces. 2021
- ← Von Hoffman, Alexander. 2019. The Ingredients of Equitable Development Planning: A Cross-Case Analysis of Equitable Development Planning and CDFIs. Joint Center for Housing Studies Harvard University

Links to Key City of Newport Documents

- ← City of Newport, North End Urban Plan
- ← City of Newport, Green and Complete Streets Ordinance
- ← City of Newport, North End Urban Plan Zoning Amendments

Endnotes

- 1 North End Urban Plan. (2021) City of Newport. p.1
- 2 <https://www.facebook.com/NewportInnovationHub/>
- 3 The City of Newport. 2021. Amendment No. 1. North End Urban Plan. p. 5.
- 4 Sarah Treuhaft, Equitable Development: The Path to an All-In Pittsburgh. (PolicyLink:2016). p. 4
- 5 Von Hoffman, Alexander. 2019. The Ingredients of Equitable Development Planning: A Cross-case Analysis of Equitable Development Planning and CDFIs. Joint Center for Housing Studies Harvard University.
- 6 Equitable Development and Environmental Justice. United States Environmental Protection Agency
- 7 Sarah Treuhaft, Equitable Development: The Path to an All-In Pittsburgh (PolicyLink, 2016), p. 4.
- 8 The Alliance Equitable Development Principles and Scorecard.
- 9 <https://govsalaries.com/salaries/RI/newport-public-schools>
- 10 <https://govsalaries.com/salaries/RI/newport-police-department?employee=newport+fire+department>
- 11 <https://www.salary.com/research/salary/alternate/firefighter-emt-salary/newport-ri#:~:text=The%20average%20Firefighter%20FEMT%20salary,have%20spent%20in%20your%20profession.>
- 12 <https://www.salary.com/research/salary/general/registered-nurse-rn-salary/newport-ri>
- 13 <https://www.salary.com/research/salary/alternate/hotel-general-manager-salary/ri>
- 14 https://www.glassdoor.com/Salary/Newport-Hotel-Group-General-Manager-Rhode-Island-Salaries-EJJ_IE704720.0,19_KO20,35_IL.36,48_IS3156.htm
- 15 <https://www.salary.com/research/salary/benchmark/housekeeper-salary/newport-r>
- 16 2019 American Community Survey five-year estimate.
- 17 Smart Growth America. North End Equitable Development Strategy Newport, RI. Economic and Demographic Analysis & Residents' Perspectives. p.6
- 18 Smart Growth America. North End Equitable Development Strategy Newport, RI. Economic and Demographic Analysis & Residents' Perspectives. p.10
- 19 <https://www.newportri.com/story/news/local/2021/08/03/newport-ri-minority-residents-hesitant-get-covid-vaccine-why/5409656001/>
- 20 See City of Newport. Zoning Amendments "Base" and "Float" for North End. June 14, 2021.
- 21 See City of Newport. Zoning Amendments "Base" and "Float" for North End. June 14, 2021. p. 4
- 22 A small but growing number of American cities have established community planning academies designed to educate residents and businesses about the fine points of planning processes and to engage them as partners. Examples include Sacramento CA, Charlotte, NC; Nashville, TN; and Howard County, MD. Links to their websites can be found in the appendix.
- 23 Community benefits agreements (CBAs) are an increasingly common tool used across the country. Developers agree to provide specific amenities and/or mitigations to the local community or neighborhood in exchange for city action and/or acceptance of the project by the community. More information on CBAs and how to use them can be found at: Working Families, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and All-in Cities.
- 24 Newport's Green and Complete Streets Ordinance, which was adopted in June 2021 and became effective on July 1, 2022. It describes Green and Complete Streets as those designed and operated to safely and comfortably accommodate all street users of all ages and abilities.

The North End Equitable Development Strategy for Newport, RI

For the last 50 years, the residents of the North End neighborhood in Newport, Rhode Island have watched their city change and their neighborhood suffer from decline and neglect. Urban renewal, the construction of bridges, and a freeway cut the community off from the rest of the city.

While Newport leaders have undertaken many planning efforts intended to reverse the trends described above, North End residents were marginally engaged in those efforts.

This North End Equitable Development Strategy (NEEDS) has evolved over months of collaboration with North End community leaders, who have come together to form a Local Advocacy Group (LAG), which has been increasingly active in local planning discussions. With the support of the Newport Health Equity Zone, the LAG has co-created this strategy with Smart Growth America (SGA) to advance policy changes that will make their neighborhood a place where everyone can thrive.



Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

1152 15th Street, NW, Suite 450
Washington, DC 20005
smartgrowthamerica.org