

**SUMMARY REPORT
BURRILLVILLE PLANNING CHARETTE**

March 19, 2005

The following summarizes the findings and recommendations of a Planning Charette held on March 19, 2005 at the Burrillville Middle School. This Planning Charette was attended by twenty nine community leaders (see Appendix I) and was facilitated by Mr. Kevin Menard, former President of the Burrillville Town Council, and Mr. Scott A. Gibbs, President of New England Economic Development Services, Incorporated. The purpose of this Planning Charette was to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities confronting the Town of Burrillville (e.g. SWOT Analysis). From this SWOT Analysis, vision statements were developed along with various goals and objectives for the Community. This Planning Charette builds upon the findings of a similar Planning Charette held in 1997. Any significant congruencies and/or incongruencies between the findings and recommendations of these two community planning events will be identified.

Opinions and perspectives that one has concerning their community is based on one's personal experiences, needs and values. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are some contradictions in the statements recorded during the Planning Charette. For example, some attendees identified Burrillville's location as a strength while others identified location as a weakness. Another example pertains to the Town's school system. Some attendees identified the public school system as a weakness while others identified the schools as a strength. The existence of such contradictions does not negate the value of the Planning Charette. In fact, the existence of such contradictions reinforces shared values but highlights the absence of shared, objective and measurable information and clearly defined goals and objectives from which the Community can measure progress. Furthermore, the existence of contradictions also suggests the problem of effective internal and external communications. These clear, defined goals and objectives need to be effectively communicated to the Community along with the progress of the Community in attaining these goals and objectives.

This summary report should not be viewed as a static document. The findings of this summary report should be continually referenced by the various boards and commissions entrusted with the authority and responsibility to make decisions in the "best interest" of the Community. Furthermore, these boards and commissions should continually strive to better define the various goals and objectives outlined in the summary report in an effort to establish measurable standards by which progress can be monitored. Also, a theme that will be mentioned throughout this summary report is "continual and effective communication". This theme should become the standard by which the various Town boards and commissions operate in the future.

Part I: Summary of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Community Strengths

The following were identified as Burrillville's strengths.

- Reasonable tax structure.
- Reasonably good schools.
- Significant amount of open space offering the community the land resources to expand the tax base, preserve open space and meet the community's needs for active and passive recreation.
- Good location in terms of the greater Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island market.
- State highway access.
- Generous small business community.
- Town owned industrial park (Commerce Park).
- Quality of life.
- Safety.
- Sense of community.
- Good government; fiscally responsible and regulatory cautious.

The above identified strengths are similar to the strengths identified in the 1997 Planning Charette, with some exceptions. Additional strengths identified in 1997 included (1) affordable real estate prices, (2) good quality of drinking water, and (3) opportunities associated with a growing, more affluent and better educated population. Escalating residential real estate prices and the recent groundwater contamination resulting from the Mobil gas station's leaking tank probably contributed to the fact that affordable real estate prices and good quality drinking water were not identified as strengths in the most recent Planning Charette. Although the changing demographics in the Town were recognized in the recent Planning Charette, anecdotal evidence would suggest that these demographic trends are also viewed by some as a threat as reflected in (1) escalating home prices, (2) increasing residential real estate development pressures, and a (3) weakening understanding and respect for the Town's history and culture.

The term "Quality of Life" was continually mentioned throughout the Planning Charette. The facilitators pressed the participants to better define what they meant by "Quality of Life". In general, "Quality of Life" encompasses many of the community attributes that the participants value such as (1) safety, (2) good recreation resources, (3) open space, (4) environmental quality, (5) good schools, (6) good government, (7) affordability, and (8) sense of community. There is a trend nationally whereby communities experiencing increasing growth pressures have identified protecting what is unique about their communities as a key driver behind their growth management and design regulations and incentives.

Community Weaknesses

The following were identified as Burrillville's weaknesses.

- Access.
- Lack of historic appreciation.
- Fear of distance ("The Rhode Island Syndrome").
- Local employment opportunities.
- Sense of community ownership by "long term/generational".
Burrillville Residents.
- Distrust of local government.
- Fear of change.
- Business and resident apathy.
- Low sense of pride.
- "Ghettoizing" of villages.

As compared to the 1997 Planning Charette, the 2005 Planning Charette resulted in the identification of significantly fewer weaknesses. This fact reflects, in part, accomplishments made following the 1997 Planning Charette such as the recent bond referendum for a new library, adoption of a capital improvement program, and effective near term and long term fiscal management. In other words, evidence would suggest that Town leaders took serious the findings of the 1997 Planning Charette and were successful in responding to many of the previously identified weaknesses. Another explanation for the relatively fewer number of identified weaknesses is the fact that many of the weaknesses identified in 1997 were referenced in 2005 under the category of threats. Examples are (1) high cost of living for the elderly, (2) poor building infrastructure and inadequate public buildings, (3) poor public transportation, (4) federal and state mandates, (5) poor road access, (6) lack of diversification in the tax base, (7) lack of effective communication, and (8) concerns regarding the capacity of community policing and the lack of emergency medical care for a growing population.

Many of the weaknesses identified as a result of the 2005 Planning Charette are endemic to many communities throughout the United States. Communities are struggling to cope with rapidly escalating internal and external pressures such as changing demographics, fiscal strains, and loss of local landmarks and culture that distinguishes a community as unique, and increasing development pressures. Many communities are fighting these pressures by "waging the war" against developers/developments, distrusting the ability of their local officials to effectively manage these issues (e.g. keep taxes low and stop development), fighting change and adopting "Nimby" attitudes, or becoming apathetic since they don't believe they can effectuate change. The positive news is that you have the ability to buck these trends.

Community Opportunities

The following were identified as Burrillville's opportunities.

- Town owned industrial park.
- Village Centers.
- Infrastructure.

- Agricultural land (development and open space/recreation opportunities).
- Recreation Department and Resources.
- Working with neighboring communities through tourism (“BRVNHCC”).
- Capital Improvement Program.

The Opportunities theme in the 1997 summary report was “we have the time and resources to effectively plan for and manage our community’s future which includes promoting appropriate industrial and tourism growth”. The 1997 summary report also identifies the opportunities for better internal communication and cooperation, controlling the local regulatory and tax environment for businesses, better schools, and marketing the community to the “outside”.

The 2005 Planning Charette continued the theme of encouraging appropriate business development and promoting the tourism industry. Nevertheless, the 2005 Planning Charette adopted a more balanced approach by emphasizing the importance of preserving what is unique about Burrillville. The importance of the Villages was consistently emphasized including the need to promote their rehabilitation in a manner consistent with their historic value. The desire to embrace development while maintaining a balance that preserves Burrillville’s unique qualities clearly sets the Town apart from many other communities. As with the 1997 Planning Charette, the 2005 Planning Charette recognizes that Burrillville has the land resources and historic resources to embrace appropriate business development yet preserve the community’s rural character. The 2005 Planning Charette, however, emphasizes the importance of the community to better communicate and cooperate in responding and capitalizing on these opportunities. The Industrial Foundation of Burrillville was again identified as an opportunity to promote industrial development. The Industrial Foundation of Burrillville has previously been successful in the planning, permitting and management of industrial parks and the construction of speculative industrial buildings in the town.

Community Threats

The following were identified as Burrillville’s threats.

- Federal and State governmental mandates.
- Lack of public transportation.
- External image of community.
- Need for tax revenue resulting in succumbing to development pressures.
- Poor condition of buildings in various villages.
- Inadequate external communication by the various boards and commissions.
- Independent sewer, water and fire boards.
- Inadequate supply of affordable housing.
- Cost of living for seniors.
- Local support of local businesses.
- Financial strength of schools.

- Loss of Ocean State Power resources to municipal finances.
- Special interests and misinformation.
- Impact of neighboring communities' decisions on Burrillville.

Many of the Threats identified in the 1997 Planning Charette Summary Report were identified in the 2005 Planning Charette. The primary difference between the two charettes is that the 1997 charette identified both fiscal and utility threats to the Community. The availability, upkeep and cost of utilities were identified as threats in 1997. Both taxes and high debt load were also identified as threats in 1997. None of these specific threats were identified in the 2005 Planning Charette.

The perceived problem of inadequate external communication continued to be mentioned as an impediment to Community progress. This problem is linked to concerns regarding the perceived misinformation being disseminated by individuals and/or groups with specific agendas. The need to expand the Community's tax base as a means to manage the cost of living in Burrillville, especially for the senior citizens, was mentioned. The need for affordable housing also reflects this concern over the community's escalating cost of living. This need, however, creates a threat due to the concern that possible desperation for an expanded tax base could result in local support for development projects that are not congruent with a future vision for the Community; a vision that builds on the Community's historical assets and rural heritage. The Town having and maintaining control over the type and rate of growth was recognized as essential to its future.

Part II: Summary of Community Visions

The following were identified by the Planning Charette participants as important attributes to Burrillville's future.

- Community oriented atmosphere.
- "Proper" education.
- Safe and healthy community.
- Preserved rural character and villages.
- Extensive, coordinated and promoted social and cultural events.
- Targeted economic development.
- Balanced and equitable tax burden.
- Affordable housing opportunities.
- Rehabilitated and reinvigorated Villages.
- Balanced growth.
- Proper planning and growth management.
- Fiscal strength and affordability.
- High quality of life.
- Clean environment.

- Effective and appropriate utilization of natural and man-made resources.

The following Vision Statements were drafted based on the above attributes.

Community	A strong community oriented atmosphere that prioritizes public safety and health; well managed and promoted social and cultural events for all residents; quality recreation programs and facilities; good schools; and clean environment.
Economic Development	Balanced economic development that prioritizes well planned industrial, commercial and retail developments; rehabilitated and reinvigorated historic village centers; diversified and affordable housing opportunities; preserved open space and rural character; and an integrated and promoted tourism industry.
Government	Local government that prudently manages fiscal conditions; demonstrates leadership in effective and appropriate planning and growth management; provides quality and affordable services; and demonstrates and encourages a total commitment to honest, responsive and respectful internal and external communication.

Part III: Community Goals and Objectives

Much of the discussion during the Planning Charette did not result in the identification of specific, quantifiable objectives. Nevertheless, the goals were implicit in the discussions that occurred during the Planning Charette. Therefore, the authors have outlined their interpretation of the resulting Community goals and associated objectives.

In order to effectively monitor the Community's progress in the achievement of the above outlined visions, it is necessary that specific, measurable objectives be outlined. Such objectives may be represented by the accomplishment of a specific task.

In other cases, it is necessary to further define specific measurable data from which progress can be gauged and from which comparative positions with other communities can be evaluated.

Given the above defined Vision Statements, the following are the specific goals and objectives.

Goals	Objectives
<i>1. Diversify the tax base</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a goal for total assessed value of business real estate as a % of total assessed value of real estate (tax base• Annually track progress in diversifying tax base per goal.• Support efforts of Burrillville Redevelopment Agency and Industrial Foundation of Burrillville.• Adopt property tax incentive program to encourage investment in business real estate.
<i>2. Manage “cost of living” for residents and seniors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish comparative “cost of living” indices and monitor on an annual basis.• Study and consider adoption of “development impact fees” and “user fees”.• Maintain recently passed property tax credits and sliding scale for seniors.• Secure outside organization to sponsor semi-annual community budgeting and financial planning workshops for residents.• Promote the development of affordable housing through the design of land use regulations and negotiations with developers.
<i>3. Improve public health and safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify public safety and health indices and establish community safety and health goals.• Prepare an annual community safety and

health audit using established indices and goals.

- Based on results of annual community safety and health audit, establish strategies to improve performance.
- Resolve Pascoag water crisis and promote a strong, collaborative working relationship between the Harrisville and Pascoag water departments.

4. Promote balanced and appropriate growth

- Develop strategies to rehabilitate and reinvigorate the various historic villages.
- Develop regulatory and incentive programs to direct growth to historic villages.
- Support the activities of the Burrillville Redevelopment Agency in the aggressive implementation of the Stillwater Mill Redevelopment Plan.
- Support the activities of the Burrillville Redevelopment Agency in the adoption of a redevelopment plan for Downtown Pascoag.
- Investigate options for the preservation of open space through the acquisition of development rights, fee simple acquisition of key parcels, conservation easements and/or other techniques.
- Prioritize the preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties.
- Establish high level discussions between the Town and the State of Rhode Island concerning the future of Zambrano Hospital. Explore collaborative approaches to enhancing this property's value to the community as a recreation resource.
- Support the build-out of Commerce Park.
- Evaluate all industrially zoned parcels in town to objectively evaluate appropriateness and feasibility for industrial development.

5. *Tourism and recreation development*

- Proactively identify “best bet” opportunities for industrial development in anticipation of the successful build-out of Commerce Park.

- Develop a strategic plan for the cooperative management, promotion and enhancement of public and private passive and active recreation resources and support services.
- Establish Burrillville as an outdoor recreation destination serving the greater Rhode Island, southern Massachusetts and northeast Connecticut markets.
- Link outdoor recreation destination strategy to Town’s safety and healthy lifestyle strategy.
- Establish land-use and tax incentives to encourage the establishment of “bed and breakfast” enterprises.
- Link outdoor recreation strategy to development and business creation strategies in the villages.

6. *Responsive and accountable Town government*

- Develop internal and external communication strategies to facilitate the collection, analysis and dissemination of timely, accurate and appropriate information and data.
- Investigate the option of undertaking a local government total quality management initiative including (1) process analysis and reengineering of local permitting and regulatory processes, (2) on-going employee training and team building, and (3) customer satisfaction maximization focus.
- Establish Burrillville as the leader in Rhode Island in providing on-line municipal information and services.

7. Community Orientation

- Develop a collaborative strategy to coordinate, support and promote cultural and community events.
- Investigate the option of establishing a private, not-for-profit organization to provide support services (e.g. fundraising, coordination, promotion) for community events.

Part IV: Closing Comments

As a result of the Planning Charette, the Facilitators made several general observations. These general observations are as follows.

The participants were supportive of growth in their community. This observation is somewhat unique in the age of “anti-everything”. Nevertheless, the participants were concerned that their community could lose its rural character and historical roots. The participants’ emphasis on the preservation of open space, rehabilitation and reinvigoration of the villages, historic preservation, and well planned industrial and commercial developments are a reflection of this concern.

The participants consistently referenced the importance of the “sense of community”. Community is a hard thing to define because it means different things to different people. The participants emphasized the importance of providing events and services that respond to the needs of all the residents from the youth to the senior citizens. Cultural and social events, quality recreation programs and facilities, focus on public safety and health, good schools, and constructive and open communication were all recognized as important contributors to Burrillville’s “sense of community”.

Managing the cost of living in Burrillville, especially for the senior citizens, was repeatedly mentioned. The impact of Federal and State mandates was highlighted as a key contributor to escalating costs of local government. Nevertheless, a responsive and accountable local government that prioritized open communication and collaboration in better understanding and responding to local issues was viewed as critically important to the community’s future.

The issue of public education was consistently mentioned. There appeared to be divergent opinions regarding the quality of Burrillville’s public schools. This is not unique. This observation supports the argument that one’s opinion of the school system is a direct reflection of one’s personal experience. Furthermore, it is difficult to address the goal of a quality school system when there isn’t a consensus as to what constitutes quality education. The public needs to become more involved in their public schools and

they must become more educated about the performance of their schools with quality, objective, and comparative data. The call for better communication and collaboration is as relevant to the school system as it is for Town Hall. The fact that there was no representation at the Planning Charette by members of the School Committee or the school administration was unfortunate.

APPENDIX I

PLANNING CHARETTE ATTENDEES

Louise R. Phaneuf	Town Clerk
Nancy Angell	Conservation Commission
Jacki Zahn	Town Council
Bill Andrews	Town Council
Wallace F. Lees	Town Council
Shirley M. Hodson	Burrillville Seniors
Patty Frye	DPNA
James H. Libby	Planning Board
Ray Levesque	Planning Board
Joe Raymond	Planning Department
Russell Couture	Board of Assessment Review
Nancy Binns	Town Council
Ray Cloutier	Zoning Board
Art Hurley	Budget Board
David Marcotte	Recreation Commission
James Langlois	Redevelopment Agency
Barbara Langlois	Historic District Commission
Mark Brizard	Budget Board
Jeffrey Presbrey	Planning Board
Cheryl Choquette	Redevelopment Agency
Peggy Dudley	Town Council
Edwin R. Pacheco	State Representative
Ray Church	State Representative
Michael C. Wood	Town Manager
Gabrielle Abbate	BOSAP
Charles Newell	Historic District Commission
Kathy Albuquerque	Historic District Commission
Bruce Ferreira	Planning Board
Tom Kravitz	Town Planner