

## **PRUDENCE ISLAND**

The Prudence Island element is arranged a bit differently than the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Prudence Island is different from the rest of Portsmouth in many respects. Nonetheless, much of what applies to the “main island” part of Portsmouth applies to Prudence as well. Those sections are not repeated, although they are referenced. This section contains what is planned differently from the rest, and where there are special implementation or unique needs.

NOTES: Readers of this section are particularly referred to maps #34 - 53.

### **I. GOAL**

To maintain the unique nature, natural resources, and character of Prudence Island, while providing a reasonable level of Town services. The Town of Portsmouth assumes that the State will not change ownership and whole-heartedly supports no development of Hope and Patience Island.

Prudence Island is a special place, a unique spot so close to a heavily urbanized area of the world, and yet so far away. In a world rushing to develop, Prudence Island provides a refuge to be protected.

### **II. DEFINITION**

Only Prudence Island is addressed herein. The State owns all of Patience and Hope Islands, and the others are too small and low-lying to develop anyway. It is assumed that all of those will be protected from any development.

### **III. THE NEED FOR PLANNING FOR PRUDENCE**

- A. The danger to Prudence Island lies in a gradual erosion of its unique character. Pressures to develop more residential areas, tourism and even industrial areas abound.
- B. The environment, location, access and other physical factors present major limits on growth and clearly point to preservation and strictly managed growth. Yet, as with the rest of this Plan, without clear direction, the worst, as well as the best, are possible.
- C. Understanding most other matters relates directly to understanding the special considerations associated with an Island that has no bridge connection to the mainland.

## **IV. OPEN SPACE**

### **A. OBJECTIVES**

Ensure that as much of Prudence Island remains open space as possible.

1. Open space is a part of the essential character of Prudence, part of its identity, part of what makes it different. This is in part due to Prudence's location and inaccessibility from the rest of Rhode Island.
2. Prudence people value their open space, value their isolation. For many, that is why they came here. The problem is that the natural beauty and isolation of the Island is its own worst enemy—the person who wants to live there also takes a piece of it. While we cannot stop that process from happening, we can manage it so that as much open space is preserved as possible.
3. The Island's unique status, environment, and cost to Portsmouth for providing services all lead to the conclusion that the maximum amount of open space should be preserved, as opposed to selected areas or corridors.

### **B. IMPLEMENTATION**

1. Much of the Open Space and Natural Resources elements apply particularly well to Prudence. The reader is urged to refer to those elements.
2. Outright Purchase of Development Rights.
  - a) The most permanent way of preserving land is to buy it, or to buy the development rights. Purchasing development rights means the property owner keeps the land, but sells his right to develop it to the Town or a land trust.
  - b) There are a number of competent and experienced people and organizations working on this. It should be Town policy to lend maximum assistance to these private efforts as requested.
  - c) Over the past two decades, Prudence has been fortunate enough to be included in the National Estuarine Reserve Research Sanctuary program (NERRS). Over 700 acres on the northern part of the Island plus some 201 acres between Homestead and Northeast Point are owned by the State as a research reserve under this program. (There are also over 300 acres under the same program that encompasses all of Patience and Hope Islands).
  - d) Some 480 acres are also owned by Preserve Rhode Island.
  - e) Prudence Conservancy, a land trust based on the Island, and Nature Conservancy, a national land trust, are working actively to secure further acreage.

3. State Park
  - a) 647 acres on the southern tip of Prudence belong to the State and is used for walking, nature study and hunting. This is the former Navy property. It has a fair amount of paving and a number of World War II vintage buildings in poor condition. It also has a huge pier.
  - b) There has been any number of proposals for this area:
    - (1) Part of the Bay Island Park System, as it is currently, with more recreational facilities.
    - (2) Added to the NERRS program.
    - (3) An industrial park.
    - (4) A state prison complex.
  - c) Of these, only the park idea and estuarine reserve program are valid for Prudence. The other intensive uses would destroy the Island's character in short order. The State is urged to preserve this acreage permanently for recreation and as a preservation area. (Deed restrictions imposed when the Federal Government transferred the property to the State stipulate public recreation use only.)
4. The farm assessment programs are not applicable as there are no active farms.
5. The requirement of each new subdivision, reserving by deed restriction, a major percentage of the parcel for open space is quite applicable here.

## **V. RECREATION**

### **A. OBJECTIVES**

1. Create a regular cooperative relationship between the Town Government and volunteer organizations on Prudence for the provision of recreational opportunities for Island residents.
  - a) Being an Island with no bridge to the mainland, people cannot regularly go elsewhere for their recreational opportunities.
  - b) The self-reliant people of Prudence can cooperate with the Town Government to create and maintain a reasonable level of recreational opportunities.
2. Repair, create and maintain enough physical recreational facilities for the summer and winter populations.
  - a) Dedicated recreation facilities on Prudence are few and old. There are not enough permanent residents of the Island to warrant major year 'round facilities. But the summer population does have a significant need for recreation.

- b) Fortunately, most of the developed portion of Prudence is in a compact area on the east coast. So, it is possible to provide satisfactory recreational facilities on one large or a few small parcels near the developed area.

## B. IMPLEMENTATION

1. Five-Year Recreational Facilities, Improvement and Maintenance Program.
  - a) Prioritize and fund the physical improvements listed below.
  - b) Consider entering into an arrangement whereby the Town will construct or renovate facilities, and established citizen organizations on Prudence will maintain them.
    - (1) The residents do not have the lump sums of funds to pay for major physical improvements. The Town cannot afford to dedicate staff to regularly go to Prudence to do maintenance and regular repairs.
    - (2) Organizations such as the Prudence Improvement Association can be responsible for maintenance and regular repairs.
2. Playground and Tot-lot
  - a) Select and acquire a site.
3. Tennis Courts
4. Indoor Recreation
  - a) Indoor recreational opportunities are limited on an Island, particularly in inclement weather.
  - b) An indoor recreation program can be created for arts and crafts, ping-pong, etc.
  - c) The Prudence Improvement Association's building may be an ideal spot for both programs and storage, if an arrangement can be made, and if the Town can help cover insurance costs.
5. Hunting
  - a) Deer hunting is a seasonal event on Prudence that causes severe problems for permanent residents. Bow hunting season is November 1 to January 31. It is an effective wildlife management tool on an Island where excess animal population cannot migrate, so it should be continued. As many as 250 hunters in one day (usually opening day weekend) come to Prudence to hunt.
  - b) The State should allow parking for hunters on State-owned land, as that is where the State is allowing them to hunt. It makes little sense for the State to tell hunters where they may hunt but not let them get there.

- c) The State Division of Fish and Wildlife should develop and distribute maps with all hunting permits that show parking areas and legal hunting areas. (Such maps are available, but if not distributed are useless.)
- d) DEM should establish a logical and consistent ratio of hunters to conservation officers for effective oversight and limit the number of hunters allowed on Prudence to that ratio.

## **VI. NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **A. OBJECTIVES**

1. Maintain As Much of Prudence In Its Natural State As Possible.
  - a) This is a major objective for Prudence for much more than aesthetic reasons. Prudence is an Island with a delicate ecosystem, so much so, that a major section of it has been designated a national estuary. (The National Estuarine Research Reserve is one of only a dozen nationwide.)
  - b) A significant wetland area runs almost the length of the portion of the Island that is owned and protected by Preserve Rhode Island.
  - c) Disturbance of this ecosystem will do much more than harm the plant and wildlife, as detailed below.
  - d) Because water seeks its own level and has to go somewhere, serious disturbance of the ecosystem will cause the wetlands to spread into some of the populated areas, ruining the septic systems.
2. Protect Groundwater and Surface Water Resources
  - a) This is a paramount concern. Prudence cannot buy its water from another Town and it is too small to develop other water sources. It must use what it has.
  - b) Most of Prudence depends on a few wells and springs for drinking water. There are six community wells (wells that serve a number of households) on Prudence Island. These are privately owned, but serve a public purpose.  
  
The wetlands feed these water sources, so pollution of the wetlands will mean pollution of the drinking water.
  - c) The public water system is much too small to be able to afford a modern treatment facility.
  - d) See the Wellhead Protection Plan Program below.
3. Improve the Public Water Supply and Distribution Capability and Facilities
  - a) The public water supply for Prudence is owned and operated by the Prudence Island Utility Corporation and regulated by the State Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Unlike the Portsmouth Water and Fire

District, this is a private corporation that is not elected by the public. Therefore, recommendations herein cannot be adopted as public policy. Nonetheless, provision of enough volume and quality of water is a public concern. (Note: The terms “public water supply” or “public wells” as used in this section refer to the distribution of water to a number of households, not to the ownership of the water supply system).

(1) There are today 300+ houses served by the water system, about 60 year-round, with a commitment to 30-50 more.

b) Therefore, an objective of this plan is for the Town to do what it can to assist the Prudence Island Utility Corporation by planning with them so the system will not be overtaxed.

(1) Reference is made here to the 1989 findings of the Rhode Island Department of Health (DOH) on the condition of this water system.

## B. IMPLEMENTATION

1. Adopt the Resource Protection Overlay District regulations recommended in the Natural Resources Element.

a) The recommendations in that element are particularly applicable to Prudence due to the Islands ecosystem and water supply.

b) A complete study of the water supply was completed in 1993 by an expert from the University of Rhode Island (URI).

2. Adopt Mapped Watershed and Wellhead Protection Areas as Watershed Protection Overlay Districts and implement regulations described in the Water Quality element.

a) There is more than one watershed feeding the public water supply. Luckily, the major one is not in a developed area, and is mainly in conservation ownership.

(1) These watersheds were delineated in an independent study completed in July 1991, commissioned by the utility company.<sup>1</sup> See maps #39 - 41.

b) Development uphill from public supply wells is causing immediate concern. Regulations are not today in place to control this case.

c) If public wells downhill of development are found to be important sources of public water, mandatory septic pumpout will be necessary in their watersheds.

3. DEM has a model Wellhead Protection Program designed to prevent contaminants from entering groundwater resources supplying the five public

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<sup>1</sup> “Delineation of Wellhead Protection Areas for Prudence Island”, Daniel W. Urish, Ground Water Hydrologist, URI, January 1992 Revision.

wells owned by the Prudence Island utilities Corporation. This program is designed to be interactive between the State and local governments. The Town will, and the PIUC is urged to, work with DEM on implementing the program.

- a) The principal elements of the Rhode Island WHP Program are as follows:
  - (1) Delineation of the Wellhead Protection Area, which has been done for the Prudence Island Utility Company by Prof. Daniel Urish in 1992. Though it has reviewed the document, RIDEM has not taken any formal action in approving the delineations.
  - (2) There are two potential sources of groundwater contamination within the WHPA: an underground fuel storage tank upgradient of the DeWitt Well (PIUC #3) and an abandoned auto dump site upgradient of the Goulet Well (PIUC #4). These threats need to be removed.
  - (3) It is unlikely that there will be any new threats to the WHPA. The entire Island is zoned Residential or Open Space.
  - (4) The Wellhead Protection Program will concentrate on education and outreach, so that residents understand the consequences of leaking underground storage tanks and haphazard disposal of hazardous waste and oil to their own health.
- b) The Watershed Protection District section of the zoning ordinance should be applied to the Prudence Wellhead Protection Area.

#### 4. Enforcement

- a) Enforcement of Town as well as State regulations on Prudence is problematic due to geographic separation.
- b) Assignment of staff to inspect and enforce on Prudence cannot be satisfactorily done from the mainland by either the State or the Town.
- c) Nonetheless, the Town does have staff permanently and seasonally assigned to Prudence. Selected of these personnel (more than one) are to be educated in the basics of State and local environmental regulations and assigned, as part of their regular duties, to tour the Island and report on activities that may be in violation.
  - (1) They should:
    - (i) Be educated on what to look for.
    - (ii) Know the geographic areas of concern.
    - (iii) Know whom to contact at State and local levels for more detailed inspection and enforcement.
  - (2) Each staff person need not be given enforcement powers. Just knowing what to look for, being assigned to look for it and report should be enough.

- (3) Should enforcement powers be found necessary, a part-time position should be created for a permanent Prudence resident, if possible, to serve as Building Inspector/Environmental Inspector.
  - (i) Due to the difficult access to the Island, perhaps the Department of Environmental Management or other State agency could financially support such a position.
- d) Follow Through on Enforcement
  - (1) Too often DEM issues a notice of violation but fails to follow through on the notice by taking the violator to court.
  - (2) The Town should consider instituting a record-keeping system in which it will issue reminders to DEM when violations persist and enforcement has lagged.
- 5. Preserve Rhode Island Property
- 6. The property in the center of the Island that is owned by the Preserve Rhode Island composes most of the main well's watershed.
  - a) Facilities do not exist on Prudence to fight a forest fire. A major fire could destroy much of the watershed vegetation, and hence the watershed itself.
  - b) As Prudence is mainly undeveloped, there are few fire breaks. For instance, for the aforementioned Preserve Rhode Island property the only firebreak is Broadway.
  - c) A program to cut firebreaks around watershed areas should be put in place.
  - d) Consult with DEM natural Heritage Program.
- 7. Underground Storage Tank Regulation.
  - a) Regulate underground storage tanks as detailed in the Soil and Air Element, section V. D. Local Underground Storage Tank (UST) Regulations.

## **VII. WATERFRONT AND COASTAL**

### **A. OBJECTIVES**

The objectives and implementation items in the Waterfront and Coastal Element apply even more so to the pristine coastline of Prudence.

### **B. IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **1. Pollution Sources.**

- a) Eliminate discharge of human waste at Potter Cove through the closed-head mooring program, in conjunction with a Special Area Management Plan.
- b) Eliminate overnight mooring at Coggeshall Cove and Sheep Pen Cove.
- c) Establish an Island based test monitoring system of coastal waters and shores.
  - (1) Perhaps through the research facility at the national estuary.
- d) Establish Island based enforcement of the above.

#### **2. Road Drainage and Erosion.**

- a) The only major recommendation in addition to the main element is to install and regularly maintain proper storm drainage along Narragansett Avenue at its intersection with all streets going uphill.
  - (1) Today storm drainage is accommodated by cutting into the bank on the bay side of Narragansett Avenue and letting the water flow to the Bay. Not only does this pollute the Bay, it is causing severe erosion that, in some places, could threaten the structural integrity of the road.
  - (2) Make this part of the Capital Improvement Program.

## **VIII. FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

### **A. OBJECTIVES**

1. Provide a reasonable level of physical facilities and services to Prudence Island commensurate with its seasonal populations and inherent limitations of serving a remote island.
2. Prudence Island residents know that they cannot expect the full level of services provided on the "Main Island". Nonetheless, certain items need to be addressed.

## B. IMPLEMENTATION

### 1. Official Town Roads

- a) The only two roads on Prudence Island that Portsmouth has officially recognized as part of its highway system are Broadway and Narragansett Avenue.
- b) The Town needs to identify and map which, if any, roads on Prudence it wishes to accept and permanently take responsibility for. This would determine:
  - (1) What the Town's maintenance and legal responsibilities are.
  - (2) Determine where new houses and subdivisions are allowed.
  - (3) Determine future growth limits and locations.
- c) Following this effort it will be necessary to evaluate road construction and maintenance standards both for Town roads and new subdivision roads, to develop appropriate standards.
  - (1) Full width paved roads may not be necessary, but any road construction, public or private, must be done to reduce future maintenance and reconstruction needs.
  - (2) Any such standard should be designed to retain the special character of the Island.
  - (3) Experiment with different surfaces on selected road sections to determine the optimum surface.
    - (i) The key objectives are dust control and rut/drainage/erosion control.
    - (ii) Due to the fact that there is very little traffic 8 months a year, it may not be necessary to have asphalt pavement.
- d) Consider the adoption of a mapped street ordinance.

### 2. Solid Waste Disposal And Recycling

- a) The Town has done an excellent job of converting from a landfill to a Transfer Station.
- b) A recycling depot should be located within the Transfer Station.
- c) A compost site should be established at or near the Transfer Station. The Town-owned chipper could be brought there regularly and the residents allowed to use the product for mulch.

### 3. Waste Oil Collection Facility

- a) Due to the cost of transporting vehicles to the mainland for an oil change, plus the fact that many cars on Prudence are unregistered, there is a much

greater likelihood of waste oil from cars being just dumped somewhere than on the mainland.

b) A Waste Oil Collection Facility at the Transfer Station is necessary.

#### 4. Education

a) Address problems associated with educating students grades K-4.

(1) Make a commitment to maintain and operate school facilities on Prudence.

(2) Annually survey the teacher to determine needs, problems and ideas specific to teaching in a one-room schoolhouse.

(3) Survey parents about their concerns on same.

(4) Investigate the need for and feasibility of hiring a teacher's aid.

(5) Include the Prudence Island community as a school resource.

(i) A tiny community like this presents a unique opportunity for volunteer community involvement.

(ii) Form a Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

(6) Plan to ensure parents' accessibility to their children because of illness, injury or emergency.

b) Address problems associated with educating students on the main island.

(1) Transportation to the mainland taking into consideration safety and time.

(2) Inclusion in extra-curricular activities.

(3) Cost.

#### 5. Fire

a) The Prudence Island Volunteer Fire Department functions very well.

b) The present vehicles are judged to be generally adequate for current needs.

(1) The 1962 tanker truck should eventually be replaced with a 2000-gallon truck.

(2) A new off-road brush truck is needed to enable the Fire Department to effectively fight brush and forest fires, as well as a small brush truck.

c) If population is allowed to increase, a full-time staff person may be necessary.

d) The current funding of \$5,000 per year may be inadequate for maintenance and operation. Evaluate the financial and capital improvement needs of the Prudence Island Volunteer Fire Department. (The volunteers have funded in the past the fire hall, a \$20,000 addition, and an ambulance with no Town money.)

e) As fire hydrants are not possible due to lack of adequate pressure and the fact that the water lines cover so little of the Island, new water storage locations are needed.

(1) The State is urged to allow the Fire Department's use of the underground reservoir and pumping station on the State's land in South Park.

6. Police

a) The single public safety officer is adequate during the off-season, but not during the summer season.

b) Addition of part-time help is recommended by doubling up officers on weekends and holidays May 15 through Labor Day plus the entire hunting season. As was done 20 years ago, two officers can alternate time coverage, with the off-duty officer on call.

c) Off-season the Public Safety Officer may be able to assume some the non-police enforcement duties outlined above,

7. Repair And Maintenance of Sandy Point Dock

a) This Town-owned dock is used primarily for the Prudence Island Volunteer Fire Department for emergencies. Located almost directly across the water from the main dock at Bend Boat Basin, and away from the ferry landing, this is a key emergency facility.

b) It is gradually deteriorating and does not fare well in major storms. Preventive maintenance and repair is to be scheduled.

8. Water Supply and Distribution

a) The public water supply is actually the privately owned Prudence Island Utility Company. It supplies most of the eastern portion of the Island) has been at or near capacity for many years. It currently has a waiting list for new connections, but it is highly unlikely that any new connections can be accommodated. There are no current plans to expand the system. The PIUC has adopted a policy of no further connections.

b) There are no surface water sources for water supply on Prudence Island. All supply is from groundwater, which, in places near one of the water supply pumps, rises to the surface as spring water

c) Preliminary indications of the water supply study are that the existing supply drawn from the main watershed is near capacity.

d) The secondary wells in developed or developing areas may become more important.

(1) The decision as to whether such wells will be used to increase supply is very important to the land use regulations and environmental regulations to be imposed.

(2) Those decisions must be made in concert with the Town.

- e) Liaison should be established between the Prudence Island Utility Corporation and the Portsmouth Water and Fire District, which have the charter to support the Town on water issues.

## **IX. TRANSPORTATION**

### **A. PRUDENCE ISLAND FERRY**

1. The only access other than by boat or small private plane (there is one unpaved private airstrip) is via the Prudence Ferry Inc. Because this lifeline is located in Bristol, it will take an unusual effort to provide for the transportation needs of Prudence.
2. Bristol, in its Comprehensive Plan, has confirmed the importance of water related business and industry in this area, and so does not plan to try to eliminate the ferry.
3. Ferry Parking
  - a) In spring of 1991, the main lot used by weekend passengers, located across the street from the Prudence/Hog Ferry in Bristol became unavailable for daily parking. It is now available for monthly lease only. The problem in the summer has become severe, particularly for the many property owners on Prudence that stay there mainly on the weekends.
  - b) While there are municipal and private lots 1-1/2 and 3 blocks away now, changing conditions in Bristol, including an active effort by Bristol to improve the business climate on its waterfront, make the case unstable.
  - c) Portsmouth will work actively with Bristol to help resolve this problem.

### **B. FERRY FROM PORTSMOUTH MAIN ISLAND AND OTHER LOCATIONS**

- a) Investigate the long-term feasibility of providing direct ferry service from Aquidneck Island to Prudence, particularly via the Town's planned boat launch, if feasible.
  - (1) A ferry service directly from Aquidneck Island would solve many of the current problems that can be attributed to lack of direct control over the situation in Bristol.
- b) Work with RIDOT on its Water Transportation Study.

### **C. ROADS**

1. The major road related problem is the above-mentioned uncertainty as to what the Town is responsible for.

2. The minimal width of roads on Prudence is not a problem as long as population is held to approximately its current levels.

## **X. LAND USE**

### **A. OBJECTIVE**

#### **SUSTAINABLE, SERVICEABLE GROWTH**

1. While this may generically be an objective for any community, it is much more so for a small island with limited facilities.
  - a) The roads are narrow and are not built to construction standards that can accommodate much traffic.
  - b) The public water supply can only accommodate a few more houses.
    - (1) Private wells may appear to be the answer. Much of the Island is in the public supply watershed or in environmental overlays, so not much growth could occur anyway.
  - c) The Town is already hard-pressed to provide enough public services due to the high expense of access to the Island.
    - (1) This is particularly true both for heavy Public Works vehicles and main island based staff.

### **B. REGULATORY**

#### **1. Rezoning**

- a) In view of the severely limited public water supply and water company infrastructure, make the following changes:
  - (1) Zone the area now serviced by the Prudence Island Water Company as R-20 (20,000 square feet).
  - (2) Zone the entire remainder of the Island a “Conservation Zone” in which there is severely limited development and the majority of land must be set aside as permanent open space.
    - (i) Existing lots remain grandfathered with a recommendation that a merger clause be considered. The Town reserves the right to adopt a merger clause.
    - (ii) Conservation zone land must be reassessed to reflect new lowered value.
    - (iii) At a bare minimum, all State and non-profit owned land should be zoned conservation soon.

2. Commercial Zone
  - a) If commercial zoning were to be considered it should be limited to minimal requirements to service current property owners.
3. Adherence To Current Subdivision Regulations
  - a) Subdivision regulations must be strenuously enforced. Allowing them to be ignored due to the difficulties of enforcement will lead to serious problems.
4. Merging Of Substandard Size Lots
  - a) There are hundreds of very small vacant lots on Prudence Island platted decades ago. Working with the property owners, come up with a method of combining these lots in order to reduce the potential impact on the Island. (See also the Land Use Element.)
5. Conversion Of Summer Houses To Permanent To Require Septic System Evaluation
  - a) Prudence Island has hundreds of summer houses that could potentially be converted to year 'round. An obvious threat to the environment, as well as to the people occupying such houses, is that the septic systems that work well for three months a year in the dry season, may be inadequate for year 'round use.
  - b) Requiring full Individual Septic Disposal System (ISDS) evaluation by DEM before a conversion building permit is issued will help ameliorate the problem.
    - (1) Adopt a definition of "Conversion" which would trigger this requirement (such as renovating at a cost of over 50% of building value, or enlarging the house by over a certain percentage).