



PLANNING CHALLENGE GRANT INITIATIVE

2006 PROJECT SUMMARY

ATLANTIC BEACH DISTRICT MASTER PLAN

Project Sponsor: Town of Middletown, Middletown Planning Board

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Project Cost: \$62,500 **Challenge Grant Amount:** \$50,000

Completed: December 2007 **Products:** Study Report available at: www.planning.ri.gov/misc/pcgrants/2006/midd.pdf

Background

This Planning Challenge Grant project was undertaken to study the Atlantic Beach District which is a commercial area located in the southwest corner of Middletown. It features a mix of uses including hotels, restaurants, a Town park, and small-scale retail establishments. Located next to Middletown's Atlantic Beach and Newport's Easton Beach, the District is both a tourist destination and a neighborhood commercial center. Although the District's location and mix of uses would seem to make it an ideal walkable district, this is not currently the case. An uninviting streetscape, inadequate pedestrian facilities, and highly congested intersections all discourage pedestrian activity.

The purpose of this Grant was the development of a master plan incorporating transportation improvements for automobiles, pedestrians, and bicycles; streetscape enhancement; parking management strategies; and tools for encouraging land uses that support the vision of a walkable Beach District. This was seen as an essential first step in creating a vibrant neighborhood at Atlantic Beach.

Objectives and Process

Specific project objectives included:

- Reducing congestion at the intersection of Aquidneck Avenue and Purgatory Road by improving traffic flow and increasing non-vehicular mode share;
- Promoting pedestrian and bicycle activity by increasing safety and providing improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities;
- Developing a parking management strategy that provides adequate parking for visitors while reducing illegal parking in residential areas and eliminating commercial parking on residential property;
- Establishing a mix of uses characterized by high quality site and building design that supports tourism and meets the daily needs of neighborhood residents; and
- Creating a streetscape that encourages pedestrian activity by providing landscaping, street furniture such as benches and lighting, and other aesthetic improvements.

During the public workshops and investigative phase of the project, it was found that people believed that the area had the basis to be a thriving commercial district, and that the businesses and residences wanted to see more attention paid to improving circulation for both pedestrians and traffic — all while improving aesthetics and landscaping. Equally important, people wanted to maintain the views of Easton Pond and the beaches and clearly define links and access to them. These are the natural features that give this area a sense of place and should be utilized as a steppingstone in the development of conceptual designs.

Major Findings and Recommendations

The key recommendations of the Atlantic Beach District Master Plan are:

Reconstruction of Aquidneck Avenue

- Wider sidewalks that are ADA compliant
- Street furniture (benches, plantings, banners, kiosk)

Gateways at Dunlap-Wheeler Park and Valley Road

Traffic Improvements

- Round-about at Valley Road
- Bump-out at Purgatory Road
- One-way on Crescent Street (T-intersection)
- Newport Avenue reconfiguration (T-intersection)
- On-street parking

Parks

- New park at Newport Avenue
- Dunlap-Wheeler Park
 - Pedestrian bridge
 - Reconfiguration of pedestrian circulation
 - Reconfiguration of parking lot

Non-structural Recommendations

- Establish a business improvement district
- Form a neighborhood business association



Next Steps

The Atlantic Beach District Master Plan has an overall vision for the area to become a more pedestrian-oriented, attractive, and vibrant commercial village that will serve the influx of seasonal visitors, the surrounding residential neighborhoods and the Town. The Plan will be used as a leveraging tool by the Middletown Planning Board to seek funding to implement recommended improvements within the public right-of-way and to guide private investment. The Plan's implementation has a projected twenty-year timeframe and estimated construction costs of nearly \$3.5 million.

Funding for the Challenge Grant Initiative is provided by the Federal Highway Administration.

