



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A proud city with a rich heritage, Portsmouth in 2002 celebrated the 250th anniversary of its founding as a seaport in the historic Tidewater region of Virginia. While the City has experienced transition and change in recent decades, its citizens can take pride in their past, appreciate progress made in the present, and look forward to the future with a renewed sense of confidence and optimism. A product of extensive time and effort invested by Portsmouth citizens, community leaders, staff, and consultants, the **Destination 2025** Comprehensive Plan sets a clear direction for the City to follow as it charts a course to a positive future. The Plan articulates a **Vision** of the City in the year 2025 based on the expressed values and aspirations of Portsmouth's citizens. It provides the means to realize the Vision through clear and consistent **goals and policies** and through specific **action strategies** that the City will take over time to achieve the desired future.



Elizabeth River

The Comprehensive Plan was developed through a two-year planning process that included extensive citizen involvement. Plan development was guided by the Citizens 2025 Committee, which was comprised of 25 members selected through an open application process to represent all areas of Portsmouth. Public input was solicited through citizen surveys at the beginning of the process; interviews with stakeholders representing civic, neighborhood, and business interests; community meetings at key points in the process; and general correspondence. This input is reflected in the importance that the Plan places on improving the quality of the City's education system, consistently identified by Portsmouth residents and members of the Citizens 2025 Committee as the highest priority for the City's future.

Plan Organization

The Destination 2025 Comprehensive Plan is comprised of the following sections:

Chapter 1.0 (Introduction) describes the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan, provides an overview of the planning process, and identifies three primary themes that form the basic underpinnings of the Plan.

Chapter 2.0 (Vision Statement) establishes a positive Vision of Portsmouth's future based upon the direct input of citizens during the planning process. This Vision Statement establishes the mandate and direction (*"what we intend to be"*) for the policies and action strategies contained in the remainder of the Comprehensive Plan (*"what we must do to achieve the Vision"*).

Chapters 3.0 to 10.0 (Plan Elements) define goals, policies, and action strategies for the following subject areas:

- Education
- Land Use
- Economic Development
- Housing and Neighborhoods
- Community Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Parks, Open Space, and Environment
- Community Appearance

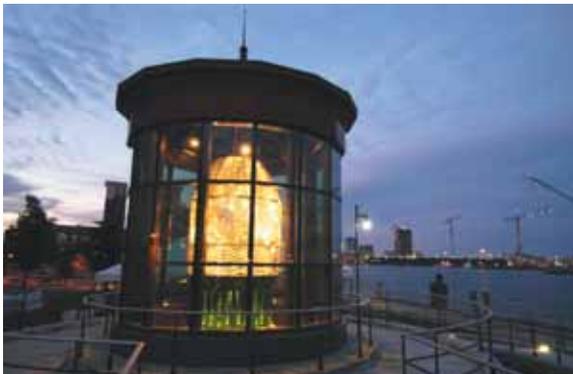
Chapter 11.0 (FOCUS on Implementation) describes in detail how the City will implement the Comprehensive Plan.

Vision Statement

The Vision of Portsmouth in 2025 directly reflects the values, aspirations and priorities expressed by citizens during the planning process. In this Vision, Portsmouth is a **Community of Choice**

for the 21st century – a city that is renowned for its **learning environment** (outstanding public schools, educational institutions, and lifelong learning opportunities), **quality neighborhoods, healthy economy**, and for its unique character and **sense of place**. The City and its citizens will achieve this Vision of a city that people choose based on its outstanding quality of life by focusing their efforts in several key areas:

Fresnel Lens





- **Investing in People:** Building an outstanding education system; creating and expanding economic development opportunities; and promoting social diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.
- **Investing in Places:** Enhancing neighborhood quality, safety, and livability; enhancing civic infrastructure (community facilities, parks, roadway corridors, etc.); and setting new standards for the quality of private development.
- **Exercising Leadership:** Achieving fiscal strength and leading initiatives to address regional issues.

Plan Elements

The eight plan elements contain policies and action strategies which, implemented over time, will move Portsmouth toward the future desired by citizens as articulated in the Vision Statement. While presented in separate elements, these policies and action strategies are interrelated and are designed to work together to support realization of the Vision.

The goal of the **Education Element** is to transform what is generally acknowledged as a present weakness of Portsmouth into a future strength by establishing the City as a “Center for Knowledge.” Policies and action strategies address the Portsmouth City Public Schools, institutions of higher education, workforce development, connections between schools and neighborhoods, and the City’s cultural life (libraries, the arts, museums, etc.), all of which are seen as components of a quality, lifelong education system.

The **Land Use Element** addresses the pattern of and relationships between residential, commercial, industrial, public, and other uses in the City. It seeks to achieve several major objectives, including maintaining and strengthening viable land uses; targeting obsolescent uses for reinvestment or redevelopment; minimizing conflicts between incompatible uses; and “raising the bar” on the quality of new development. In addition, the land use policies promote mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly land use patterns (Activity Centers); identify the need to convert currently tax-exempt lands to productive (tax-paying) uses where feasible; and address the connections of land use to transportation and education, respectively.



Court Street
Baptist
Church/
Monument

The goal of the **Economic Development Element** is to establish a healthy, diversified economy with a strong tax base and employment opportunities for all Portsmouth residents. A major focus is on coordinating city programs and initiatives to promote economic vitality in a way that supports broader Comprehensive Plan goals and policies (education, land use, etc.). Two key action strategies are to:

- Ensure that every piece of available land is evaluated and targeted for its highest and best use for the City and its residents
- Establish clear criteria for decision-making on the specific economic development initiatives and programs to be pursued by the City

Inherent to both of these strategies is the idea that economic development should be measured not only by fiscal return, but also by factors related to quality of life for citizens. This reflects the premise that by enhancing quality of life, we improve our ability to attract new residents, employers, and investment. Conversely, we recognize that any influence that compromises our quality of life may also compromise our economy.

The Economic Development Element integrates policies from the City’s Economic Development Strategic Plan that address key economic activities (business development, market development, product development, and workforce development); key business sectors (retail, residential, and office/industrial); and key geographic areas of the City. It also addresses the need to market Portsmouth’s advantages to prospective visitors, residents, and businesses.

The **Housing and Neighborhoods Element** covers two related topics. The housing policies are designed to attract and serve a more diverse population with housing stock for middle and upper income residents; expand opportunities for affordable ownership housing; and provide for the housing needs of low-income residents and persons with special needs. The

City Hall/
Courthouse



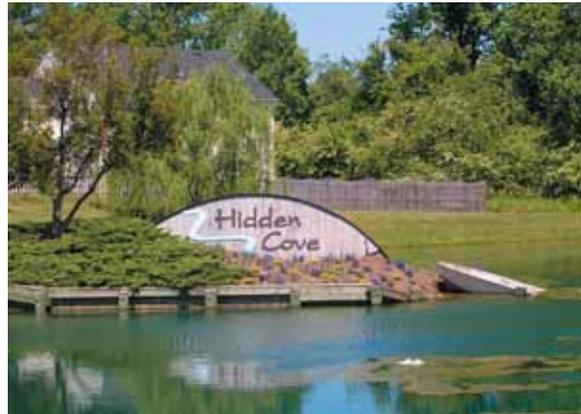
neighborhood policies are tailored towards three types of neighborhoods:

- **Stable neighborhoods** that should be maintained and strengthened
- **Transitional neighborhoods** that require more active intervention to reverse or prevent decline
- **Neighborhoods in need of redevelopment**, characterized by conditions of blight or obsolescence or abandonment

The **Community Facilities, Services, and Infrastructure Element** addresses public facilities and services (police, fire, libraries, human services, and municipal facilities) and infrastructure systems (water, sanitary sewer and stormwater drainage) provided by the City of Portsmouth. Policies and action strategies call for the allocation of limited fiscal resources based upon objective standards for each type of facility or service. This element also emphasizes the need to accelerate the replacement of aging infrastructure systems, target investments to support neighborhood revitalization and economic development activities, and carefully locate community facilities to support desired land use patterns.



The goal of the **Transportation Element** is a multi-modal transportation network consisting of roadways, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities that support quality of life and economic vitality. Because Portsmouth is a largely developed city and funding for major highway improvements will be limited, the growing problem of congestion will be addressed by improving the operational efficiency of the existing road network through such means as signal timing, improved intersection configurations, and access management along highway corridors. Nevertheless, implementation of several regional roadway improvement projects – a second tube of the Midtown Tunnel, Third Crossing, and Martin Luther King Extension – will be critically important to maintaining mobility for the City’s residents as well as Portsmouth’s viability as an employment center. Another important issue is the need to minimize industrial truck and rail traffic on local streets and neighborhoods, particularly as major new waterfront facilities are developed, by coordinating with the Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Port Authority, and others. Other transportation policies address the development of more complete pedestrian and bicycle networks, enhanced transit service in partnership with Hampton Roads Transit (including the potential for a future light rail link to Norfolk), parking, the need to coordinate transportation and land use, and improved communication of transportation information.



The **Parks, Open Space, and Environment Element** addresses Portsmouth’s environment – water quality, air quality, and natural scenic resources – along with related topics of solid waste management and parks, recreation, and open space. It incorporates by reference the Environmental Component of the Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the City in 1996 in accordance with Virginia’s Chesapeake Bay Preservation Program. Establishing a quality parks, open space, and greenways system is a central recommendation, starting with development of a comprehensive parks and recreation plan that identifies strategies to meet citizens’ needs for parks and recreational facilities. Goals, objectives, and strategies from the Environmental Component related to water quality, air quality, solid waste, and the natural environment are integrated into the element, with several significant additions (e.g., a “Greening Portsmouth” initiative to plant trees and other vegetation throughout the City). In addition, a policy is included regarding the city’s ongoing efforts to enforce and improve its floodplain management program.



The **Community Appearance Element** focuses on the visual attractiveness of Portsmouth. Included are recommendations for citywide beautification that build on the current initiatives and activities of the City’s Neighborhood Quality Action Plan and the Clean Community Commission. Key action strategies include the “Greening Portsmouth” initiative and aggressive code enforcement targeted toward properties whose unkempt appearance degrades the quality of neighborhoods and commercial areas (identified as a priority by citizens). Another topic

OpSail at night



covered by the Community Appearance Element is the visual character of gateway corridors (e.g., exits from I-264) and major roadway corridors through Portsmouth, which play a major role in establishing “first impressions” of the City’s visual image and identity. A variety of strategies to improve the appearance of key entrances and corridors are identified, such as physical improvements (attractive signage, landscaping, etc.), removal of “visual clutter,” and measures to promote the redevelopment of obsolescent, unattractive land uses.

Implementation

Plans are turned into reality by concerted, consistent attention to implementation. The final chapter of the Destination 2025 Comprehensive Plan lays out in detail how the Plan is to be used to make ongoing progress toward achieving the Vision Statement. It contains:

- Principles for **Comprehensive Plan consistency**, requiring that the Plan be used as a guide and reference for zoning and development standards, re-zoning approvals, and other decision-making regarding future development
- A protocol for **adopting, amending, monitoring, and periodically updating** the Plan
- A framework for **Fulfilling Our Comprehensive Urban Strategy (FOCUS)** by targeting **FOCUS Areas** (specific corridors, neighborhoods, or other special areas within the City) in need of attention to achieve the goals, policies, and action strategies of the Comprehensive Plan
- Policies and action strategies to enhance and re-shape **Governance** of the City to support effective plan implementation
- An **Action Plan** as outlined in an Action Initiatives Table that identifies short-term, mid-term, and ongoing activities necessary to implement the Comprehensive Plan

Given the breadth of the policies and action strategies contained in the plan elements and the extent of the FOCUS Areas, the need to target resources to achieve the best return on investment is a major theme of the Implementation Element. The element identifies criteria to be used to identify and prioritize FOCUS Areas for action by the City.