



## **9.0 PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND ENVIRONMENT**

### **9.1 Overview**

***Goal: A quality system of parks, open space, greenways, and protected natural resources.***

Portsmouth's natural environment is defined by its location on the Elizabeth River, James River, and Chesapeake Bay, one of the world's great estuarine ecosystems. Portsmouth's approximately 83 miles of shoreline support port facilities and other water-dependent industries, a mainstay of the local economy, as well as waterfront residential properties that are among the City's most desirable homes. Places where the public has access to the water, such as City Park and High Street Landing, function as community gathering and activity centers. In general, waterfront resources are central to the City's history, character, identity, and quality of life.



This element of the Comprehensive Plan deals with Portsmouth's environment – water quality, air quality, and natural resources – and the related topics of solid waste management and parks, recreation, and open space. It incorporates by reference the Environmental Component of the Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1996 as a separate document by City Council in accordance with Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Program. The following overview text first addresses parks,

open space, and greenways, followed by a discussion of policies and strategies related to the major topics covered by the Environmental Component: water, air, solid waste, and the natural environment.

#### **Parks, Open Space, and Greenways**

Shown on Map 11, Portsmouth's existing public parks and open spaces include two larger community parks and a number of smaller neighborhood and "mini" parks (typically 5-10 acres and 1-2 acres in size, respectively). The two larger parks are City Park (68 acres located



on the south shore of the Western Branch of the Elizabeth River) and Churchland Park (37 acres located on River Shore Road in Churchland). Recreational facilities in City Park include playgrounds, picnic areas, tennis courts, a multi-purpose community building, amphitheater, boat ramp, a garden, a 9-hole golf course, and the “Pokey Smokey” train. Churchland Park supports several recreation fields, tennis courts, and trails. In addition, the park is adjacent to two schools with

outdoor recreation facilities. The approximately 30 neighborhood and mini parks are scattered throughout the City south of the Elizabeth River Western Branch, with only one located north of the river in Churchland.

Other city recreation and open space properties include the Hoffer Creek Wildlife Preserve in Churchland, the Bide-A-Wee golf course near Victory Crossing, and eight recreation centers. Bide-A-Wee is an 18-hole course that underwent extensive renovation in 1999, including a new clubhouse and pavilion, and is recognized as an outstanding municipal golf facility. The Hoffer Creek Wildlife Preserve is a 142-acre sanctuary with a variety of habitats located at the mouth of the James River and Chesapeake Bay. The City’s Capital Improvement Program (CIP) includes construction of a nature center to house nature programs and activities at this preserve. All eight recreation centers are located south of the Elizabeth River Western Branch and are concentrated in the western part of the City. One of the centers is a Senior Center that offers programs and events for older adults. The Downtown and Churchland are not served by public recreation centers, although private YMCA facilities are located in both areas.

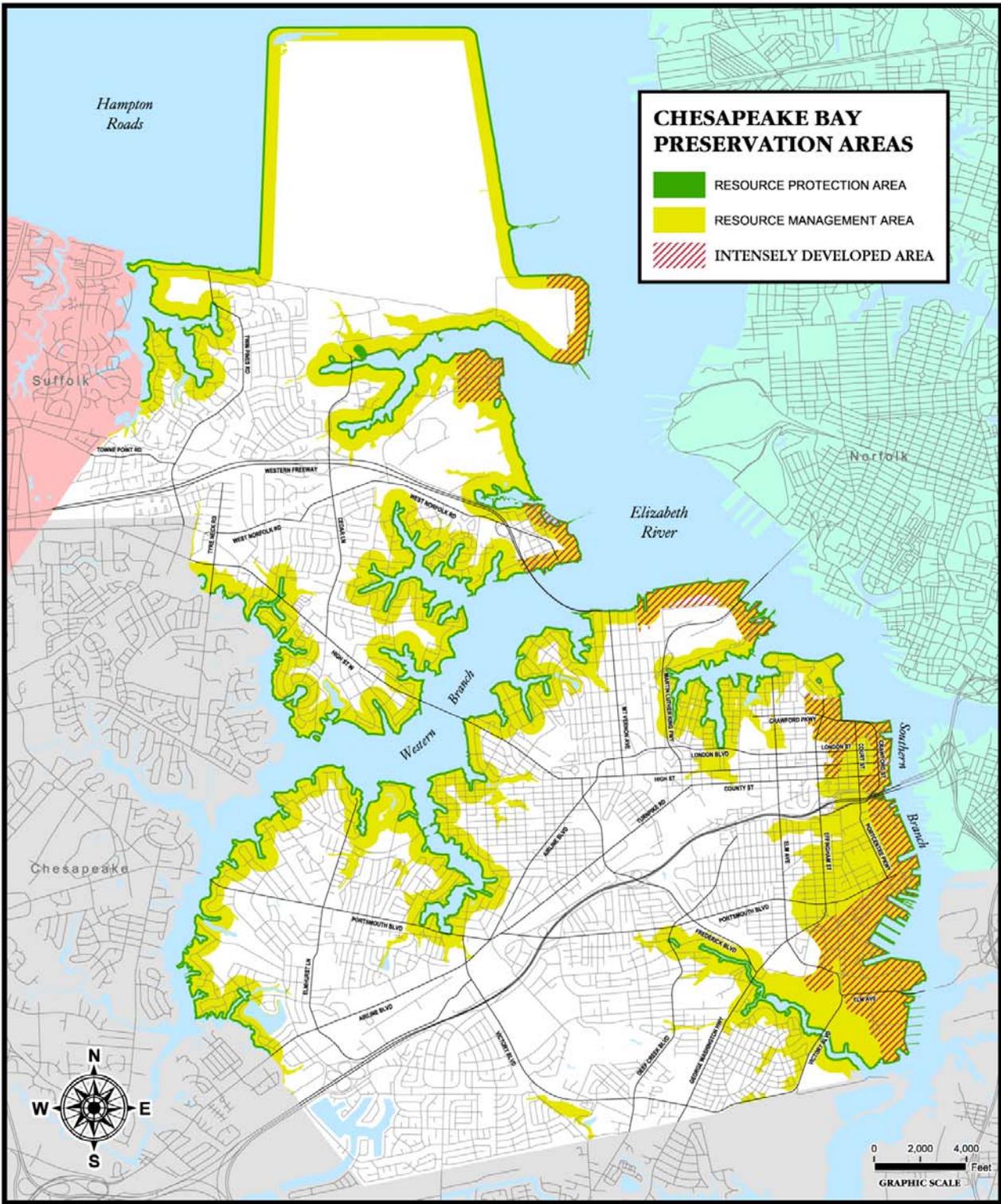


Bide-A-Wee  
golf course

The CIP includes various projects to upgrade existing recreational facilities throughout the City, as well as a project to develop a new athletic complex in the Cradock area.

In addition to city parks and recreation facilities, recreational opportunities in Portsmouth are provided through the school system, private organizations, commercial facilities, and private facilities within residential developments. Of particular importance are schools with indoor and outdoor recreation areas and open space that function as neighborhood parks/activity centers for the surrounding residential community. A number of athletic fields maintained by the City are located on City of Portsmouth Public School properties.

Past analyses of city parks and recreation facilities have revealed deficiencies in the following areas:



**CHESAPEAKE BAY  
PRESERVATION AREAS**

PORTSMOUTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

  
**MAP 12**  
 DESTINATION 2025  
*Setting A Bold New Course*

1. The total amount of city-owned parkland (approximately 350 acres) is below the standard of 10 acres per 1,000 residents that is widely used as a target for municipal parks and recreation systems.
2. Significant portions of the City are underserved by neighborhood and community parks using standard service area radii of one-half mile and two miles, respectively, for these facilities. (Churchland is particularly underserved by neighborhood parks and the Downtown and southern portion of the City fall outside of the service radius for City Park.)

In addition, there is a continuing need to accommodate new demands for recreational facilities and programs that emerge over time (e.g., the current popularity of youth soccer). Another important issue is the need to replace athletic fields on U.S. Navy property at St. Julian's Creek that are currently used by the City. The new athletic complex at Cradock will provide replacement facilities; another possibility is to develop fields next to Paradise Creek as part of a new community park (see below).

Because the largely developed nature of the City makes it difficult to acquire additional lands for park and open space purposes, creative approaches will be necessary to meet identified deficiencies. Examples of the possibilities that exist include:

- ***Redevelopment of the former Hunt-Mapp Middle School property as a “Park and Arts” complex:*** This complex would build on the Willett Hall Performing Arts Center and the outdoor areas associated with the school to bring together cultural and recreational facilities and programs in a center of community activity. A master plan for re-use of the Hunt-Mapp Middle School property to accommodate this concept should be developed, including the relationship of the “Park and Arts” complex to the surrounding area.
- ***Acquisition and development of a community park along Paradise Creek as part of implementation of the Paradise Creek Restoration Plan, an Elizabeth River Project initiative:*** The City has initiated a joint park planning initiative in the Paradise Creek area with the Elizabeth River Project and the Navy's Watchable Wildlife Program. This initiative will combine environmental restoration with recreational opportunities for citizens.

A comprehensive parks and recreation plan is needed to fully inventory existing recreational facilities and programs available to city residents, define current and projected needs based upon the inventory and a demographic analysis of Portsmouth's population, and develop strategies and actions to meet those needs. In addition to defining needs and strategies, the plan should explore the following ideas that emerged during the planning process for the Destination 2025 Comprehensive Plan:



City Park

- Develop a central recreational complex to serve residents from the entire City and beyond



- Develop a network of multi-use trails throughout Portsmouth (the City currently has very few trail facilities)
- Increase the amount of public access to the water (the 1995 City of Portsmouth Waterfront Access Study identified existing and potential water access points and can be used as a starting point to develop a strategy for increased public access)

Policies #1 and #2 below are designed to bring about a quality parks, open space, and greenways system for the City of Portsmouth. Policy #1 addresses the need for a comprehensive parks and recreation plan and identifies strategies to meet the needs of Portsmouth residents. Policy #2 proposes a city-wide network of greenways structured around parks, other protected open space lands, and linear corridors (waterways, including “blueways” with public access for landside (walking) and waterside (canoeing, kayaking, etc.) recreation; utility rights-of-way; and landscaped roadways). Paradise Creek, for which a model restoration plan has been developed as part of the Elizabeth River Project, provides a prime opportunity for development of a greenway as a component of this network.

### Natural Environment

Portsmouth’s environmental resources are documented separately in the Environmental Component of the Comprehensive Plan. Resources addressed by the Environmental Component include topography, climate, water resources, environmental conditions related to land use (soils, stormwater runoff, etc.), air quality, and natural resources such as wetlands, wildlife, and critical species habitat. In accordance with Virginia’s Chesapeake Bay Preservation Program, the City has in place a Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Overlay Ordinance designed to minimize non-point source pollution from stormwater runoff, erosion and sedimentation, and nutrients and toxicants. The ordinance establishes the following jurisdictional areas (Map 12):



Hoffler Creek Preserve

- **Resource Protection Area (RPA):** Lands at or near a shoreline that have an intrinsic water quality value due to the ecological and biological processes they perform. RPAs include tidal wetlands, tidal shores, nontidal wetlands, and a 100’ buffer area adjacent to and landward of these resources and all tributary streams.
- **Resource Management Area (RMA):** All lands within 530 feet of the landward boundary of the RPA, the limits of the 100-year floodplain, and certain other wetlands not included in the RPA. Newly developed areas cannot exceed the non-point source pollutant load for the watershed in which they are located while redevelopment sites must achieve at least a 10% reduction in the existing or predevelopment pollutant load for the specific use.
- **Intensely Developed Area (IDA):** Areas in which little or none of the natural environment remains. These areas are usually densely populated and have a very high degree of impervious surface area. Since non-point source pollution is directly proportional to the amount of impervious surface, efforts should be made to reduce impervious surface areas





when an IDA is redeveloped. Approximately 9% of Portsmouth is designated as IDA, located along the eastern shoreline in industrial areas and densely developed residential areas in the older part of the City. Within IDAs, infill development and redevelopment must meet a 10% pollution reduction.

The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act Program is a state-mandated program through which the City will continue to participate in state and national efforts to clean up the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The City should make a commitment to regional leadership in these efforts through ongoing initiatives such as restoration of Paradise Creek and new ones such as “Greening Portsmouth” (see Community Appearance Policy #1).

The Environmental Component identifies goals, objectives, and strategies for four topics related to Portsmouth’s environment: water, air, solid waste, and natural resources. Policies #3 to 6 below address each of these topics. Significant additions to the strategies contained in the Environmental Component include:

- Support of the Elizabeth River Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to cleaning up the severely polluted Elizabeth River watershed. Public education and outreach, one of the eight “highest priority actions” of the Elizabeth River Watershed Action Plan, is identified as an important action strategy. Another highest priority action contained in the Watershed Action Plan that is relevant to Portsmouth is to “ensure that a proposed expansion of Craney Island, and other proposed port expansions, are both ecologically and economically responsible.”
- Linkage of strategies for the minimization and recycling of solid waste to Portsmouth’s Clean Community program
- Development of a plan for the disposition of the City’s landfill on Craney Island, required under state legislation to close by 2018. This plan should address working with the Southeastern Public Service Authority (responsible for regional solid waste disposal) to identify a suitable replacement for the landfill, the long-term use of the landfill site, and associated funding needs.
- Linkage of air quality improvement to other Comprehensive Plan strategies, including:
  - Encouraging compact/mixed-use land use patterns to encourage pedestrian activity and reduce automobile usage
  - Encouraging the planting of trees and other vegetation throughout the City through a “Greening Portsmouth” initiative



Oyster seeding in the Elizabeth River



Another key action strategy under Policy #6 addresses the City’s continuing efforts to enforce and improve its floodplain management program in accordance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program. This includes updating the City’s Floodplain Management Plan in accordance with FEMA’s Community Rating System. Floodplain areas in the City are shown on Map 13.



## 9.2 Policies and Action Strategies

### ***Policy #1: Parks and Recreation***

Develop a comprehensive parks and recreation plan that defines the needs of Portsmouth's citizens for parks and recreational facilities and identifies strategies to meet these needs.

#### **Action Strategies**

- Define needs for different types parks and recreational facilities geographically distributed throughout the City based upon objective measures such as level of service standards
- Develop a major recreational complex that serves Portsmouth residents while attracting participants from inside and outside of the Hampton Roads region. Potential components of this complex include multiple soccer fields, an “extreme” sports center (skate park, bike ramps, rock wall, soap box derby track, etc.), and an enclosed indoor sports facility. [*Policy Link: Economic Development #2*]
- Pursue joint use of recreational facilities owned by Portsmouth Public Schools and other recreational providers [*Policy Link: Education #4*]
- Establish standards for the dedication of parkland (or cash-in-lieu payments) in development/redevelopment projects
- Identify opportunities to establish neighborhood parks accessible to local residents throughout the City
- Increase the number of public access points to the water for recreational activities (walking, boating, etc.)
- Develop an implementation and funding plan to address deficiencies in parks and recreational facilities defined by the needs analysis. Address both capital and operating/maintenance costs in the funding plan

### ***Policy #2: Open Space and Greenways***

Develop a citywide open space and greenway network comprised of parks, environmental corridors (waterways, wetlands, etc.), utility right-of-ways, and landscaped roadways.

#### **Action Strategies**

- Establish greenway corridors along waterways such as Paradise Creek and Scotts Creek, with vegetated buffers, public access, and trails where feasible
- Identify and pursue opportunities to permanently preserve key natural resource areas as part of the open space and greenway network (e.g., as dedicated open space in new developments)
- Develop a city-wide system of walking/biking trails, utilizing greenway corridors, available right-of-ways, and sidewalks/bike lanes within roadway corridors [*Policy Link: Transportation #4*]
- Incorporate waterfront lands, public access to the water, and blueways into the open space and greenway system. Retain city ownership of waterfront access points (e.g., street ends) to ensure public access

- Develop incentive programs (e.g., conservation easements, purchase of development rights, density bonuses) to encourage preservation of valuable open space, such as view corridors to waterways, marshes, and other scenic amenities

***Policy #3: Water Quality***

**Improve the quality of the Portsmouth’s water resources, including the Elizabeth River, its tributary streams, and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay.**

**Action Strategies**

- Continue to enforce the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act and tidal and non-tidal wetlands regulatory programs
- Implement and maintain Best Management Practices (BMP) in public and private development projects to minimize water quality impacts
- Maintain buffers of natural vegetation along waterways and wetland areas. Limit shoreline alterations to water dependent uses with proven economic justification and minimal adverse impacts on the environment
- Continue to improve the City’s aging stormwater drainage system, including measures to improve the quality of stormwater discharge
- Continue to work with the City of Suffolk to preserve the quality of the City’s drinking water supply
- Continue to work with the Elizabeth River Project to improve the water quality of the River
  - Implement the Paradise Creek Restoration Plan
  - Reduce toxic discharges to the Elizabeth River and its tributaries
  - Support education and outreach efforts to increase awareness and partnerships with private businesses and the public

***Policy #4: Air Quality***

**Protect and improve air quality in the City of Portsmouth.**

**Action Strategies**

- Continue to participate in the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission’s (HRPDC) air quality monitoring program
- Pursue strategies to reduce vehicular use and associated emissions (e.g., car/van pools, park-and-ride, increased use of public transit, electric or natural gas-powered transit vehicles, bicycle network, compact/mixed-use development patterns that create a walkable environment, etc.)
- Ameliorate air quality by maintaining and increasing trees and other natural vegetation throughout the City (Policy #6)



***Policy #5: Solid Waste***

**Minimize the amount of solid waste produced in the City of Portsmouth, encourage the recycling of renewable resources, and dispose of the waste generated in an environmentally sound manner.**

**Action Strategies**

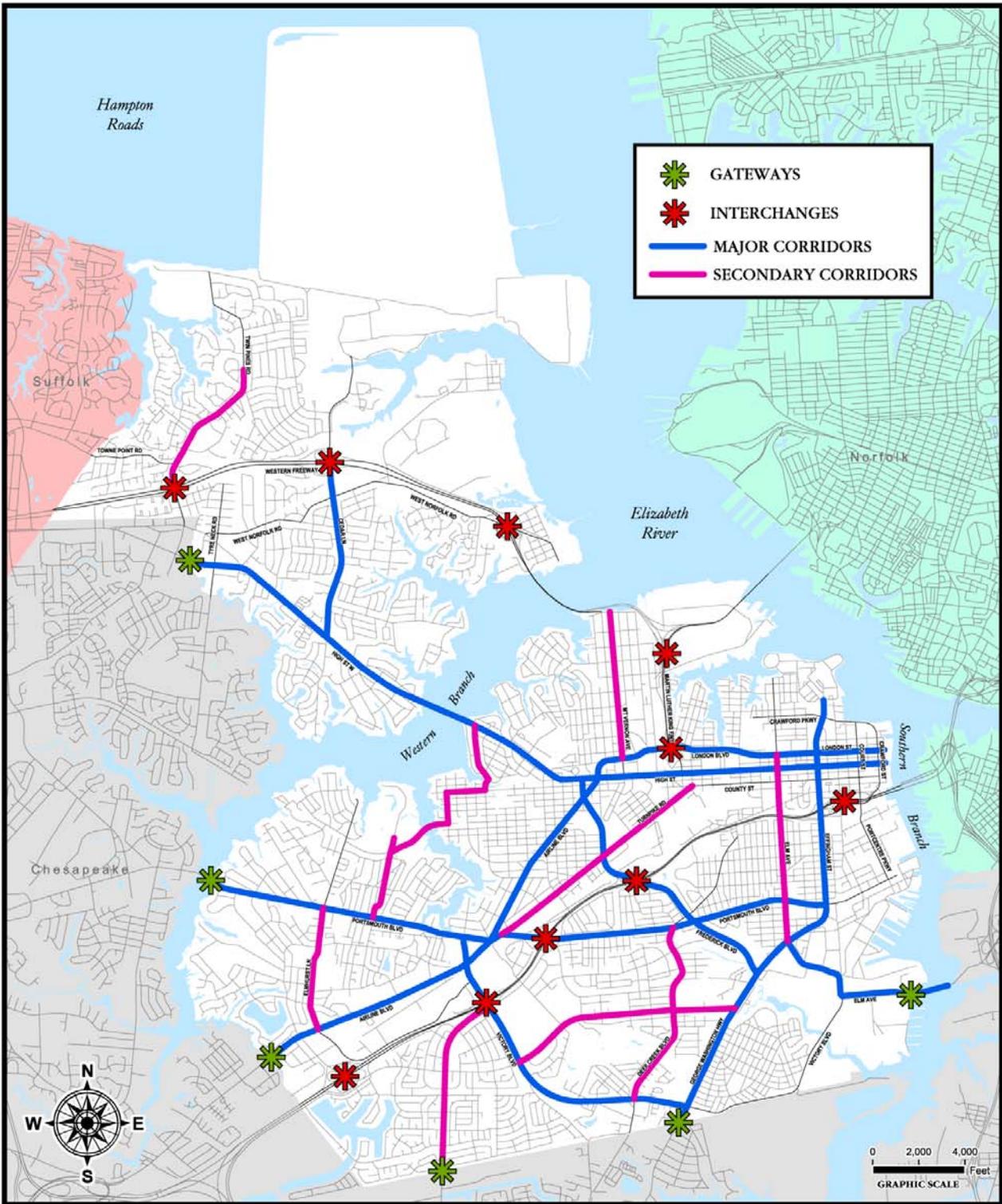
- Promote waste minimization and recycling programs for industrial, commercial, and residential uses, including public education and consideration of incentives for recycling/disincentives for generation of larger quantities of waste. Link to Portsmouth’s “Clean Community” program [*Policy Link: Community Appearance #1*]
- Plan for the future disposition and replacement of the City’s landfill on Craney Island, required by state legislation to close by 2018
- Continue to provide opportunities for the proper disposal or recycling of hazardous household materials
- Work with federal, state, and regional partners to develop a strategy for the safe and proper disposal of dredge materials from the Elizabeth River
- Coordinate with the Hampton Roads Sanitation District for the continued safe and proper treatment of wastewater and biosolids

**Policy Direction #6: Natural Environment**

**Implement strategies to preserve, enhance, and restore the natural features and environment of Portsmouth.**

**Action Strategies**

- Preserve key natural resource areas as part of the open space and greenway network (Policy #2)
- Improve the quality of Portsmouth’s water resources (Policy #3)
- Maintain and increase trees and other natural vegetation in Portsmouth, through activities such as:
  - Strengthening regulations to protect trees and other natural resources
  - Participating in the Tree City USA program
  - Encouraging the planting of new vegetation throughout the City (a “Greening Portsmouth,” initiative, including the possibility of a “forested greenbelt” at the I-264 downtown exit as recommended by the Urban Land Institute Advisory Services Panel Report for Downtown Portsmouth)
- Continue to participate in the National Flood Insurance program, enforce the Floodplain Ordinance, and pursue policies to minimize the risks of flood damage
- Establish standards and policies to address the physical limitations of natural resources (wetlands, floodplain areas, etc.) in land development projects
- Work with the Elizabeth River Project on a public education and outreach program regarding the benefits of wetlands and other natural resources and the role private citizens can play in conservation



**GATEWAYS AND  
CORRIDORS**

PORTSMOUTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

  
**MAP 14**  
 DESTINATION 2025  
*Setting A Bold New Course*