

## Economic Development

### Introduction

The overarching goal of economic development in the Town of Bristol is to sustain a vibrant, resilient, and welcoming community for residents, businesses, and visitors. Bristol's strategy builds on its core strengths—its nationally recognized waterfront, rich historic and cultural resources, active downtown, respected academic institutions, high-quality public spaces, and strong maritime and manufacturing roots.

Bristol's commercial districts, small businesses, marine trades, educational partnerships, and emerging innovation sectors provide a strong foundation for long-term growth. At the same time, the Town's coastal setting and historic character require that economic activity support environmental stewardship, resilience, and compatible land use.

This Element outlines the policies that guide economic development in Bristol and identifies strategies to strengthen the local economy, support small businesses, expand workforce opportunities, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, and enhance the Town's role as a regional destination. The implementation actions that follow provide a roadmap for achieving these goals.

**Goal 1. Strengthen Bristol's overall economic climate by promoting a stable, resilient, and business-friendly environment that supports the community's quality of life and long-term prosperity.**

#### Policies

1. Make economic development a priority by fostering a predictable, business-friendly environment across Town departments and providing permitting processes that are efficient while still meeting design, safety, and environmental standards.
2. Collaborate with local, regional, and institutional partners to align economic initiatives and leverage shared resources.
3. Promote "Destination Bristol" branding and marketing efforts that highlight the community's cultural, historic, and waterfront assets.
4. Encourage reinvestment in existing commercial and industrial sites to strengthen the local tax base.

**Goal 2. Support and grow Bristol's business base by prioritizing small businesses, key industries, the blue economy, entrepreneurship, and reinvestment in commercial and industrial properties.**

#### Policies

1. Support the retention and growth of Bristol's key industries, including marine trades, advanced manufacturing, higher education, tourism, and creative enterprises.economy.
2. Foster entrepreneurship and small business growth through partnerships, business incubators, and shared workspaces.

3. Inventory and market vacant or underutilized commercial and industrial properties suitable for redevelopment or adaptive reuse.
4. Encourage property and facility upgrades that improve accessibility, energy efficiency, and site appearance.
5. Prepare for climate impacts by helping local businesses develop continuity and resilience strategies to protect jobs and assets.

**Goal 3. Invest in infrastructure, regulatory updates, and place-based improvements that enable business growth while preserving Bristol's distinctive character and environmental quality.**

#### Policies

- ~~1. Modernize utilities, broadband, and transportation systems to meet 21st century business and workforce needs.~~
- 2.1. Align infrastructure and capital improvement investments with economic development priorities and areas suitable for reinvestment or redevelopment.
- 3.2. Incorporate flood resilience, sustainability, and green infrastructure features into public and private redevelopment projects.
- 4.3. Coordinate with regional and state agencies to fund and implement infrastructure projects that support economic growth and climate adaptation.
- 5.4. Balance commercial visibility, signage, and access needs with the Town's scenic, historic, and neighborhood character.

**Goal 4. Promote a thriving downtown and active commercial areas that serve as vibrant centers of commerce, culture, and community life.**

#### Policies

1. Preserve and enhance the historic fabric and human scale of Downtown Bristol while encouraging compatible adaptive reuse and upper-story occupancy.
2. Maintain Bristol's Formula Business Ordinance to preserve the unique character, scale, and local business environment of the Downtown Historic District.
3. Maintain and strengthen civic uses downtown to support year-round activity, reinforce the area's role as Bristol's civic and cultural hub, and complement surrounding businesses and historic character.
4. Improve walkability and accessibility through coordinated streetscape design, parking management, and wayfinding.
5. Coordinate visitor information, marketing, and signage to connect downtown, the waterfront, and other destinations.
6. Encourage year-round downtown activity through cultural events, heritage tourism, and partnerships that support local businesses.

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7. Promote public art, cultural programming, and ~~creative industries~~the creative economy as integral components of Bristol's economic vitality.

### Goal 5. Support education, workforce development, and partnerships with local academic institutions and industries to build a strong and adaptable local workforce.

#### Policies

1. Partner with Roger Williams University, the Bristol-Warren Regional School District, and workforce organizations to develop training and career pathway programs.
2. Facilitate connections between students, residents, and local employers in the trades, blue economy, manufacturing, and tourism sectors.
3. Encourage local hiring, internships, and apprenticeships through municipal, institutional, and private partnerships.
4. Promote lifelong learning and career readiness as community values that strengthen workforce adaptability.

~~—Ensure reliable, affordable, high-capacity broadband and digital infrastructure town-wide to support education, remote and hybrid work, local businesses, and municipal operations. Expand broadband and technology access to support education, remote work, and business operations.~~

### Goal 6. Maintain and expand Bristol's agricultural economy by preserving farmland, supporting farm operations, and encouraging value-added and aquaculture enterprises.

#### Policies

1. Preserve remaining farmland and high-quality agricultural soils ~~for continued agricultural use~~ through voluntary conservation tools ~~and~~, purchase of development rights, ~~and~~ ~~compatible~~while ensuring existing zoning ~~continues to support agricultural uses~~.
2. Encourage the active use of idle or underutilized agricultural land for farming, horticulture, or community agriculture.
3. Support aquaculture and shellfish enterprises in coordination with state agencies and local maritime stakeholders.
4. Promote awareness of Bristol's farming heritage and encourage residents and institutions to purchase locally grown or locally produced foods.

### 2016 Comprehensive Plan Implementation Progress

Since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the Town of Bristol has advanced key economic development initiatives across zoning, infrastructure, tourism, workforce development, and interdepartmental coordination. This section highlights the actions from the 2016 Plan that have been implemented and demonstrates how the Town has made measurable progress toward its economic development goals.

## 1. Modernizing Regulations and Improving Town Processes

Bristol has completed several zoning updates to support business growth, adaptive reuse, and flexible industrial spaces. Recent State reforms have further streamlined administrative and development review procedures. The Town has strengthened coordination among departments, improved communication with applicants and created a more efficient permitting process.

### Unity Park Redevelopment

The transformation of the former manufacturing area into Unity Park represents one of Bristol's most significant economic development accomplishments since adoption of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan. The Town proactively supported this redevelopment by ensuring that existing manufacturing uses could continue while also creating the Rehabilitation Limited Development Project (LDP) zoning district to enable adaptive reuse and broaden the range of allowable uses with minimal restrictions. This zoning framework provided the flexibility necessary to attract reinvestment, modernize aging industrial buildings, and support a mix of commercial, recreational, and civic uses.

## 2. Strengthening Tourism, Merchants, and Destination Branding

Tourism, marketing, and downtown vitality have been major areas of progress since 2016. Bristol has supported numerous initiatives through partnerships with: Explore Bristol, Bristol Merchants Association (BMA), Discover Newport, and Bristol Historical & Preservation Society

Key accomplishments include:

- Installation of tourism kiosks with maps and brochures.
- Ongoing digital and print campaigns including the “Small Town, Big Charm” brand.
- Explore Bristol’s expanded role in event coordination, marketing, newsletters, and merchant support.
- Continued progress on Discover Newport’s regional strategic planning, including Bristol representation on working groups.
- Continued support for downtown redevelopment.
- Sustained maintenance of a vibrant downtown with active storefronts, community events, and cultural programming.

Although the Town no longer operates a formal welcome center, the Maritime Center serves as a visitor gateway for the boating community. The Bristol Maritime Center is an important addition to Bristol Harbor and a major asset for the boating community. The facility provides upgraded restrooms, boater services, storage, and improved access to the harbor. Its completion has enhanced Bristol’s appeal as a recreational boating destination and strengthened the connection between the waterfront and downtown businesses.

### **3. Advancing Education, Workforce Development, and RWU Partnerships**

Workforce readiness remains an ongoing priority. Bristol has made noticeable progress in expanding partnerships with Roger Williams University (RWU), the School District, and local businesses. Recent initiatives include:

- Active partnerships between RWU, local businesses, and educational institutions to support internships, mentorship, project collaboration, and workforce skill development.
- Upgrades at the Rogers Free Library, including improved work/study rooms and the new public maker space supported through the Community Learning Center Grant, ARPA funding, and other grants, along with expanded programming focused on work readiness, education, and health.

### **4. Expanded Civic and Physical Infrastructure to Support Economic Development**

Bristol has completed numerous infrastructure actions identified in the 2016 Plan. Highlights include:

- Major progress on Unity Park, including amenities, signage, benches, and civic improvements.
- Completion of upgrades to the Town boat ramp.
- ARPA-funded expansion of the OSHEAN broadband network, advancing connectivity for municipal facilities.
- Ongoing coordination with RIDOT on the sidewalk and path extension from Constitution Street to RWU, with continued advocacy to extend sidewalks to Old Ferry Road.
- Harbor management improvements by the Harbormaster, including updated harbor infrastructure and continued implementation of the Marine Trades Route Plan.
- Completion of several actions relating to signage and wayfinding.

### **5. Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Local Food Systems**

The Town established an agricultural zoning district and partnered with NRCS and local organizations to preserve several farm properties through conservation easements, helping protect Bristol's remaining farmland. The Town also adopted agritourism zoning to support farm viability by allowing appropriate accessory commercial uses on agricultural properties. Ongoing efforts continue to support agricultural and aquaculture enterprises through zoning and tax strategies, collaboration with partners, and promotion of local food initiatives such as farmers' markets and "farm-to-table" and "boat-to-table" programming.

### **5. Downtown Residential Development and Revitalization**

Supporting residential development in and near downtown was a key recommendation of the 2016 Plan, and the Town has made significant progress. The redevelopment of the former Robin Rug mill will deliver 127 new residential units, bringing new residents to the downtown area, supporting local shops and restaurants, and strengthening walkability and year-round activity. Additional phases of downtown revitalization and adaptive reuse remain future priorities.

## **BRISTOL ECONOMIC STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES**

### **Strategic Regional Location**

~~Bristol is conveniently located within southern New England's major travel and economic corridors. The town is approximately 30 minutes from Providence, 1 hour and 15 minutes from Boston, 2 hours from Hartford, and about 3 hours and 30 minutes from New York City. This central location provides businesses with access to multiple labor pools, visitor markets, and regional industry clusters. Bristol also promotes its competitive position through a business friendly environment that includes one of the lowest commercial tax rates in Rhode Island and a federally designated Opportunity Zone that offers additional incentives for investment. Bristol is situated within southern New England's broader travel and economic corridors, providing access to multiple labor markets, higher education institutions, and industry clusters. While travel times can vary due to limited access routes, Bristol remains within a reasonable commuting distance of Providence, Newport County, and southeastern Massachusetts. Its proximity to these markets combined with strong quality of life amenities, a competitive commercial tax rate, and a federally designated Opportunity Zone helps position Bristol as an attractive location for small businesses, marine trades, research partnerships, and innovation-oriented enterprises.~~

### **Distinctive Community Character**

Bristol's walkable historic downtown, nationally recognized waterfront, preserved architecture, scenic neighborhoods, and parks and public spaces contribute to a strong sense of place. This character plays a central role in attracting new residents, businesses, and investment.

### **Presence of Roger Williams University**

Roger Williams University is a significant driver of Bristol's economy. The university brings students, employees, and visitors into town and provides opportunities for research partnerships, entrepreneurship, workforce development, cultural programming, and marine and engineering innovation.

### **Redevelopment and Reuse Opportunities**

Bristol includes several properties well suited for reinvestment, adaptive reuse, and mixed-use development. Its federally designated Opportunity Zone provides additional financial tools to support redevelopment of key sites, including historic buildings, mill complexes, and waterfront properties.

### **Infrastructure and Mobility Assets**

Bristol's public water and sewer systems, along with ongoing infrastructure upgrades, create a reliable foundation for business operations and future investment. Mobility assets, including RIPTA transit, the East Bay Bike Path, and a walkable downtown, strengthen access to commercial areas, support local businesses, and enhance the town's economic competitiveness.

### **Creative, Cultural, and Civic Assets**

Bristol's arts community, cultural institutions, historic venues, and year-round community events contribute to a vibrant local economy. These assets attract visitors, support small businesses, and reinforce Bristol's identity as a lively and creative coastal community.

## Natural Resources and Maritime Economy

Bristol's extensive shoreline and harbor shape a strong maritime economy supported by marine trades, boating, recreation, and emerging blue economy sectors. These resources offer ongoing opportunities for sustainable growth while reinforcing the community's coastal heritage.

## Economic Development Challenges

### Coastal Resilience Risks

Businesses and infrastructure in flood-prone areas of Bristol including Downtown face increasing risks from flooding and sea-level rise, creating short and long-term challenges for business continuity.

### High Cost of Real Estate

High housing costs make it difficult for employers to attract and retain workers, while high commercial rents limit the ability of small businesses and start-ups to secure affordable storefronts, workshops, and office space.

### State Land-Use Mandates and Loss of Local Control

Recent state land-use reforms have reduced local control, including new "by-right" adaptive reuse provisions that allow commercial buildings to be converted to residential use even within commercial zoning districts. This creates concern about the long-term loss of commercial space, potential land-use conflicts, and impacts on economic vitality. The Town may need to advocate for state-level adjustments to ensure adaptive reuse does not unintentionally erode Bristol's commercial tax base or business districts.

### Parking and Downtown Access

Parking in Downtown Bristol during peak periods, in particular special events is a challenge, but any parking management strategies must maintain Bristol's walkable, historic downtown and not involve adding supply that detracts from character.

### Transportation Constraints

Bristol's peninsular geography and limited access routes can create congestion and longer travel times for workers, visitors, and deliveries. For some businesses, particularly those serving a regional customer base, the geography limits their market radius and can influence business location decisions.

Distance from interstate highways also affects customer reach and employee commuting patterns, with travel to Providence and other hubs often taking longer than comparable distances elsewhere in the state. These geographic factors underscore the importance of strengthening transit, enhancing digital infrastructure, and supporting industries that are less dependent on regional physical catchment areas.

### Seasonal Demand Fluctuations

Tourism-dependent businesses experience seasonal peaks and slower winter months, affecting staffing and year-round financial stability.

### Skilled Workforce Gaps

Marine trades, manufacturing, and blue-economy firms face challenges recruiting workers with specialized skills, despite nearby training resources.

## Economic Data and Local Economic Conditions

Economic indicators are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates (2013 and 2023). Employment and unemployment data reflect ACS measures for residents age 16 and over. These indicators provide a snapshot of household assistance levels, poverty, and basic labor-force participation in Bristol. The information offers baseline context for understanding local economic conditions and helps inform future economic development strategies.

### Key Economic Indicators (ACS 5-Year Estimates)

#### Household Assistance

- Households receiving SNAP benefits (2013): 9.1%
- Households receiving SNAP benefits (2023): 5.6%

#### Poverty

- Individuals below poverty level (2013): 7.7%
- Individuals below poverty level (2023): 6.4%

#### Employment & Labor Force

- Residents age 16+ employed (2013): 86.5%
- Residents age 16+ employed (2023): 88.1%
- Residents age 16+ unemployed (2013): 8.5%
- Residents age 16+ unemployed (2023): 2.7%

## Local Employment Structure (QCEW Data)

QCEW data provides a snapshot of the jobs physically located in Bristol, regardless of where the workers live. The dataset reflects employment within both private industries and government employers, including public schools and municipal operations.

The industries with the largest numbers of jobs located in Bristol include:

- **Educational Services (1,356 jobs)** – the largest employment sector in town, reflecting local schools, Roger Williams University, and other education-related employers.

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- **Government (1,141 jobs)** – including public school employees, municipal staff, police, fire, and other public-sector workers whose workplaces are in Bristol.
- **Accommodation & Food Services (952 jobs)** – representing restaurants, hospitality, and tourism-related businesses that serve residents, students, and visitors.
- **Manufacturing (912 jobs)** – a significant presence in Bristol, including marine trades, precision manufacturing, and specialty production.
- **Health Care & Social Assistance (728 jobs)** – reflecting local medical offices, clinics, and care providers.
- **Retail Trade (609 jobs)** – including downtown shops, grocery stores, and other retail establishments.

Several of these sectors also make major contributions to total wages. The highest overall wage-paying sectors located in Bristol include:

- **Educational Services (\$78.7 million)**
- **Government (\$69.6 million)**
- **Manufacturing (\$59.9 million)**
- **Health Care & Social Assistance (\$38.5 million)**
- **Accommodation & Food Services (\$27.2 million)**
- **Professional & Technical Services (\$27.6 million)**

These industries represent the core of Bristol's job base and include longtime anchors such as Roger Williams University, marine and specialty manufacturers, health care providers, and hospitality businesses serving the community and visitors.

	Bristol		
	Number	Average	Total
	of Units	Employment	Wages
<b>Total Private &amp; Government</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>7,600</b>	<b>425,429,708</b>
<b>Total Private Only</b>	<b>854</b>	<b>6,459</b>	<b>355,790,567</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	1	*	*
Mining	0	0	0
Utilities	0	0	0
Construction	96	404	27,494,150
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>59,911,312</b>
Wholesale Trade	82	188	19,941,409
Retail Trade	55	609	24,535,556
Transportation & Warehousing	5	7	448,533
Information	36	50	4,130,393
Finance & Insurance	31	141	12,092,950

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Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	25	68	3,641,895
Professional & Technical Services	159	285	27,611,563
Management of Companies & Enterprises	2	*	*
Administrative Support & Waste Mngmnt.	50	225	12,622,043
Educational Services	25	1,356	78,734,589
Health Care & Social Assistance	72	728	38,466,041
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	19	206	5,660,234
Accommodation & Food Services	64	952	27,209,454
Other services (except Public Administration)	84	308	12,248,507
Unclassified Establishments	0	0	0
Government	16	1,141	69,639,141

Source: RIDLT, Quarterly Census of U.I.- Covered Employment and Wages, City and Town Report, 2022 AnnualData compiled May 2023, subject to revision.  
\* Some data are not shown due to the possibility of identifying data of a specific employer.  
\*\* Statewide - employment in multiple towns, at unknown locations, or outside RI.  
Data compiled May 2025, subject to revision.

### INSERT ADDITIONAL BRISTOL ECONOMIC DATA

#### INDUSTRY PROFILES

Bristol's diverse economy includes both long-standing industries and emerging sectors:

##### Marine Trades & Advanced Manufacturing

Bristol is home to skilled manufacturers producing composites, specialty equipment, and naval architecture services. These industries benefit from access to Bristol Harbor, RWU's marine and engineering programs, and the growing blue-economy cluster in Bristol (described in more detail in the section below).

##### Tourism, Hospitality & Cultural Industries

Historic downtown, waterfront amenities, and cultural venues contribute to a robust visitor economy. Year-round programming—festivals, regattas, concerts, and heritage events—extends the tourism season and supports local businesses.

##### Higher Education & Research

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Roger Williams University is a major employer and innovation driver. Collaborations with the Town and private sector support internships, applied research, planning and design services, and emerging blue-tech initiatives.

### Professional & Technical Services

Small professional firms—including engineering, architecture, IT, consulting, and design—represent an expanding sector driven by remote/hybrid work and Bristol's high quality of life.

### Health Care & Social Assistance

Local medical practices, outpatient facilities, and senior-care providers meet regional needs and support a steady employment base.

## **The Blue Economy**

The blue economy, defined by the State as the sustainable use of the ocean and Rhode Island's water assets to create a resilient economy with good-paying jobs, is an area where the state has long been a national leader. Industries contributing to the blue economy include ports and shipping, tourism and recreation, offshore renewable energy, marine trades, aquaculture and fisheries, seafood processing, and defense. Statewide studies estimate that blue-economy sectors account for a significant share of Rhode Island jobs and economic output, reflecting the importance of ocean-related activity to the state's overall prosperity.

As a coastal community with a deep maritime heritage, Bristol plays a meaningful role in this statewide blue economy. Bristol Harbor has historically supported shipbuilding, repair, and commercial maritime activity and continues to host full-service marine trades and boatyards, such as Bristol Marine, that provide skilled jobs and year-round economic activity. Roger Williams University further anchors Bristol in the blue economy through its waterfront campus, marine science facilities, and programs such as the Center for Economic and Environmental Development and the emerging Blue Solutions Institute, which support marine research, aquaculture, coastal resilience, and blue-tech entrepreneurship.

The Herreshoff Marine Museum in Bristol recently received a \$59,000 innovation grant from the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation to expand its capacity for marine-industry testing and commercialization of ocean technologies.

Meanwhile, the redevelopment of Unity Park has become a major hub for the state's blue economy initiative; the state awarded it approximately \$2.68 million in tax credits and sales-tax rebates to support adaptive reuse and manufacturing space for ocean-technology firms.

In June 2025 the state announced a \$9.7 million award under the Innovation Campus Initiative for two campuses, including a \$4 million grant for the “Blue Robotics Lab” at Unity Park to accelerate undersea robotics commercialization.

Expanding and attracting additional businesses to Bristol that support the growing blue economy—such as marine trades, aquaculture and shellfish enterprises, marine technology and engineering firms, environmental and coastal consulting, and water-based tourism and recreation—is highly desirable and

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offers significant potential to add jobs to the local economy. Aligning local land use, workforce partnerships, and waterfront planning with the State's blue-economy strategies positions Bristol to capture a larger share of this growth in the coming decade.

**Table EC1. Representative Blue-Economy Firms in Bristol (2025)**

<b>Firm / Institution</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Blue-Economy Segment</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Flux Marine	Unity Park	Electric propulsion; marine technology; advanced manufacturing	Designs and manufactures high-performance electric outboard motors; recognized statewide as a leading blue-economy innovator.
Saab, Inc. – Autonomous & Undersea Systems	Unity Park	Autonomous underwater vehicles; defense; ocean technology	Establishing major AUV manufacturing and testing facility; supported by state incentives; cornerstone tenant of Bristol's blue-economy hub.
Sea Legs	Unity Park	Amphibious marine mobility	Provides amphibious craft technology; part of growing ocean-tech cluster at Unity Park.
Endurance Clean Energy	Unity Park	Clean energy; climate resilience; blue/green tech	Develops clean-energy and storage projects; complements marine and blue-economy innovation at Unity Park.

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Herreshoff Marine Museum & America's Cup Hall of Fame	Burnside St. /Bristol Harbor	Maritime heritage; sailing; workforce development; ocean-tech partnerships	Hosts sailing, composites, and marine programs; securing grants for marine innovation space and water- access testing facilities.
Bristol Marine (Wardwell Boatyard)	Bristol Harbor	Marine trades; boatbuilding and repair; working waterfront	Full-service boatyard providing repair, refit, and haul-out services; anchors Bristol's working waterfront economy.
Bristol Harbor Group, Inc.	Bristol Harbor / 99 Poppasquash Road	Naval architecture; marine engineering	Designs and engineers commercial vessels and advanced hull types; regional leader in marine design services.
Zim Sailing	Ballou Blvd.	Sailing equipment; marine manufacturing	Designs and distributes performance dinghies; supports competitive and recreational sailing markets.
Kinder Industries	Wood Street	Marine fabrication; canvas and enclosures	Provides custom marine covers, enclosures, and fabric products for recreational and competitive boats.
Quantum Sails – Bristol Loft	Tupelo Street	Sailmaking; performance sailing services	Designs and repairs sails for cruisers and racing vessels; reinforces Bristol's role in the sailing

and marine-services sector.

## Economic Development Programs and Partners

### *Tax Stabilization*

The Town offers a Commercial Tax Stabilization Program to support new construction and rehabilitation investment by allowing a phased property tax arrangement for qualifying projects. This incentive is intended to improve Bristol's competitiveness for business location and reinvestment, particularly for projects exceeding capital investment thresholds. This program is established under Town Ordinance Chapter 27, Section 27.5

### *Ready, Set, Rhody*

The Town was selected for the Ready, Set, Rhody initiative, a statewide program supporting climate and infrastructure resilience in vulnerable commercial districts. Through this effort, Bristol's Thames Street district will receive a state-funded vulnerability assessment to identify flooding, storm surge, and infrastructure risks that could affect businesses. Participation in this program positions the Town to pursue targeted improvements that strengthen downtown's long-term economic health and protect local businesses from climate-related disruptions.

### *Explore Bristol*

Explore Bristol serves as the Town's primary partner for tourism promotion and visitor information. The organization markets local businesses, cultural assets, and community events through coordinated outreach and branding. Its work supports Bristol's small-business community by helping direct visitors to downtown shops, restaurants, and attractions. Continued collaboration with Explore Bristol can assist the Town in maintaining a steady visitor economy and reinforcing the visibility of local destinations.

### *Bristol Merchants Association*

The Bristol Merchants Association (BMA) is a volunteer organization that supports local businesses through communication, networking, and coordinated promotional efforts. The group helps share information among merchants, collaborates on seasonal activities and special events, and provides a forum for discussing issues affecting the downtown and broader business community. The BMA's efforts complement the Town's economic development goals by fostering connections among local businesses and contributing to a cohesive commercial environment.

### *East Bay Chamber of Commerce*

The East Bay Chamber of Commerce serves as a regional resource for businesses in Bristol, Warren, and Barrington. The Chamber provides networking opportunities, business education, advocacy, and promotional support for local enterprises. It also assists with small-business development, workforce connections, and regional marketing initiatives. The Chamber's programs complement the Town's

economic development efforts by offering services that help strengthen local businesses and support a coordinated economic identity for the East Bay region.

Bristol's Fourth of July Committee plays a major role in the local economy by organizing the month-long celebration that draws tens of thousands of visitors each year. The Committee's work—parades, concerts, fireworks, ceremonial events, and family activities—creates the busiest economic period of the year for local businesses. Coordination between the Town, the Committee, and economic development partners is essential to ensure that public safety, parking, transportation, signage, and visitor services support both residents and businesses during peak weeks. Strategic planning with the Committee can help optimize the economic benefits of this signature event while maintaining the traditions and character that define Bristol's identity.

### Geographic Areas of Economic Development Focus

Future economic development efforts should prioritize reinvestment and compatible growth within the following areas:

1. Unity Park and Surrounding Industrial Properties

Support the emerging blue-economy cluster, encourage adaptive reuse, and maintain space for marine trades and advanced manufacturing.

2. Downtown Bristol / Thames Street Corridor

Strengthen year-round business vitality, improve resilience to coastal flooding, support upper-story housing, and maintain the historic character that underpins economic activity.

3. Hope Street North and Wood Street Corridors

Encourage small-business growth, mixed-use redevelopment, and façade and streetscape improvements in areas experiencing transition.

4. Metacom Avenue / Route 136 Corridor

Continue long-term efforts to improve corridor transportation, access, and overall appearance along this busy mixed-use roadway. Identify and help market larger parcels suitable for reinvestment or redevelopment.

5. Working Waterfront & Harbor Area

Preserve Bristol's marine trades, promote water-dependent economic growth, and coordinate local regulations and investments with the State's Blue Economy initiatives.

### Public Input on Economic Development

Community feedback emphasized the need to support economic growth while preserving Bristol's historic character and coastal identity. Participants expressed a desire to maintain the Town's unique sense of place, including its walkable downtown, working waterfront, and cultural assets, while encouraging reinvestment and a stronger local business environment.

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Residents highlighted the importance of diversifying the business base, revitalizing vacant or underutilized properties, and continuing to support small, locally owned establishments. Many noted that Bristol's waterfront and historic resources present opportunities to attract visitors and strengthen the economy, provided these efforts remain consistent with neighborhood character.

Overall, community members were optimistic about Bristol's economic future and stressed the importance of balanced growth that expands opportunities for residents and businesses while honoring the Town's historic and coastal heritage.

### Major Employers

Major employers in Bristol include Roger Williams University, the Bristol-Warren Regional School District, municipal and state government offices, and a range of marine trades and manufacturing firms. Local media, community service providers, and employers in healthcare and retail also contribute to the town's job base."

<u>Employer</u>	<u>Sector</u>
<u>Roger Williams University</u>	<u>Higher Education</u>
<u>Bristol-Warren Regional School District</u>	<u>Education</u>
<u>Town of Bristol / State of RI</u>	<u>Government</u>
<u>East Bay Media Group (Phoenix-Times)</u>	<u>Media / Publishing</u>
<u>Bristol Marine &amp; Marine Trades Firms</u>	<u>Marine / Manufacturing</u>
<u>Composite Energy Technologies</u>	<u>Manufacturing</u>
<u>Flux Marine</u>	<u>Marine Technology</u>
<u>Stop &amp; Shop</u>	<u>Retail</u>
<u>FCC Bristol</u>	<u>Nonprofit / Community Services</u>

**For Discussion/Input from Planning Board members / Stakeholders**

*Which businesses / industries sectors are most important to Bristol's economy today, and which are growing or declining?*

*Are there specific areas or properties in town where economic activity is changing and/or that may be suitable for reinvestment or adaptive reuse?*

*What opportunities do you see for the Town to better support existing businesses or key local industries (e.g., marine trades, tourism, blue economy, small businesses)?*

*What barriers (regulatory, permitting, infrastructure, etc.) make it harder for businesses to operate or grow in Bristol?*

*Are there specific programs, incentives, or partnerships the Town should strengthen or develop to support local economic development?*

**State Standards and Guidance for Economic Development** *(for reference purposes not for inclusion)*

Standard 6.1 Describe the types and patterns of economic activities that exist within the municipality.

- a. Identify the business and industry sectors within the municipality that are significant employers, large revenue generators, or substantial contributors to the tax base;
- b. (Recommendation) Include an inventory of significant agricultural operations by identifying: i. The scale of the agricultural sector in the community, including supporting uses such as processing centers, distribution centers, etc.; ii. The locations and types of active agricultural operations; and iii. Farmlands that have been protected from development, even if currently idle.
- c. Identify the business, industry, and agricultural sectors within the municipality that are expanding or shrinking; and
- d. Discuss any areas of the community where the economic activity, including agriculture, is changing, whether in terms of size, form, or nature of activity.

Standard 6.2 Assess and discuss the ways in which the local government can improve the local business climate.

- a. Discuss the significant opportunities that exist to further support the businesses within the community's major or expanding business sectors;
- b. Discuss any issues that may exist related to the services and infrastructure provided for local businesses;
- c. Discuss any local economic or regulatory issues affecting the business and industry sectors within the municipality;
- d. Describe any local economic development plans, programs, or other incentives currently in effect or offered by the municipality; and
- e. (Recommendation) Discuss the opportunities to further support agriculture relative to capacity, access, and partnerships.