



# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND VISION

WORKING DRAFT (9/8/23)

This document is presented in its current form as a preliminary draft for informational purposes only. It is intended to provide an overview of the proposed content and the direction of the Comprehensive Plan. Please note that this draft is subject to further editing, revisions, and updates.

A public meeting is scheduled for September 23rd, during which community feedback will be solicited and considered. Following this meeting, the document will undergo additional refinement based on the input received. This refinement process may include the incorporation of photos, graphics, and other visual elements to enhance clarity and understanding.

As a result, the information contained in this draft may evolve, and new content may be added or modified to accurately reflect the goals, aspirations, and needs of the community. We encourage all stakeholders to provide comments, either in written form or at the Public Workshop, as your input will play a vital role in shaping the final version of the Comprehensive Plan.

We appreciate your understanding of the dynamic nature of this planning process and your active participation in creating a comprehensive plan that best serves the interests of our community.

# 1

# INTRODUCTION AND VISION

The Town of Shelter Island has embarked on a process to update its comprehensive plan which was adopted in 1994. While New York State does not have a mandate for how often a plan should be developed, it is considered to be good practice to update the document every 10 years to reflect current community-established principles for the orderly and balanced future economic, social, physical, environmental, and fiscal development. In essence, the document serves as a roadmap to help Shelter Island to become a more sustainable, equitable, and livable community.

Adopting a comprehensive plan is important for several reasons:

## **Provides a clear vision:**

This new plan outlines Shelter Island's vision for the future and provides a framework for decision-making, ensuring that the community's needs and aspirations are reflected in all policies and actions taken by the local government. In pursuit of a fair and effective plan, stakeholders should recognize that this process is inherently political, meaning that many differing views, values, and interests must be considered and that the results will affect people differently. The planning process provided many opportunities for engagement and input from the community in an effort to help build consensus among stakeholders with different perspectives and interests.

## **Promotes coordinated development:**

A comprehensive plan helps to avoid haphazard development that may lead to sprawl, congestion, and other problems, by guiding the location, design, and intensity of land uses and infrastructure. It also helps to establish the rationale for zoning decisions which help to ensure that future development is consistent with the community's overall goals and vision.

## **Facilitates decision-making:**

A comprehensive plan provides a basis for informed decision-making by the local government, enabling officials to evaluate proposed developments and initiatives against the municipality's overall goals and priorities. It can also help the municipality to secure funding for infrastructure and other projects.

This Comprehensive Plan represents much time and effort, and is the continuation of a process that involves assessing existing conditions, and changing regulations and procedures where needed. Some of these changes will require further, more detailed studies and plans. Sustained public involvement is necessary to bring the items in this plan to fruition.

The document is divided into 11 topics and two appendices containing an Implementation Matrix and important supporting documents, some of which are part and parcel of the Plan. There is some duplication between chapters, done for clarity, but there should not be conflict between them. The Implementation Matrix is in effect, a “To Do” list of specific tasks, each with a responsible party, a proposed timeframe, and a rating system to outline complexity and expected expense. This roadmap enables the Town to review and report on the progress of this Plan’s action items.

### Regional and Local Context

As shown in Figure 1, Shelter Island is situated between the North Fork and South Fork of Long Island and is separated from them by Shelter Island Sound, Gardiners Bay, and other water bodies. Shelter Island is the smallest of the 5 towns on the East End of Suffolk County.

Numerous distinct neighborhoods, including many with homeowners associations, comprise Shelter Island. The Island also includes Dering Harbor, one of the smallest incorporated villages in New York State with 50 residents (2020 Census). The relationship between the village of Dering Harbor and the rest of Shelter Island is that of a municipality within a larger administrative unit. Dering Harbor has its own local governance and is responsible for local matters like zoning, regulations, and other village-specific affairs. However, broader island-wide matters might fall under the jurisdiction of the Shelter Island Town government.



### PRIOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

In 1994, the Town’s adopted its first Comprehensive Plan. That plan projected housing growth from 2,200 units in 1990 to 3,000 housing units by 2010 (vs. actual 2010 units of about 2,600). Even though growth rates moderated somewhat, many of the issues discussed in the 1994 plan, such as economic development, housing, Town services, taxes, environmental protection, and water supply are still relevant.

In 2008, the Town Board formed a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee to review progress on implementing the 1994 plan and draw up a fresh list of actions to achieve its goals. The Committee developed a detailed Vision Statement focused on protecting the Island’s unique character and quiet sense of place, and highlighting the threats posed by social, environmental, and economic trends. The 2008-2009 plan update recommended a list of 39 “new or renewed” initiatives, ranging from protection of marine waters and aquifers to strategies for economic development, transportation, community facilities, and zoning. While the plan update was not adopted, it continued to inform the work of Town departments and committees in the following decade. Both the 1994 Comprehensive Plan and the 2008 update were reviewed in the production of this update.



FIGURE 1: REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

## PLANNING PROCESS

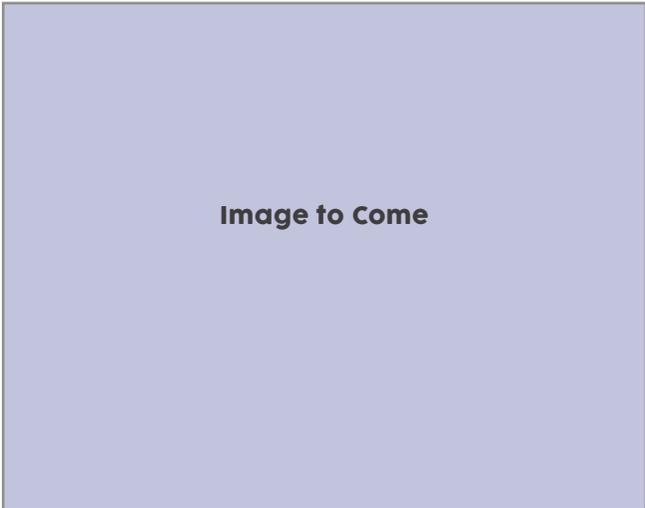
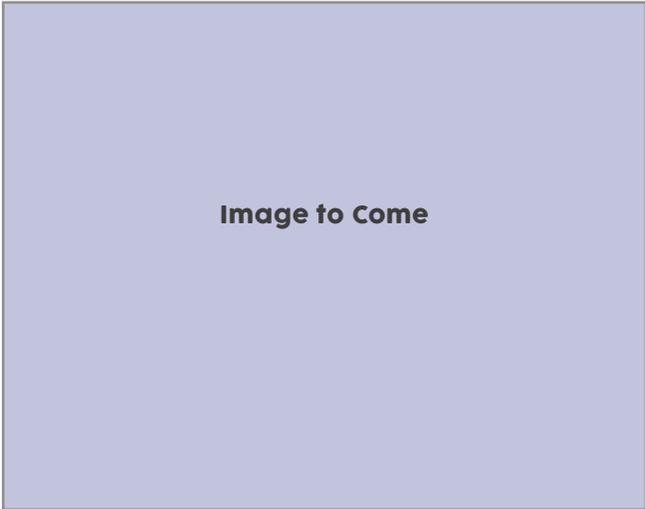
This Comprehensive Plan was formed through a community-led effort which began in 2020. The planning process involved a series of community workshops, forums, and studies, all of which contributed to the drafting of this document. The process was managed by a Comprehensive Plan Task Force (CPTF), comprised of two Town Board members and a Planning Board representative who worked regularly with the Town’s planning consultants to plan for meetings, provide background information, and review reports as needed. The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) met regularly to review drafts, provide feedback, and contribute ideas to ensure that the plan reflects the values and aspirations of the community. This plan was developed in three distinct stages, which are described below.

### Stage 1: 2020-2021

In this stage, the Town began the planning process which introduced the CPTF, the CPAC, and the consultant team – Dodson and Flinker, Inc. and Larissa Brown + Associates LLC.. In the first year of the process, Dodson and Flinker completed a public survey, 2 public workshops, a SWOTCHI (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats, Challenges, Imperatives) Analysis, an existing condition report (Shelter Island 2020), and conducted numerous meetings of the CPTF, CPAC, and with Town staff and other community stakeholders. In the middle of 2021, 2 of 3 CPTF members resigned, and the project stalled until the Town Board could re-establish the Task Force. The Town released the original consultants from their contract because the future of the plan was unsure. A synopsis of work completed in 2021 is below.

#### Public Survey

A public survey was conducted in early 2021 to help identify key issues to address, to gather information and ideas about the Island’s defining strengths and weaknesses, and to get a general sense of what is important to Shelter Islanders. The survey was not meant to be a vote or referendum on issues, but rather to clearly identify the range of issues that people care about so that nothing was overlooked in the planning process. The survey was heavily publicized through the town website, local social media, print media, email distribution using a



variety of email lists maintained by local organizations, and a direct mailing to every mailbox in the Town of Shelter Island. The 1,013 responses included self reporting of age, income and education levels, housing tenures (rent, live with family or friends, own), short- and long-term residents, and various connections to the Island (visitors, people who live here a few months of the year, people who live here most of the year).

Overall, the survey provides a rich tapestry of information about the opinions of respondents, what they value about the Island, what their concerns are, and which topics may be worthwhile focus areas for the Comprehensive Plan. A summary report of survey results can be found on the Town’s website.

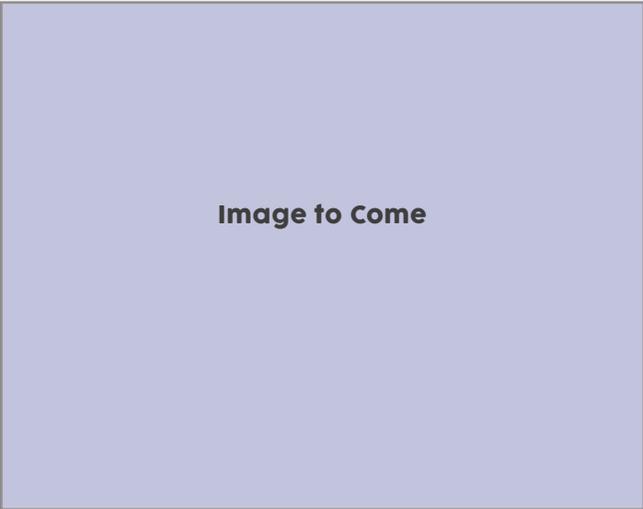
**Two Public Workshops**

The original consulting team conducted two community-wide workshops. The first was held on March 18th, 2021 to introduce the project and discuss the Plan’s draft vision. A second workshop was held on April 22nd to present results of the public survey to conduct a SWOTCI assessment.

**SWOTCI Synthesis Report**

Dodson and Flinker incorporated feedback from the community and stakeholders into a SWOTCI report. The purpose of a SWOTCI is to create a coherent framework to analyze issues and opportunities. This allows for an objective analysis of each factor, including positive elements that the Town can build on, and negative factors that need to be addressed. It also intentionally separates those internal factors over which the Town has direct control from those external factors it cannot control but to which it must react.

The *SWOTCI Synthesis Report*, which can be found on the Town’s website, includes a look back at SWOTCI analysis in previous Comprehensive Plans, and presents a synthesis of the 2020-2021 results from the first survey, the first public workshop, stakeholder interviews conducted thus far, feedback on the Shelter Island 2020 report, and input from the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) and Comprehensive Plan Task Force (CPTF).



### **Shelter Island 2020**

*Shelter Island 2020* is a profile of existing conditions. It was developed as an interim document to present a summary of existing conditions, issues, and opportunities. This report compiles existing data about the Island from numerous sources, including publicly available data such as the US Census; data maintained by the Town, including Police reports and the Assessor's database; and previous plans prepared by the Town or Suffolk County. First-hand information was gathered from interviews, conversations, and meetings with Town staff, community members, and representatives of Shelter Island organizations. This 2020 profile of the Island establishes a common set of facts that the community as whole can use as the basis of discussions and decision making in the upcoming phases of the Comprehensive Plan Update. It tries to answer the question "where are we now?"

### **Stage 2: 2022**

In this stage, members of the CPTF compiled previously completed work by Dodson and Flinker into 12 draft chapters, which were posted to the Town's website in late 2022. This planning process include numerous meetings with stakeholders and the CPAC to confirm goals and objectives. The monthly CPAC meetings were open to the public either in person or on Zoom and recordings were posted online. Several public meetings were held to discuss various topics covered in the plan:

- Public Workshop on July 18, 2022
- Pop-up meeting at the Green Expo on August 22, 2022
- Public Workshop on September 26, 2022
- Small group discussions on October 24, 2022
- Public Workshop on November 28, 2022

### **Stage 3: 2023**

BFJ Planning was hired by the Town to edit the document and complete the planning process. During the period, the CPAC continued to assess the CPTF's drafts and report back with comments. 118 written comments were received from the CPAC and other members of the community through June 2023. BFJ Planning and CPTF members attended CPAC meetings to discuss content to be incorporated into the document. BFJ and the CPTF

also met with various community stakeholders to discuss issues and opportunities. A virtual public meeting was held on August 24th to present draft recommendations to the community. 88 people were in attendance. A summary of this meeting can be found on the project website.

In September, draft chapters were posted to the project website. A public meeting was held on September 23 to give the public another opportunity to comment on priorities for the plan.

**THIS WILL BE  
UPDATED AS  
COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT  
CONTINUES**



## VISION

This Vision Statement sets forth the kind of community the Town of Shelter Island would like to be in ten to twenty-five years. First and foremost, Shelter Island is defined by its unique character with only water connections to the North and South Forks of Long Island. In addition to its geography, the Island’s natural and cultural resources are critical as is its population (an interdependent mix of year-round and part-time residents, working persons and retirees, second homeowners, renters and summer visitors) in defining the identity of the Island. Shelter Island still affords a sense of community that is relatively rare on Long Island’s East End.

The people of Shelter Island have traditionally valued smallness of place and exhibited a cooperative spirit blended with an element of independence. Many Islanders value the long history and cultural resources of the Island and show a high level of volunteerism. Islanders support transparent and responsive government, the school, library, fire protection and emergency services. While

residents value individualism, the rights of the general public are vital to maintaining a healthy community. It is understood we cannot live on an island within an island - a collaborative effort is needed to address issues the Town faces now and into the future.

As members of the global community as well as Islanders, there is a need to include ‘sustainability’ thinking in our everyday policies and practices, as climate change and uncontrolled growth threaten to undermine the very qualities that make Shelter Island special. A planning challenge is to assure that the growth which results from being attractive does not destroy that which makes the Island desirable or exceed its sustainable capacity.

As we move forward, we will utilize the following guiding principles to help us define goals, recommendations, action items and implementation plans.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These guiding principles are inherent in and overlap across multiple chapters and should guide the specific goals and objectives that follow in those chapters.

Exercise **responsible stewardship** for the natural and cultural resources which give the Island its distinctive character and significance. These cultural and natural resources that are enjoyed by all – fresh and salt waters, vistas, parks, and cultural institutions - should be considered when establishing goals and objectives. Of critical importance is our fragile aquifer.



Increase the **resiliency of the Island to climate change and sea level rise** by implementing appropriate adaptation measures. By acknowledging that we are only accessible by water and at its mercy, we recognize the need to mitigate the negative effects of sea level rise through infrastructure improvements and conscientious changes made by homeowners living in sensitive coastal areas. These changes will require community-wide commitment and support.



Maintain a **vibrant year-round island community** that meets residents' economic and social needs. We recognize that growth and economic opportunities are necessary to sustain a year-round island community, but this should not come at the expense of our natural and cultural resources. This goal is only achievable by giving due consideration to year-round employment and attainable housing opportunities, high quality community services and a strong public school system while maintaining low housing density in ecologically sensitive areas.



**Motivate and enable upcoming generations** to be part of Shelter Island's future (including its town governance) through education, economic development, housing efforts, and by encouraging early involvement in municipal operations, and the volunteer work of local boards, committees, and services. Shelter island's history and sense of community is strengthened by providing a future on the Island to the children who have grown up, summered, or who have family roots here.



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