

State of the Greater Newport Economy: Momentum and Opportunity

February 2025



GREATER NEWPORT
Chamber of Commerce



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Executive Summary

The Greater Newport Economy has emerged relatively strong since the global pandemic tested the resilience of the business community and residents of the region. The analysis and information obtained for this report point to a few key themes.

Sector Growth

- The Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sectors demonstrated the greatest growth by both number and percentage (an addition of 2,083 jobs and 64% growth). This growth outpaced the trend in RI and the US as a whole.
- Overall, the region has added 3,306 jobs since January 2020, a 4.9% rate compared to the state's 5% job growth rate.

Educated and Changing Workforce

- The percentage of residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher is above 50%, which is at least 10% greater than that of RI and even more than that of benchmark regions.
- The % of people who live and work in Newport County is decreasing, which means more people are commuting to the region for work, most likely due to housing market challenges.
- The region grew by 4% over the decade but also has 4,609 fewer 'prime working age' residents under age 54. While several factors are contributing to this change, it lessens the ability of regional employers to find workers in the region.

Housing Trends

- There has been significant growth in median household income as well as median housing values, with Greater Newport somewhat less than many peer regions.

The Voice Of Small Business - Business Walk and Survey

- Business owners told us about a strong 2024, not without the challenges of recruiting workers and dealing with rising costs.
- The region's businesses are more confident in their current and future business outlook than their statewide and national peers.

About this Report

The following report highlights data on the economic performance of the Greater Newport economy. This information was commissioned by the Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce through their regional economic development initiative Connect Greater Newport. Their consulting partner Fourth Economy provides the data analysis and report development and is available to provide additional information upon request. The work of the Connect Greater Newport committee and information on their discussions follows.

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Greater Newport Demographics

The Region's Workforce

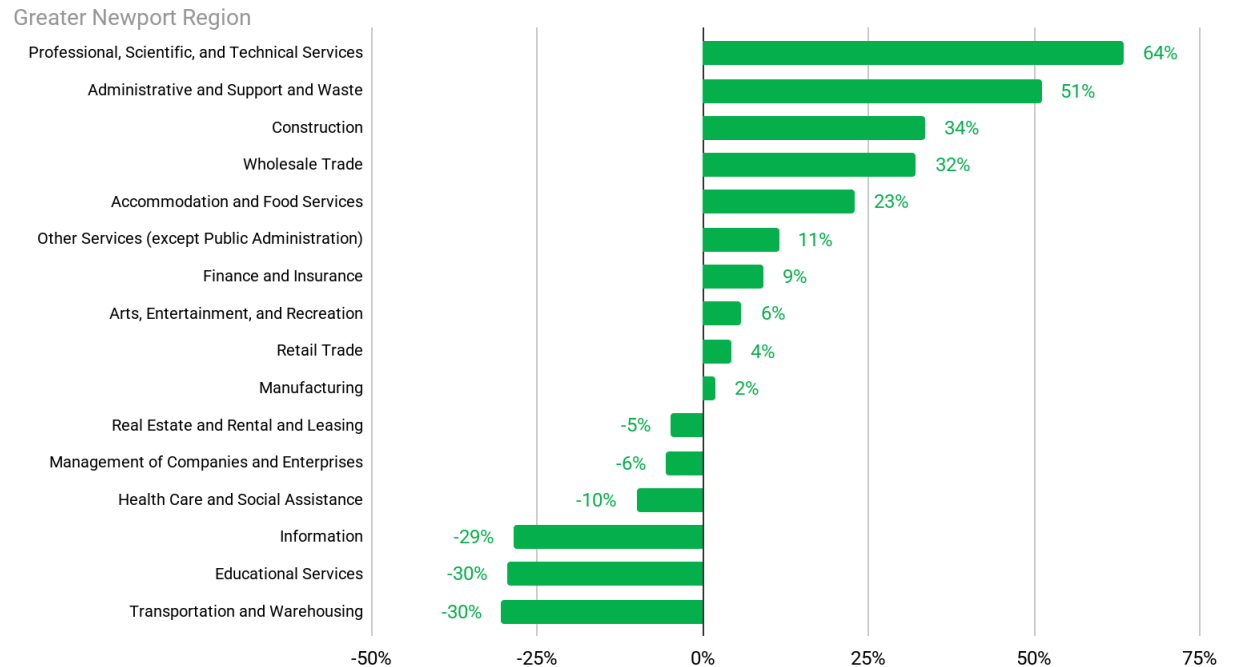
The Greater Newport region has seen similar employment growth as the State overall. From January 2020 to December 2023, the Greater Newport region has added **3,306 jobs (66,950 to 70,256) for 4.9% growth.**¹ By comparison, the state saw 5% job growth during the same period. However, the region experienced higher wage growth compared to the state at 18% growth from 2019 to 2023 compared to 17% for the state.

Growing Industries in the Region, 2013-2023²

10 industries in the Greater Newport Region experienced growth from 2013 to 2023, with those jobs in the **Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services demonstrating the greatest growth by both number and percentage (an addition of 2,083 jobs and 64% growth).**

Growth in this sector is driven by the presence of Naval Station Newport and the contractors that serve its operations, as well as the desirability of the region for more senior professionals.

Growth by Industry, 2013 to 2023



¹ Source: [Unemployment Rate/Labor Force Statistics \(LAUS\)](#)

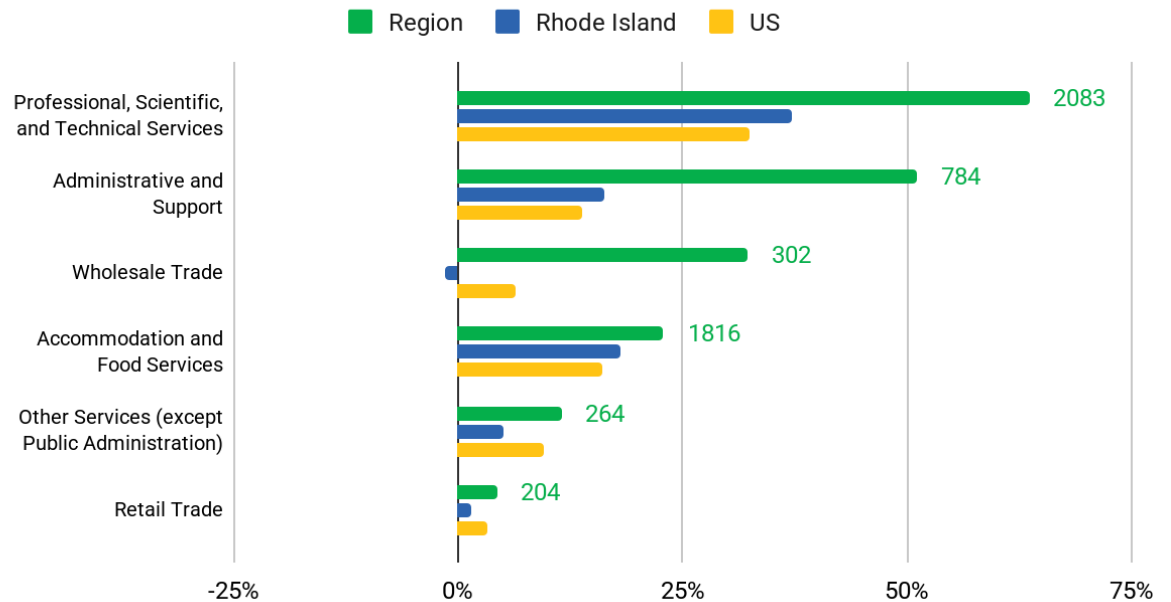
² Source: U.S.Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, LEHD - Quarterly Workforce Indicators

Of 10 industries in the Greater Newport region that saw growth over the last decade, 6 of these also experienced growth that outpaced the sectors' respective US averages.³

The surge in Professional Scientific and Technical job growth is impressive and a turnaround from the 2008-2018 period documented as part of the 10-Year Economic Development Strategy published in 2021. During that period, the sector had added 467 jobs for 13% growth.

With the increased investment occurring at Naval Station Newport and a growing portfolio of Blue Economy businesses in the region, this sector is expected to see continued growth.

Top Growing Industries in the Region, 2013-2023



³ Source: U.S.Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies, LEHD - Quarterly Workforce Indicators

Educated Workforce

The region's residents possess academic credentials at rates above RI and National averages with 55% and 54% with a Bachelor's or Higher degree in Bristol and Newport County, respectively. This compares to RI (39%) and the US average of 37%.

This base of an educated workforce makes the greater Newport region a desirable location for businesses.

More commuters

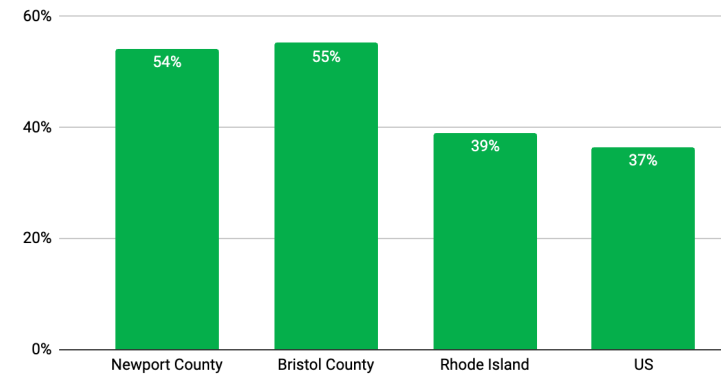
There are 18,537 people who live outside of Newport County but commute there for work, which is known as workforce outflow.

Meanwhile, 19,413 people live in the county but commute outside of it - the workforce outflow. **17,104 residents live and work in the county, a share that has decreased 4.4 percentage points from 2012 and 20.3 percentage points from 2002.** Since 2012, net job inflow and outflow have decreased from -1,914 in 2012 to -876 in 2022.⁴

Workers Employed in Newport County, Living Outside by County

Newport County, RI	17,104	48.00%
Providence County, RI	3,835	10.80%
Bristol County, MA	3,702	10.40%
Washington County, RI	3,275	9.20%
Kent County, RI	2,618	7.30%
Bristol County, RI	2,296	6.40%
Plymouth County, MA	354	1.00%
Southeastern Connecticut	308	0.90%
Barnstable County, MA	217	0.60%
Middlesex County, MA	159	0.40%
All Other Locations	1,773	5.00%

Percent of Working Age Population (25-64 Years) with Bachelor's or Higher



⁴ Source: Census OnTheMap, 2022

Greater Newport Benchmarking

Regional Benchmarking: Comparison and Trends in Key Areas

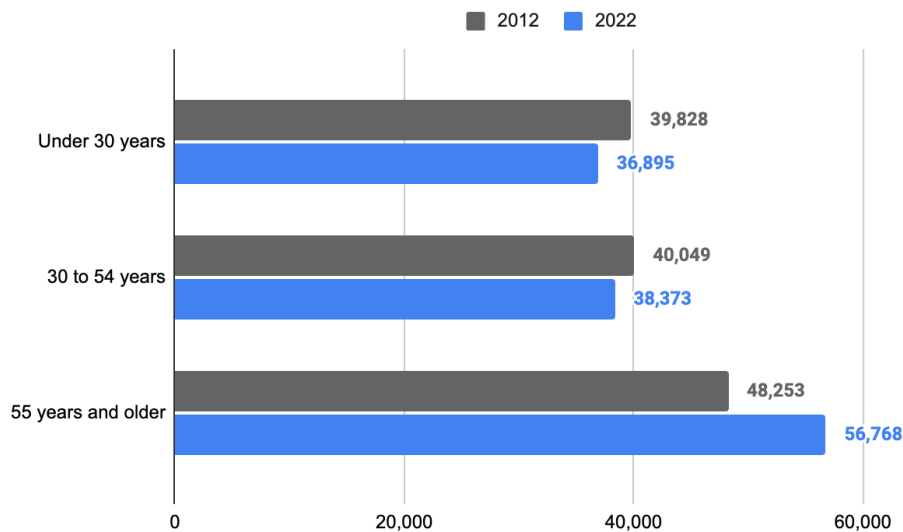
As part of the 10-Year Economic Development Strategy nine regions that possess similar characteristics to Greater Newport were identified. These other metropolitan areas offered similar characteristics as Greater Newport; these include locations that are popular tourist destinations, have a robust military presence, are located on the East Coast, and are relatively close to a major city. Of the nine similar benchmark regions,

Geography	Population	% Non-White	% Foreign -Born	Median Age	% BA+	Median Household Income	% of People Living in Poverty	Median Housing Value
Bristol/Newport, RI	136,100	8.5/13.7	9.9/6.8	43.9/46.4	51.4/52.1	\$105,875/\$96,319	7.2/7.8	\$443,700/\$503,700
Cape May, NJ	95,456	12.7	4.7	50.9	35.9	\$83,870	9	\$372,300
Charleston, SC	409,840	33.1	5.8	38.9	48.1	\$78,795	12.3	\$415,000
Escambia (Pensacola), FL	321,296	34.7	5.3	38.1	28.1	\$61,642	14.9	\$206,400
Horry (Myrtle Beach), SC	356,578	20.9	6.5	47.6	25.4	\$59,880	13.1	\$235,000
Rockingham (Portsmouth), NH	315,169	7.9	4.9	44.7	43.6	\$110,225	4.8	\$424,100
Sarasota, FL	439,392	14.0	12.1	57.1	38.3	\$77,213	8.1	\$338,500
York, ME	212,691	7.3	3.5	45.2	33.2	\$79,743	8	\$323,500
Essex (Gloucester), MA	806,103	27.7	18.5	40.9	41.7	\$94,378	9.7	\$535,300
Chatham (Savannah), GA	296,266	50.9	7.4	36.7	36.1	\$66,171	14	\$256,400

Greater Newport remains the most educated and has the second-highest median household income⁵.

In reviewing the data since this information was first published in 2021, utilizing the most recent data, which was from 2019, the following tables highlight where there have been more significant changes. Population in the Greater Newport region has grown by approximately 4%, which has outpaced or is on par with the other regions except Myrtle Beach, which has seen significant growth. The Connect Greater Newport Housing study has noted that Older adults and retirees are driving population growth.

The region's population grew among adults aged 55 years and older. However, the region lost population for residents aged 30 to 54 years and residents under 30 years old.



Region	Population 2023	Population 2019	Change 2019-2023	% Change 2019-2023
Bristol, RI	50,658	48,527	2,131	4.4%
Newport, RI	85,442	82,472	2,970	3.6%
Cape May, NJ	95,456	93,086	2,370	2.5%
Charleston, SC	409,840	401,165	8,675	2.2%
Escambia (Pensacola), FL	321,296	313,491	7,805	2.5%
Horry (Myrtle Beach), SC	356,578	332,172	24,406	7.3%
Rockingham (Portsmouth), NH	315,169	306,359	8,810	2.9%
Sarasota, FL	439,392	419,496	19,896	4.7%
York, ME	212,691	204,316	8,375	4.1%
Essex (Gloucester), MA	806,103	789,034	17,069	2.2%
Chatham (Savannah), GA	296,266	289,430	6,836	2.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2019-2023 - Census Business Builder

The following two charts illustrate that there has been significant growth in median household income as well as median housing values. While the growth in median household income can be seen as a positive trend and the Greater Newport region is outpacing its peers, the data do not represent a change in continuous households rather, they most likely represent the influx of additional higher wage earners that are replacing others who are not able to afford to live in the region. The Connect Greater Newport Housing Analysis has more details on this dynamic.

A positive note is the increase in median housing value as compared to the peer communities. Greater Newport is on the lower end of increases. It will be important to see how these rates of increase impact workers and new residents in the region and if there becomes an equilibrium between income and housing value increases.

Region	Median Household Income 2023	Median Household Income 2019	Median Household Income % Change 2019-2023	Region	Median Housing Value 2023	Median Housing Value 2019	Median Housing Value % Change 2019-2023
Bristol, RI	\$105,875	\$83,092	27.42%	Bristol, RI	\$443,700	\$358,100	23.90%
Newport, RI	\$96,319	\$79,454	21.23%	Newport, RI	\$503,700	\$387,900	29.85%
Cape May, NJ	\$83,870	\$67,074	25.04%	Cape May, NJ	\$372,300	\$300,500	23.89%
Charleston, SC	\$78,795	\$64,022	23.07%	Charleston, SC	\$415,000	\$315,600	31.50%
Escambia (Pensacola), FL	\$61,642	\$50,915	21.07%	Escambia (Pensacola), FL	\$206,400	\$146,200	41.18%
Horry (Myrtle Beach), SC	\$59,880	\$50,704	18.10%	Horry (Myrtle Beach), SC	\$235,000	\$181,500	29.48%
Rockingham (Portsmouth), NH	\$110,225	\$93,756	17.57%	Rockingham (Portsmouth), NH	\$424,100	\$326,300	29.97%
Sarasota, FL	\$77,213	\$62,236	24.06%	Sarasota, FL	\$338,500	\$251,600	34.54%
York, ME	\$79,743	\$67,830	17.56%	York, ME	\$323,500	\$252,300	28.22%
Essex (Gloucester), MA	\$94,378	\$83,810	12.61%	Essex (Gloucester), MA	\$535,300	\$409,900	30.59%
Chatham (Savannah), GA	\$66,171	\$57,611	14.86%	Chatham (Savannah), GA	\$256,400	\$194,500	31.83%

Small Business Profile

The Newport region **has seen 6.5% growth in small businesses from 2012 to 2022**, a definition that includes establishments in Newport and Bristol counties with fewer than 500 employees⁶.


	Newport County	Bristol County	Greater Newport Region
2022	2,221	1,057	3,278
2020	2,144	1,008	3,152
2012	2,118	960	3,078

As part of its mission to serve the region's business community, the Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce and its regional economic development initiative - Connect Greater Newport, visit with businesses and conduct surveys to understand their needs and opportunities.

Business Perspectives

In late 2024 a business survey was conducted with 122 responses (84% were profit businesses).

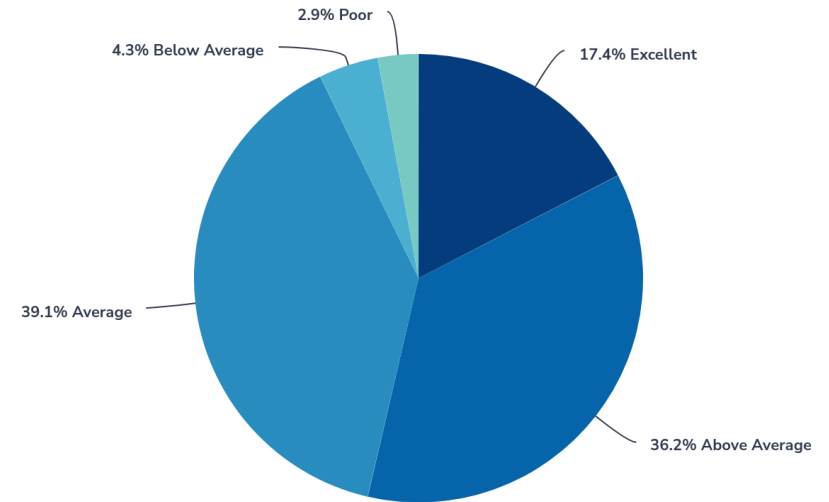
- **Revenue and Demand:** Many businesses have experienced **increased revenue and demand compared to the previous year**.
- **Cost Pressures:** Businesses are facing **increased costs for goods and services**, leading to price increases.
- **Top Challenges:** The **top challenges facing businesses include recruiting and retaining workers, the cost of offering employer-sponsored health insurance, and access to financing and capital**.

Item	Overall Rank	Rank Distribution	Score
Recruiting/retaining workers	1		81
Cost of offering employer-sponsored health insurance	2		63
Access to financing/capital	3		59
Investing in technology	4		50
State regulations	5		47
Housing/transit access for employees	6		34

⁶ Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Center for Economic Studies - Business Dynamics Statistics (2022)

Rating Current Business Performance

54% of respondents would describe their business's current performance as "Excellent" or "Above Average," By comparison, 32% of businesses statewide rated their current performance as "Excellent" or "Above Average," and only 29% of businesses nationally rated their current performance as such.

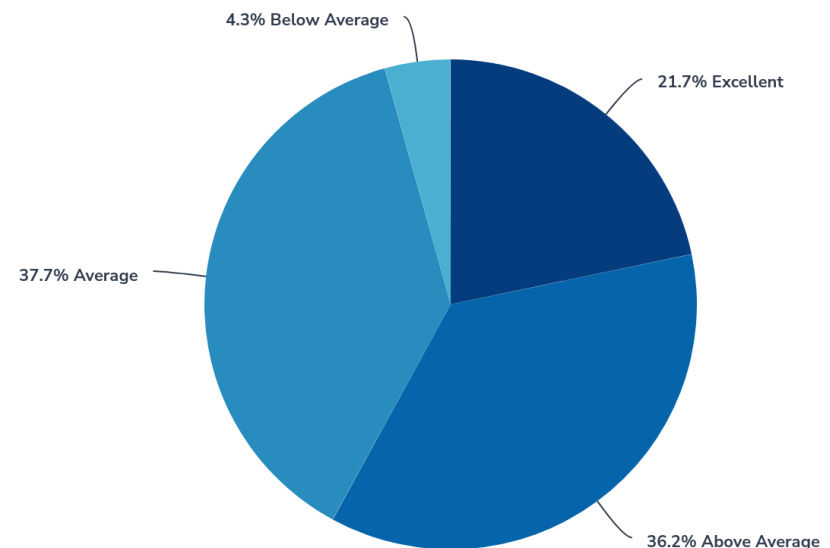


Looking ahead 6-months

58% believe that six months from now, they will describe their business's performance as "Excellent" or "Above Average."

By comparison, 33.2% of businesses statewide rated their current performance as "Excellent" or "Above Average," and only 32.2% of businesses nationally rated their current performance as such.

These findings demonstrate confidence in the business community that should support investments and growth.



Regional Opportunity and Needs Discussions

Connect Greater Newport stakeholders convened on three occasions in 2024 to hear about economic-related activities in the region and discuss opportunities for collaboration. Participants in these sessions ranged from partnering trade associations, service providers, private industry, municipal and state officials, the hospital, and regional universities. The session dates and topics were:

- March 7th: Greater Newport: Center of the Southern New England's Blue Economy
- June 6th: Sustainable Tourism and Transportation Planning
- September 26th: Regional Housing Market Updates

Connect Greater Newport has been hosting these types of convenings since 2019 as an opportunity for regional leaders to hear about recent developments, and new areas of opportunity and come together to discuss what actions we can take individually and collectively to improve the economy and conditions in the Greater Newport Region.



Greater Newport: Center of the Southern New England's Blue Economy

The CGN Committee heard presentations from:

- Peter Rumsey, Peter Rumsey, Chief Business Development Officer, URI Research Foundation - sharing information on the implementation of GrowBlue, the state's Blue Economy Action Plan (Slides [HERE](#))
- Lisa Carnevale, Vice President of Innovation Initiatives, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation - sharing an update on the Southeast New England Ocean Tech Hub and OSW activity (Slides [HERE](#))
- Brian Dursi, Executive Director, Rhode Island Marine Trades Association - updates on workforce and environmental initiatives
- Brian Willians, Chief of Staff at Roger Williams University - sharing updates on a range of related activities underway at RWU.
- Kern Maas, President, IYRS - sharing the latest updates from the school (Slides [HERE](#))
- Michael Semenza, Vice President, University Relations, Salve Regina University, sharing updates on the range of related activities underway at Salve
- Mollie Williams, Director of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, sharing updates on Blue Economy events and programming (Slides [HERE](#))

This meeting covered a lot of ground, and the presentations underscored the existing Blue Economy assets in the region and how the sector will shape the regional economy for years to come.

Some highlights of the presentations and resulting discussion include:

- URI Bay campus - Blue Tech Innovation Center - safe touch-down space for companies and universities.
- Smart shellfish hatchery - Blue Tech Innovation Center on the URI Bay campus as proof.
- Matunuck Oyster Farm - USDA is setting up the Northeast shellfish genetics program here.
- Launched an exciting partnership with Tribe Academy. Nashita described Learn Blue which is working to match talent with high-growth sectors.



- The Southeast New England Ocean Tech Hub was advancing a Phase 2 proposal and seeing increased business activity in the region.
- The recreational marine industry of RI has ~400 businesses with ~13,000 jobs. It has an annual economic impact of ~1.5 Billion dollars
- RIMTA has several workforce development initiatives underway focussed on composites, boat building, machine and marine work and more.
- RIMTA is also working on the environmental impacts of the industry and efforts to recycle shrink-wrap materials and fiberglass vessels.
- Roger Williams i● Aquaculture | Coastal Development | Marine Legal and Policy Affairs
- Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (EPA)
- The link here is RWU navigating at the intersection of the Natural and the built worlds
- It's our sweet spot to be at that intersection of quality of water, life, coastal development, and preservation
- IYRS has an innovation campus that is hosting Safe Harbor Marine and Brooks Marine
- IYRS is also in scaling mode as it works to grow programs and access for students.
- Innovate Newport is a hub of Blue Economy activity with the Founder's Dinners, Blue and You series and Industry Spotlight Series

Sustainable Tourism and Transportation Planning

For this session, we asked three speakers to update us on their work and ideas for the region. Participants engaged in dialogue about what actions we may want to take as a result of what information was shared.

The CGN Committee heard presentations from:

- Evan Smith, President and CEO, Discover Newport: Changing Landscapes of Aquidneck Island and the Region (slides [HERE](#))
- Paige Myatt, Aquidneck Island Regional Resilience Coordinator, Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank: Sustainable Tourism (slides [HERE](#))
- Liza Farr, Supervising Planner, RI Department of Administration, Division of Statewide Planning: RI's Long-range Transportation Plan and Complete Streets work (slides [HERE](#))

Changing Landscapes of Aquidneck Island and the region

Evan's presentation was a fascinating look at recent developments that are reshaping Aquidneck Island. He noted:

- Newport Craft
- Rogers High School development
- New Harbor Facility -
- Belmont Chapel
- Easton's Beach Rotunda
- NOAA facility - hundreds of new families expected
- New bike path
- Hamilton Family Aquarium
- East Main development in Middletown
- Newport Boys and Girls Club -
- And many more projects

The presentation underscores the change that is happening in the region, community by community, without a zoomed-out view of how these developments can enhance the livability of the region.



Sustainable Tourism

Paige provided an overview of climate-resilient infrastructure, connected multi-modal transportation, waste reduction and environmental stewardship. She showcased projects from the region that are good models of these activities and what the region currently has underway. This has included \$24M in Municipal Resilience Program investments for Newport.

- She also noted the need for the region to develop improved mobility to the various places in the region not currently served
- She shared the economic benefits of sustainable tourism and a list of resources to consider/ support, as well as models from other coastal communities.

RI's Long-range Transportation Plan and Complete Streets work

Liz presented on the State's long-range transportation plan and the opportunity to engage. As noted in Evan and Paige's presentations, there is significant change underway and climate impacts will continue to be more severe. The movement of people throughout the region can be enhanced to protect assets and improve livability.



Sustainable Tourism

Connect Greater Newport Advisory Committee Meeting
Paige Myatt, Aquidneck Island Resilience Coordinator
June 6, 2024

RI Long-Range Transportation Plan 2050 RI Complete Streets Plan & Design Guide

Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce
June 6, 2024



Regional Housing Market Updates

For this session, we asked speakers to update us on their work and what areas we should focus on to help improve the Housing Market. Participants engaged in dialogue about what actions we may want to take as a result of what information was shared.

The CGN Committee heard presentations from:

Municipal Planning and Implementation Updates

Patria Reynolds, Director of Planning and Economic Development, City of Newport (Slides [HERE](#))

Lea Hitchen, Town Planner, Town of Portsmouth

Anita Guo, MCRP, Principal Planner/GIS Manager | Town of Middletown

The Housing Market Ahead

Phil Tedesco, RI Realtors (Slides [HERE](#))

State Housing Plan 2030 Updates

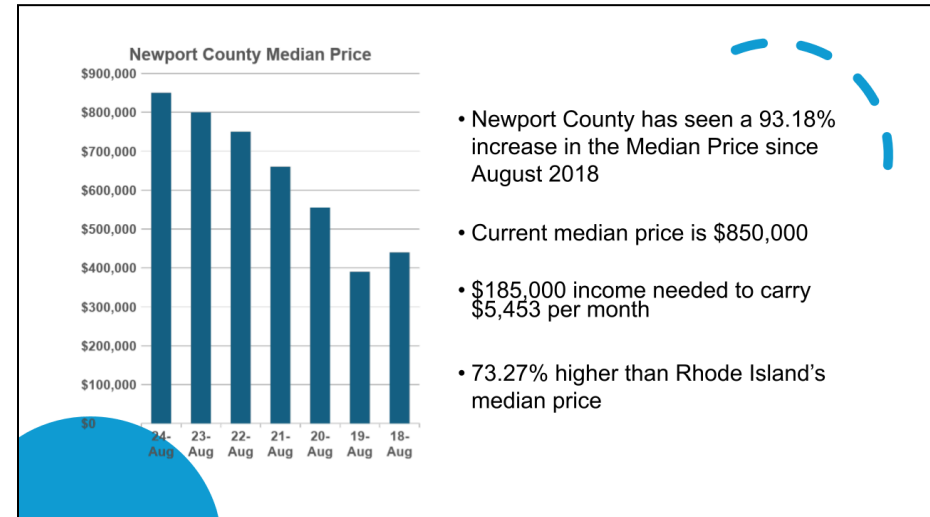
Patrick Duffy - RI Department of Housing (Slides [HERE](#))

Rich Overmoyer also shared a set of updated slides from the regional housing analysis that was updated in June 2024. (Slides [HERE](#))

Regional Housing Discussion Summary

Patricia provided an overview of the recent planning activity that the community has undertaken. The presentation can be found [HERE](#). Some highlights include:

- The majority of Zoning in Newport is R10 which requires 10k sq ft lots. This is despite the fact that the majority of the community includes housing built on lots in the ~4k sq ft size. This means that the existing housing stock is noncompliant with the City's own zoning.
- The recommendation is to adopt r4 zoning to allow for smaller lot sizes which will preserve the housing density of the community.
- There has been a loss of 900 units over the past decade, largely due to conversions of apartments into single-family homes.
- Short-term rentals and 2nd and 3rd homes for people are also removing housing stock available to year-round residents.
- The planning work has identified the build out potential to add 1,500 housing units to Newport.



Lea provided an overview of Portsmouth's planning efforts. The presentation can be found [HERE](#).

- Portsmouth has an aging but stable population base.
- Two mobile housing developments with 287 residents are not included in the affordable housing mix as they are private property on leased land.
- R10 is a similar issue and changes have been tabled for the time being.

Anita provided an update on planning and some recent developments. The presentation is [HERE](#).

- The community is working to address abandoned properties.
- Expecting ADUs to be an opportunity
- Several projects are in development that total 513 units:
 - Rosebrook Commons - 144 Units with 40% affordable with a subsidy
 - Adaptive Reuse 499 East Main Road
 - Oliphant School
 - Green End Ave
 - East Main Road
 - Middletown Center
 - Weaver Cove

Phil provided an overview of recent changes as well as some updated data, the presentation is [HERE](#).

- The recent NAR settlement changed the way that buyers retain real estate services. It is early to tell what the final impact will be.
- To get real-time legislative updates sign up at RIRealtors.org.
- Prices are skyrocketing from 2018 to August 2024:
 - RI Median: Up 78% to \$490,560
 - Newport County: Up 93% to \$850,000
 - Middletown, RI: Up 100% to \$835,000



State Housing Plan Updates

Patrick described the State's 2030 Housing Plan which is currently in development. The presentation is [HERE](#).

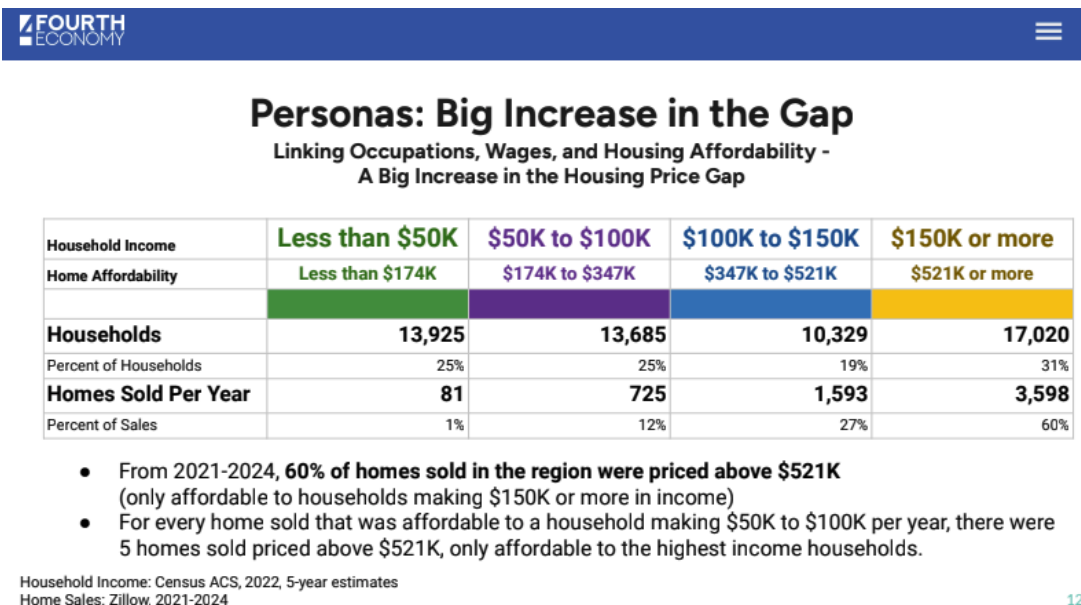
- Lowest per capita permitting of any state

- 2023 did see the most permitting since the Great Recession
- 2006 was the last RI Housing Plan
- A resident survey is currently being circulated (housingri.com)

Regional Housing Actions

Facilitated conversation to identify next steps for collaboration and needs as we work together on this critical issue.

- Is there a way to get a better estimate of how many properties are owned by people who are using them as second or third homes? Possibly, voting records could be used to see primary addresses. This information matters to schools and better modeling of what is available.
- Are there tools to help support the development of smaller units? Tax credits support large developments but what about infill and smaller properties?
- The interplay between taxes, school-age children, and the school district's needs when growth occurs, as well as opportunities for payments to offset the costs of denser development, affects other aspects of community needs.
- It is estimated that the state needs 1,500-2,5000 new units developed each year to catch up with the current and estimated future needs.



12

Opportunities Ahead

The Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce, through Connect Greater Newport, is advancing work to continue the growth of our existing businesses and actions that improve the economic infrastructure to support the attraction of new companies. This includes:

- **Launching an Emerging Market Coordinator** position to support the region's minority businesses and a renewed focus on Business Retention and Expansion.
- **Compatible Use Planning** work focussed on leveraging the impact of Naval Station Newport while eliminating external impacts on base operations.
- Engaging regional leaders in developing actions to improve the quality of life in the region to **support talent attraction** and eliminate growth barriers to improve business conditions.

To discuss how to get involved or how we can help, please contact Erin Donovan Boyle at erin@newportchamber.com or (401) 847-1600.