



EXETER



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Municipal Resilience Program Community Resilience Building Summary of Findings

August 2024



Town of Exeter, Rhode Island

Community Resilience Building

Summary of Findings

Overview

The need for municipalities, corporations, states, and federal agencies to increase resilience to extreme weather events and a changing climate is strikingly evident amongst the communities across the state of Rhode Island. Recent events such as Tropical Storm Irene, Super Storm Sandy, severe winter storms (2013 & 2015), and even the recent severe flooding during the summer and fall of 2022, 2023 and 2024 have reinforced this urgency and compelled leading communities like the Town of Exeter to proactively collaborate on planning and mitigating risks. Ultimately, this type of leadership is to be commended because it will reduce the vulnerability and reinforce the strengths of people, infrastructure, and ecosystems and serve as a model for other communities in Rhode Island.

In the summer of 2024, the Town of Exeter embarked on certification within the state of Rhode Island's Municipal Resilience Program (MRP), a partnership between the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank (RIIB), Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RI-DEM), and The Nature Conservancy. As a prerequisite to certification, the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank (RIIB) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) provided the Town with a community-driven process to assess current hazard and climate change impacts and to surface projects, plans, and policies for improved resilience. In August 2024, Exeter's Core Team helped organize their Community Resilience Building process and workshop facilitated by TNC in partnership with RIIB. The core directive of this effort was the engagement with and between community members to define strengths and vulnerabilities and the development of priority resilience and sustainability actions for the Town of Exeter.

The Exeter Community Resilience Building Workshop's central objectives were to:

- Define top local natural and climate-related hazards of concern.
- Identify existing and future strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Identify and prioritize actions for the Town.
- Identify opportunities to collaboratively advance actions to increase resilience alongside residents and organizations from across the Town and beyond.

The Town of Exeter employed an “anywhere at any scale”, community-driven process called Community Resilience Building (CRB) (www.CommunityResilienceBuilding.org). The CRB’s tools, reports, other relevant planning documents, and local maps were integrated into the workshop process to provide both decision-support and visualization around shared issues and existing priorities across Exeter. The Twenty-Year Comprehensive Plan For Exeter, RI (2024) and the Exeter Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2005 (currently being updated (2024))) were particularly instructive as references. Using the CRB process, rich with information, experience, and dialogue, the participants produced the findings presented in this summary report. This includes an overview of the top hazards, current concerns and challenges, existing strengths, and proposed actions to improve Exeter’s resilience to hazards and climate change today, and in the future.

The summary of findings transcribed in this report, like any that concern the evolving nature of risk assessment and associated action, is proffered for comments, corrections and updates from workshop attendees and other stakeholders alike. The leadership displayed by the Town of Exeter on community resilience building will benefit from the continuous participation of all those concerned.

The Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank is a quasi-state agency focused on financing infrastructure improvements, particularly those addressing climate resilience, environmental sustainability, and public health. The MRP operates under the framework of state and federal environmental policies, including the Resilient Rhody plan, which serves as Rhode Island’s overarching climate resilience strategy. In addition, RIIB's initiatives fall within the legal authorities granted by the Rhode Island General Assembly, including the Climate Change Coordinating Council Act and related environmental protection laws. By participating in the MRP, Exeter continues to build resilient infrastructure that not only safeguards the community but also enhances its long-term sustainability in the face of evolving environmental challenges.

Summary of Findings

Top Hazards and Vulnerable Areas for the Community

Prior to the CRB Workshop, the Exeter Core Team identified the top hazards for the Town. The hazards of greatest concern included flooding of rivers and streams, wildfires and brush fires, and tropical storms. Additional hazards highlighted by participants during the CRB Workshop included hurricanes and major storms as well as Nor'easters and blizzards. These hazards have direct and increasing impacts on the infrastructure, environment, and residents of and visitors to Exeter. These effects are seen in residential homes, natural areas (wetlands, rivers, forests, preserves, parks), road infrastructure, dams, businesses, transportation systems, municipal facilities, social support services, and other critical infrastructure and community assets within Exeter.

Current Concerns and Challenges Presented by Hazards

The Town of Exeter has several concerns and faces multiple challenges related to the impacts of natural hazards and climate change. In recent years, Exeter has experienced a series of highly disruptive and damaging weather events including severe flooding (March 2010, 2023, and 2024), Tropical Storm Irene (August 2011), Superstorm Sandy (October 2012), Nor'easter Nemo (February 2013), and Blizzard Juno (January 2015), severe drought (2016), and significant blizzard (2022). Impacts from Irene and Sandy included widespread inland flooding along with tree damage and associated power outages. The winter storms Nemo and Juno dropped 2-3 feet of snow with 2-3 inches per hour of accumulation at their peak. The magnitude and intensity of these events and others across Rhode Island have increased awareness of natural hazards and climate change, while motivating communities such as Exeter to proactively improve their resilience.

As is predicted with climate change, the impacts from these severe weather events have been varied and diverse. In Exeter, this has included riverine flooding of critical infrastructure, roads, bridges, and low-lying areas; localized flooding from stormwater runoff during intense storms and heavy precipitation events; and property damage and utility outages (lasting several days or more) from wind, snow, and ice. Longer periods of elevated heat, particularly in July and August, have raised concerns about vulnerable segments of the population, including elderly and disabled residents who are homebound,

residents living in older housing stock without air conditioning, lower-income residents who may have difficulty with utility bills for temperature control in their homes, and the residents living in proximity to areas with increased potential for wildfires. The combination of these issues presents a challenge to preparedness and mitigation priorities and requires comprehensive, yet locally specific actions in Exeter.

The workshop participants were generally in agreement that Exeter is experiencing more intense and frequent storm events, heat waves, and cold snaps. Additionally, there was a general concern about the increasing challenges of being prepared for the worst-case scenarios (e.g., major thunderstorms and hurricanes (Cat-3 or above)) particularly in the late summer and in the fall/winter months when more intense storms coincide with colder weather (i.e., Nor'easters, blizzards). Workshop participants also highlighted the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on their community.



Credit: Only In Your State

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges

As in any community, Exeter is not uniformly vulnerable to hazards and climate change. Certain locations, assets, and populations have been and will be affected to a greater degree than others. Workshop participants identified the following items as their community's key areas of concern and challenges across several broad categories.

Municipal Functions, Operations, & Growth:

- Limited potential for additional economic development makes increases in municipal budgets to accommodate new services and resources difficult to envision in the future.
- Primarily a residential community with limited commercial/retail development, which limits revenue towards the Town's tax base.
- Ongoing financial struggles to meet demands of municipality with limited control of expenses given that 80% of Exeter's annual budget is allocated to help run the regional school system.
- Limited funding available to advance new projects and programs and/or secure additional staff capacity.
- Most municipal departments are managed by a single individual, resulting in limited support and an inability to take time off ("always on call"). The demands of grant requirements leave staff overwhelmed, causing a backlog of daily tasks.
- Existing structure of an elected council and mostly single-employee departments presents challenges for the Town's resilience and day-to-day operations. With department heads often managing their own workload independently and without centralized support or guidance, the ability to prioritize tasks can be strained when the needs of residents exceed current capacity.
- Lack of coordination across departments can create additional burden on the Town Clerk, who may not have the authority or resources to address executive-level decisions that arise. Alterations of governance structure to enhance operational efficiency and resilience may face resistance from taxpayers or voters, particularly if it is perceived as increasing costs and/or status quo in Exeter.
- Communication within and across Town Hall and various departments are currently not optimally effective ("people don't talk enough to each other even within departments").
- Communication between municipal leadership and community residents was described as "non-existent" with a Town website that is often unreliable and outdated despite being the only place that currently posts municipal-related information for residents.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Longer-term residents can be resistant to the ideas and approaches of more newly arrived residents for managing on-going issues in Town. New residents have many ideas for change and are challenged by established residents that want to retain the status quo.
- Lack of public transportation system increases and reinforces dependence on privately owned automobiles.
- Ongoing and mounting costs associated with removing downed tree limbs and trees due to high wind events and winter ice storms.
- Installation of solar farms that result in increased runoff and erosion locally.
- Higher rates of school absenteeism during power outages because students remain at home to manage farm issues related to water wells being inoperable among other challenges with buildings, crops, and livestock.
- Currently, Exeter does not have a police department and relies on the Rhode Island State Police to handle local law enforcement issues. Exeter does have a Town Sergeant who is responsible for Concealed Carry Weapons Permits, Vehicle Identification Number verification, and vehicle odometer checks, road details, and house checks. The Town Sergeant also attends Town Council meetings.
- Establishment of a full-time Fire Department and Police Department is highly unlikely due to budget limitations. The Fire Departments rely solely on community volunteers. Note: The Exeter Fire District and Exeter Dispatch are not a part of the municipal government in the Town of Exeter.
- Elderly residents and young families are currently experiencing financial challenges at current tax levels.
- Space in Town Hall is limited and can present impediments to getting work completed.
- Exeter Public Library provides excellent resources for the community but has limited administrative capacity with limited additional time to pursue and submit grant proposals that could enhance available resources and programming for residents.
- Exeter does not have a dedicated grant writer which results in missed opportunities for much needed federal and state funding to bolster capacity (staff positions and/or consultants) and advance priority projects.

Emergency Management & Preparedness:

- Rapidly aging resident population who have limited mobility and are increasingly isolated during and after disasters.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Concerns about routine and longer-duration power outages after major storm events which can present problems for elderly and more isolated residents.
- Growing concerns about the frequency and impact of wildfires in Exeter with little awareness amongst residents of areas more vulnerable than others to loss of property from fire. This is of particular concern to newer developments with higher housing densities in proximity to forested areas.
- Low density and distribution of homes across Exeter creates challenges for timely emergency response in the event of power outages, with the greatest concern being isolation of elderly and those with special/medical needs.
- Exeter Emergency Management Agency does not have a designated Emergency Operations Center which can present challenges to communication and coordination efforts in advance of major events.
- Concerns regarding access and blocked evacuation routes into more remote areas in Exeter in the event of wildfires or other disruptive natural hazard events.
- Aging population that prefers to remain in their homes or are homebound in residences located a distance from the nearest neighbor.
- Increasing threat of power outages lasting more than several days and up to a week which is of particular concern for residents relying on electric pumps for private drinking water wells.
- Ongoing challenges communicating information to residents who don't have or use web-based technology in their homes. During recent wildfires, residences without technology were unaware of the severity of the situation and therefore often refused to leave their homes despite the threat level.
- Declining numbers of volunteers amongst the ranks of the all-volunteer Exeter Volunteer Fire Department with additional training needed beyond structural fire responses to include wildfire fire suppression responses and techniques.
- Large land area coupled with a lack of fire suppression infrastructure such as dry hydrants and water tankers results in the inability of local fire fighters to effectively control wildfires that can then quickly reach overwhelming proportions placing people and property at greater risk.
- Lack of adequately distributed and maintain fire roads to enable better fire suppression operations in the event of a wildfire.
- Increased storm frequency, intensity, and duration can result in greater flooding impacts such as flooding of drinking water well pumps, basement flooding, and dam failures in Exeter.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Ongoing and increasing damage to trees due to insect and pathogen infestations leaving dead and standing trees which pose a health and safety threat if in proximity to homes or roadways.
- Concerns regarding the amount of paperwork and process via Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to recover fully from last Presidentially Declared Disaster in January (2024).
- Exeter Public Library does not currently have a back-up generator and is considered a critical facility for residents as the warming/cooling center during power outages.
- Lack of an updated Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (15 years since last update) has led to Exeter not being able to apply for emergency management related funding over the last decade.

Roads & Road Networks, Bridges, & Dams:

- Potential flooding issues during heavy precipitation events identified at the Boone Lake Dam.
- Damage to Mail Road coupled with increased erosion due to the transportation of equipment by large trucks for a new solar array installation in Exeter.
- Gravel or unpaved roads subjected to extreme weather events such as in January 2024 causes loose gravel to be washed into adjoining waterways which presents environmental concerns.
- Concerns about the safety of bridges built in the 1940s which offer singular access to remote areas of Town. If bridges were compromised by storm events these areas would be inaccessible.
- Roadways identified as at risk or currently experiencing impassable conditions during storms include Widow Sweets/Cobblestone Hill, Kingston Road, Liberty Church Road, Dolly Pond Road, Stony Lane, New London Turnpike, Raymond Potter Lane, Summit Road, Pardon Joslin Road, Skunk Hill Road, Queens Fort Road, Bates Schoolhouse Road, Sheffield Hill Road, Wolf Rock Road, and Austin Farm Road.
- Flooding along the Queens River causes damage and makes the adjoining transportation corridor untraversable at times.

Septic Systems, Drinking Water Supply, & Stormwater Systems:

- Ongoing and growing concerns amongst residents with private drinking water wells regarding the impacts of drought on water availability (“wells are drying up with one month of drought”).

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Potable water sources in Exeter are threatened by pre- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).
- Concerns with contamination and availability of high-quality groundwater to supply all residents private drinking water wells. Two wells at Ladd Center tested positive for PFAS in spring 2024).
- Lack of public drinking water supply for residents on private wells, which is an issue when power outages occur unless private investments have been made in onsite backup generators.
- Culverts in many locations across Exeter are undersized and inadequate to manage the increased runoff volumes from precipitation events.

Watersheds, Wetlands, Rivers, Open Space, Forests, & Trees:

- Accumulation of impacts on forests due to repetitive outbreaks of various blights, pests, and diseases across Exeter and much of western Rhode Island.
- Forest invasive pests and pathogens have growing impacts on income derived from woodlots as well as increasing the forest fire risk.
- Increasing number of incidents with infectious disease from ticks and mosquitos.
- Large amounts of land in Exeter are owned and managed by the state of Rhode Island with limited opportunities for local residents and leadership to have a say in how those public lands are managed.
- Exeter also has large tracts of land that are conserved and owned and managed by non-governmental organizations that are currently not under municipal government control, which is of concern locally as it relates to coordination and response to fire suppression efforts.
- Privately owned lands in Exeter retained by small number of families, and if they decided to sell off the land it could result in a rapid amount of development.
- Stream, rivers, and water bodies are found all across Exeter resulting in extensive and widely dispersed flooding issues.
- Deforestation due to development presents a threat to essential forest habitat in Exeter and western Rhode Island.

Current Strengths and Assets

Just as certain locations, facilities, and populations in Exeter stand out as particularly vulnerable to the effects of hazards and climate change, other features are notable assets for Exeter's resilience building. Workshop participants identified the following items as their community's key strengths and expressed interest in centering them as the core of future resilience-building actions.

- Clearly, the responsive and committed engagement exhibited by leadership, staff, and residents is a very appreciated strength within and across Exeter. Ongoing collaboration between municipal staff, committee/commission volunteers, business owners, land trusts, faith-based organizations, non-government organizations, adjoining municipalities, and various state-level organizations, among others, on priorities identified herein will help advance comprehensive, cost-effective, community resilience building actions.
- Many residents and their families have lived in Exeter for many generations creating a deep interest in the community's long-term vitality.
- Culture of watching out for one another with a strong sense of community, which is shared by most residents.
- State Representatives for Exeter understand the importance of natural resources and environmental strengths that contribute to the overall resilience of the region.
- Due to the small size of the community, there is a direct connection between municipal leadership and staff and the residents of Exeter.
- Exeter has a new Twenty-Year Comprehensive Plan For Exeter, RI (2024) complete with meaningful action steps that were informed by extensive stakeholder engagement.
- Exeter is currently updating its Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2025).
- Ongoing work to improve funding streams and staff capacity in hopes of making the Town function more effectively with more projects being completed.
- Longer-term plans and active fund raising in hopes of acquiring a local facility to be converted to public space to provide additional support and programming for residents.
- Municipality operates efficiently given the small number of staff who are dedicated to creating a better Exeter.

Current Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Town is fiscally disciplined and currently carries zero debt on its balance sheet coupled with accurate forecasting of routine and extraordinary expenses.
- Quick access to Interstate Route 95 with relatively short travel times to coastal amenities coupled with geographic housing advantages such as affordable housing. Exeter met the 10% affordable housing goals set by the state in 2023.
- Concerted effort by Town to attract young families with children, who hopefully will grow up within the community, by providing accessible housing.
- Dedicated social services staff that help care for community needs including the maintenance of a food pantry and programs for elderly residents.
- Highly responsive Public Works Department keeps roads clear of hazards and debris, which has been a challenge over the last decade due to the increased extent and intensity of flooding and storm events.
- Volunteer fire fighters and emergency medical technicians in Exeter are highly respected by residents due to their responsiveness.
- Exeter is a partner in the Rhode Island Statewide Mutual Aid Plan and coordinates fire apparatus sharing in response to local fires as well as with neighboring communities when there is a incident requiring more assistance then a local jurisdiction can provide.
- Town staff have identified many potential projects with co-benefits to the environment and community members.
- Active and engaged Exeter Public Library facility which serves as a community center or hub with outstanding programming especially for children within the community. Library is particularly important due to the lack of a community center in Exeter.
- Public buildings, including the School, Library, and new Town Hall, are all low maintenance.
- Town Council approved the “Village Common Concept” that links skilled residents (i.e., medical professionals, skilled labor (plumbing, etc.)) with those in need within the community, such as preventive medical attention for elderly residents and household plumbing needs.

Current Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Town leadership and residents are becoming more active about addressing issues associated with wildfire prevention and management.
- Exeter's Emergency Management Department has brought together a group of homeowners to discuss wildfire prevention and safety.
- Firewise Program provided by Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Forestry Division and Exeter's Emergency Management Director help residents in Exeter with best practices to reduce threat of wildfire given the extent of the forested areas across Town.
- Good response and collaboration of efforts amongst volunteers in the community during recent wildfires with support from neighboring municipalities including West Greenwich, among others.
- Strong collaboration between Red Cross and Exeter Public Library during last wildfire where people sought shelter at the Library and received attention from Red Cross personnel.
- Schools are used as shelters and have generators to maintain power availability in the event of power outages.
- Exeter has a new software system that allows for more effective communication with residents on issues of timely importance.
- School system has communication system via live feed, telephone, and email to effectively reach parents of children within the system. Teachers also have an app that enables communication with parents of students who are fluent in languages other than English.
- Limited amount of impervious surface due to the limited amount of development and associated pollutants in stormwater runoff.
- Exeter has a large contiguous core forest and associated forest habitat that protects and cleans freshwater for residents and others.
- Private landowners with large tracts of forested lands care deeply about the land and proactively seek out advice on better "climate-smart" management practices from organizations such as Northern Rhode Island Conservation District.

Current Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Given the rural nature of Exeter, the community can think strategically about how to use space without the restrictions of built-out, urban municipalities.
- Residents of Exeter are conservation minded and seek to retain values associated with the Town's rural character.
- Large amount of forested open space offers protection from extreme heat waves and other climate-related anomalies by helping to reduce ambient air temperatures.



Credit: Visit Rhode Island (Wicked Tulips Flower Farm)

Recommendations to Improve Resilience

A common theme among workshop participants was the need to continue community-based planning efforts focused on developing adaptive measures to reduce Exeter's vulnerability to extreme weather, climate change and other common concerns raised. To that end, the workshop participants helped to identify several priority topics requiring more immediate and/or ongoing attention including:

- **Long-term vision and growth** (i.e. responsible/sustainable growth, volunteerism, conservation & recreation, economic development, funding/tax base, water quality);
- **Infrastructure improvements** (i.e. road/bridge/dams, stormwater management systems, green stormwater infrastructure, private drinking water wells);
- **Quality of life improvements** (i.e. parks and recreation, open space & access, sustainability, health & safety, economic prosperity, water quality, education);
- **Emergency management** (i.e. communications, outreach, education, continuation of services, evacuation, vulnerable populations, wildfire).

In direct response, the Community Resilience Building workshop participants developed the following actions and identified, but did not rank, them as priority or as additional actions. Maps provided during the CRB Workshop gathered from the Twenty-Year Comprehensive Plan For Exeter, RI (2024) are provided in Appendix A.

Priority Actions

Capacity Building

- Prioritize efforts and funding to advance the establishment of an Emergency Operations Center for Exeter Emergency Management Agency complete with additional staff to proactively management disasters and other major events.
- Work with Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency to establish an emergency management training program for high school students while simultaneously setting up a Community Emergency Response Team in Exeter.

Priority Actions (cont'd)

- Identify an emergency response team amongst existing municipal staff and work to define what is needed to serve the community more effectively before, during, and after a natural disaster.
- Secure a grant writer for Exeter and work to cover associated staff costs via administrative allocations within awarded grants that will help implement projects.
- Seek out approaches and funding opportunities to increase administrative capacity in all Exeter's municipal departments.

Capital Projects

- Seek out federal funding to bring internet and associated technological devices to residents currently underserved, with special attention directed to families with children.
- Conduct engineering study and look to replace Mount Tom Bridge on the western side of Town which has fallen into a state of unsafe disrepair.
- Identify, assess, and repair antiquated and unsafe bridges in Exeter.
- Work towards securing funding to install a back-up generator at the Exeter Public Library.
- Look to acquire and install back-up generators where needed at all municipal buildings in Exeter.

Priority Actions (cont'd)

Plans/Preparedness/Studies/Outreach

- Identify, assess, and prioritize flood mitigation projects involving replacing/retrofitting undersized culverts and other inadequate flood/stormwater runoff infrastructure in Exeter.
- Create a plan and process for better communications with residents - for example, through a newsletter, emails, text alerts, Facebook page, Town website, etc.
- Complete Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan update currently underway in partnership with West Greenwich as well as look to update Exeter's Emergency Operation Plan from 2004. An Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) serves as a comprehensive guide for how a municipality will respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters. Its primary purpose is to coordinate the actions of local government departments, emergency responders, and community organizations to ensure an efficient and effective response to various hazards. An Emergency Operations Center is where the EOP is implemented.
- Partner with environmental organizations (Save the Bay, Audubon, etc.) to provide educational training programs for community members and high school students on watershed and water quality management and best practices.
- Consider setting up state-wide training programs for students who are looking for careers in landscaping and outdoor labor skills (versus college education) and look to offer career paths for them within Exeter.
- Review existing regulations and policies and strengthen as needed to ensure drinking water resources are protected for residents.

Priority Actions (cont'd)

- Develop an emergency resource guide for residents that explains appropriate responses at the household scale and provides contact information to help ensure residents receive the care and services required before, during, and after major events (i.e., Rhode Island Department of Health Special Needs Registry).
- Convene a forum of large landowners (private property owners, land trusts, etc.) including the state of Rhode Island (Department of Environmental Management) to discuss ongoing fire mitigation operations as well as best preventive fire management practices across Exeter to help reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfires (i.e. Firewise). Firewise USA is a national program created by National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) that addresses the risks to homes and communities from wildfire in the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI). It encourages local community-based solutions for wildfire safety, with the goal of reducing home ignitions due to wildfire.
- Review current ordinances and regulations pertaining to heavy construction and development as it relates to transportation on roads as well as stormwater management, erosion, and low impact development (LID) practices.
- Look to actively participate in the Natural Resources Conservation Services operations and flood mitigation program (PL 566 program) currently ongoing to model watersheds in Exeter for flood protection.
- Ensure that all culvert retrofits, repairs, and replacements are conducted in accordance with best management practices that allow for wildlife and fisheries passage, where appropriate.
- Look to add an implementation action list to the current Pavement Management Plan to include an additional stormwater management assessment and best management practices for bridge repairs.

Additional Actions

Capacity Building

- Examine Community Resilience Building Summary of Findings from neighboring municipalities to find areas of common interest, shared value, and capacity availability to begin creating regional partnerships and networks to collaboratively tackle issues.
- Explore in partnership with neighboring municipalities ways to help Exeter fill capacity gaps, share resources, and create more exchange amongst departments, leadership, and residents.
- Define approaches used in other communities to establish and maintain critical commissions and boards in Exeter, such as the current non-existent conservation commission.
- Identify a program coordinator for Exeter to coordinate with FireWise Program and look to roll out program in areas of Town that are particularly vulnerable to wildfire. A Firewise Program Coordinator is an individual who has expertise in community wildfire risk reduction and are knowledgeable about the Firewise USA® program guidelines, which include educating communities on fire-resistant landscaping, building practices, and other strategies to reduce the risk of wildfires.
- Coordinate assistance to those without access to cars to get to appointments through the establishment of a volunteer committee in collaboration with Rhode Island Village.
- Expand on the current capacity of the Exeter Public Library to increase resources and amenities for residents as the single most important community hub. Add solar panels to the facility.

Capital Projects

- Work to repair gravel roads subject to runoff and erosion during major storm events.
- Fund a state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center/Dispatch Center in Exeter.

Additional Actions (cont'd)

Plans/Preparedness/Studies/Outreach

- Work to improve municipal environmental review and oversight of development-related permitting given the lack of a conservation commission due to the lack of volunteers.
- Town Council and Department Heads could benefit from reviewing current processes and potentially incorporating new technologies to improve processes and communication.
- Establish more outreach and educational forums to help better inform residents about how government operates in Exeter and what initiatives are being discussed and advanced in hopes of fostering greater involvement by the community.
- Look to provide training for residents on tree and forest management in hopes of proactively and collectively reducing risk of wildfire risk across Exeter.
- Connect with state Department of Environmental Management, Division of Forest Environment to determine the location and extent of tree clearing and other preventive forest fire management activities at the Arcadia Management Area in hopes of gaining a better understanding of fire risk across Exeter.
- Secure and disseminate information about pest and pathogen damage on tree species coupled with information on how to best control and manage the results of outbreaks.
- Explore whether there are federal programs that could support the purchase of generators for private drinking water well pumps in rural communities such as Exeter to help ensure availability of drinking water during power outages.
- Review any high-water flood assessments of bridges in Exeter (i.e., Natural Resource Conservation Service list) and generate an update with an emphasis on structures at highest risk of impacts from flood waters.

Additional Actions (cont'd)

- Create greater awareness and develop approaches to reduce the ability of PFASs getting into drinking water in Exeter.
- Look to acquire easements on properties in Exeter that can help to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change including parcels with area adjacent to special flood hazard areas as well as intact forested areas to help ameliorate ambient air temperatures. Work with Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management on open space grants to proactively secure parcels.
- Seek out funding to assess water quality in private drinking water wells across Exeter as well as set up a voluntary reporting mechanism to gain a better understanding of how often and where private drinking water wells are drying up.
- Conduct a Geospatial Information Systems assessment of gravel roads, topography, and wetlands/waterbodies to help determine the best location for interventions to improve the safety and minimize runoff from gravel roads.
- Reach out to adjoining municipalities and state-wide organizations to find out what approaches are being taken to improve sustainability at the local level.

CRB Workshop Participants: Department/Organization

Town of Exeter – Office of the Town Council

Town of Exeter – Emergency Management Agency

Town of Exeter – Exeter #1 Volunteer Fire Department

Town of Exeter – Exeter #2 Volunteer Fire Department

Town of Exeter – Treasurer Office

Town of Exeter – Social Services Office

Town of Exeter – Assessor Office

Town of Exeter – Geospatial Information Systems Office

Town of Exeter – Town Clerks Office

Town of Exeter – Resident

Exeter Public Library

Exeter/West Greenwich School System

Wood/Pawcatuck Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council

The American Baptist Church

Save The Bay

Southern Rhode Island Conservation District

Fuss & O'Neil

Fairweather Science

Exeter Core Project Team

Dori Boardman – Director, Emergency Management Agency, Town of Exeter

Online CRB Workshop Facilitation Team

State of Rhode Island (DEM) - Kim Koriath (MRP Co-Lead)

Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank – Anthony Hebert (MRP Co-Lead)

The Nature Conservancy - Adam Whelchel, Ph.D. (Lead Facilitator)

The Nature Conservancy - Kai Lo Muscio (MRP Coordinator)

The Nature Conservancy – Sue AnderBois (Small Group Facilitator)

State of Rhode Island (DEM) – Jennifer West (Small Group Facilitator)

State of Rhode Island (DOA) – Roberta Groch (Small Group Facilitator)

Rhode Island Food Council – Isaac Bearg (Scribe)

State of Rhode Island (DEM) – Mary Schoell (Scribe)

The Nature Conservancy – Kevin Carter (Scribe)

The Nature Conservancy – Angela Tuoni (Scribe)

Recommended Citation

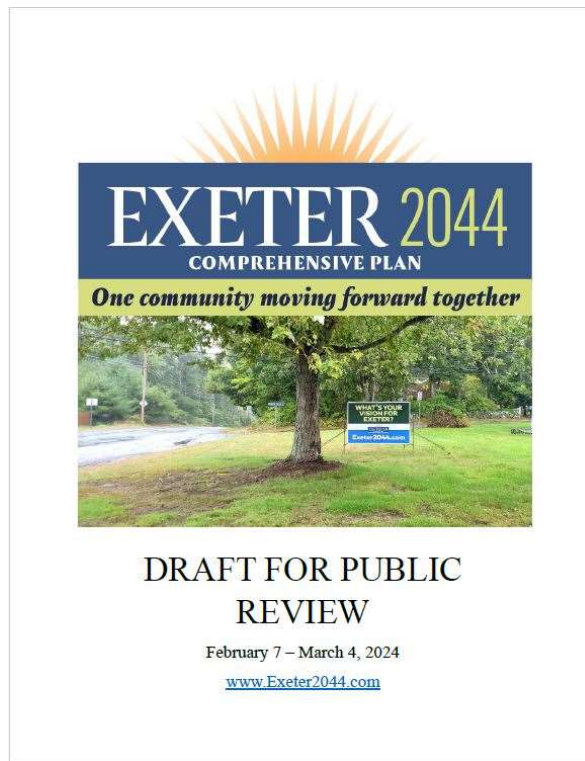
Town of Exeter Online Community Resilience Building Workshop - Summary of Findings Report. (2024). State of Rhode Island’s Municipal Resilience Program. The Nature Conservancy and Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank. Exeter, Rhode Island.

Acknowledgements

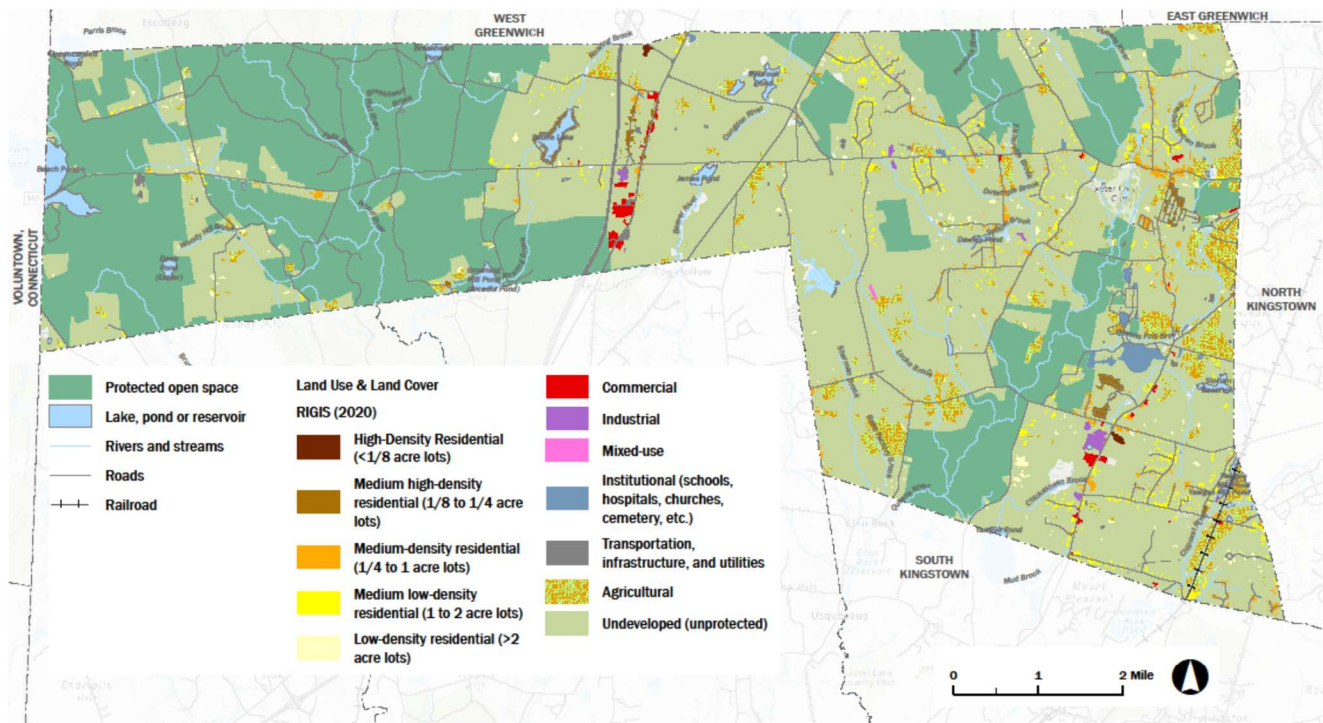
Special thanks to the Town leadership, staff, and community members for their willingness to embrace the process in hopes of a more resilient future for Exeter. This online Community Resilience Building Workshop was made possible in large part through the dedicated contribution of the facilitation team members who skillfully conducted the Exeter Community Resilience Building workshop in close partnership with the Town’s Core Project Team.

Appendix A

Town of Exeter Map Resource Packet* Used During CRB Workshop



***Gathered from the Twenty-Year Comprehensive Plan For Exeter, RI (2024).**



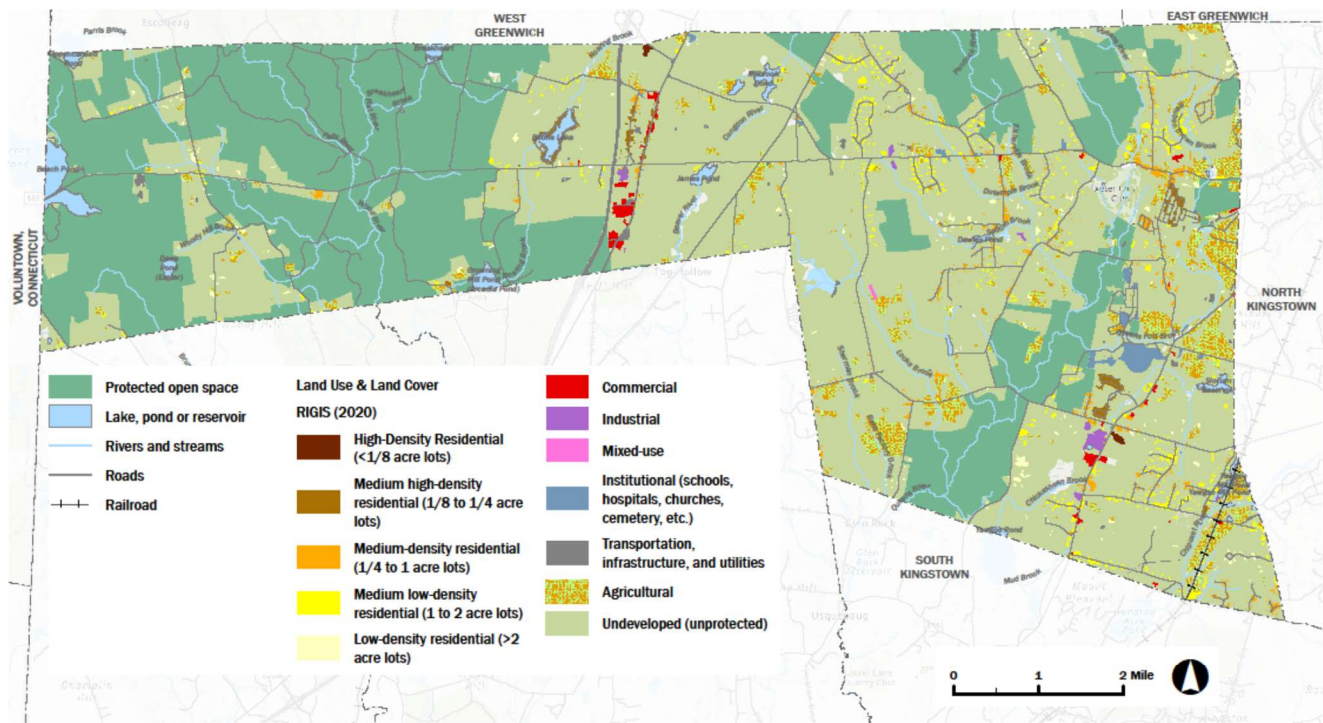
Existing Land Use

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 11, 2024

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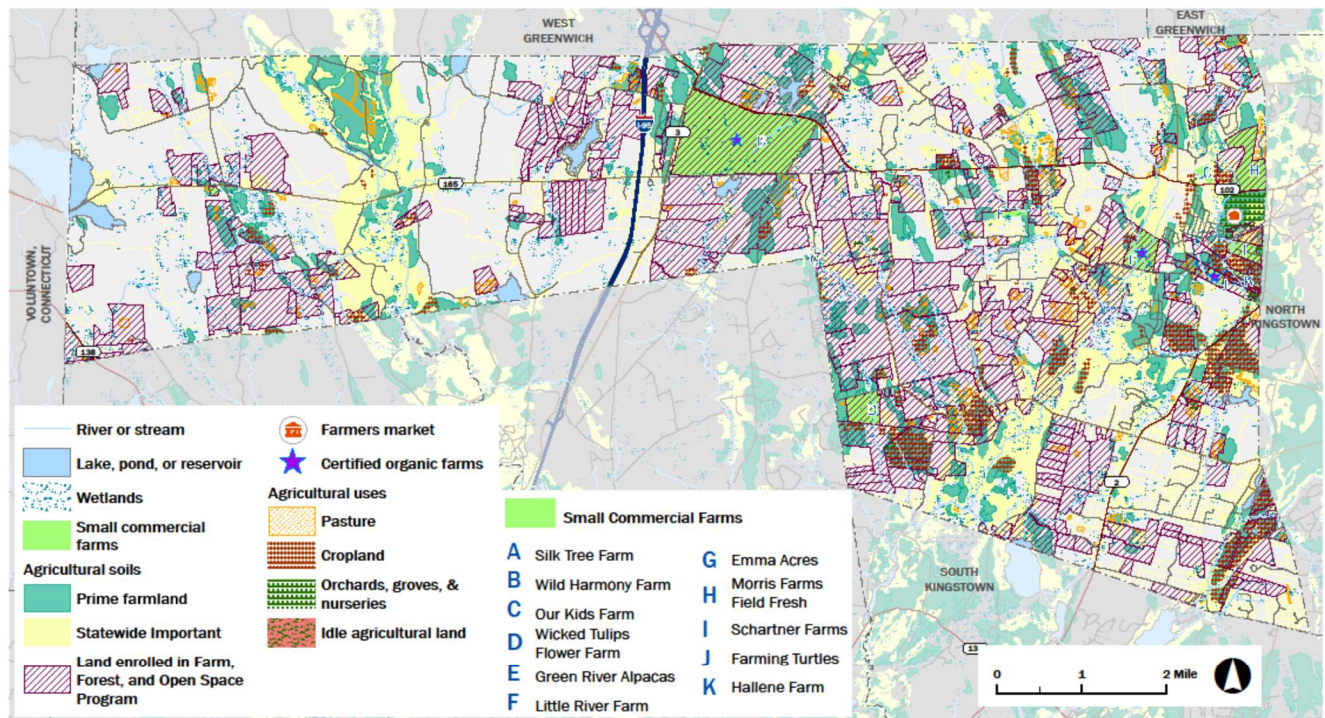
Future Land Use

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 11, 2024

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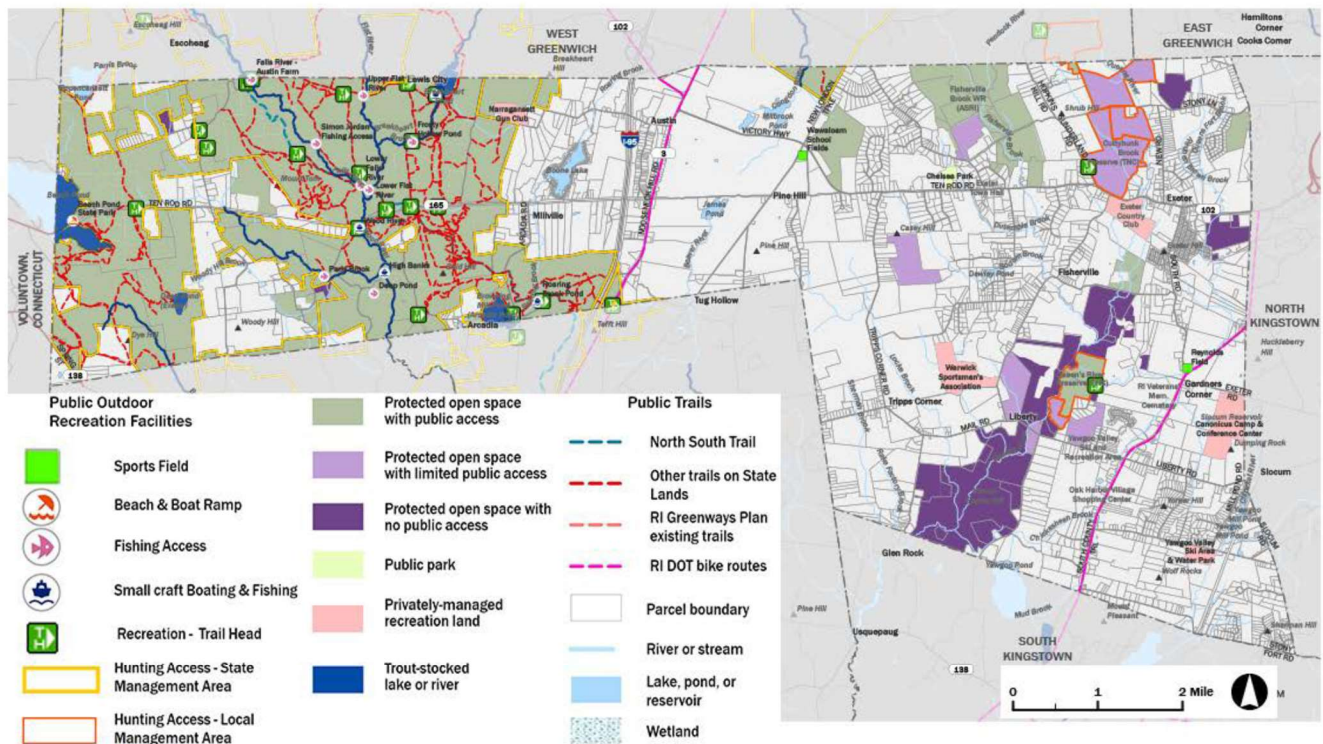
Working Farm & Forest Lands

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 19, 2024

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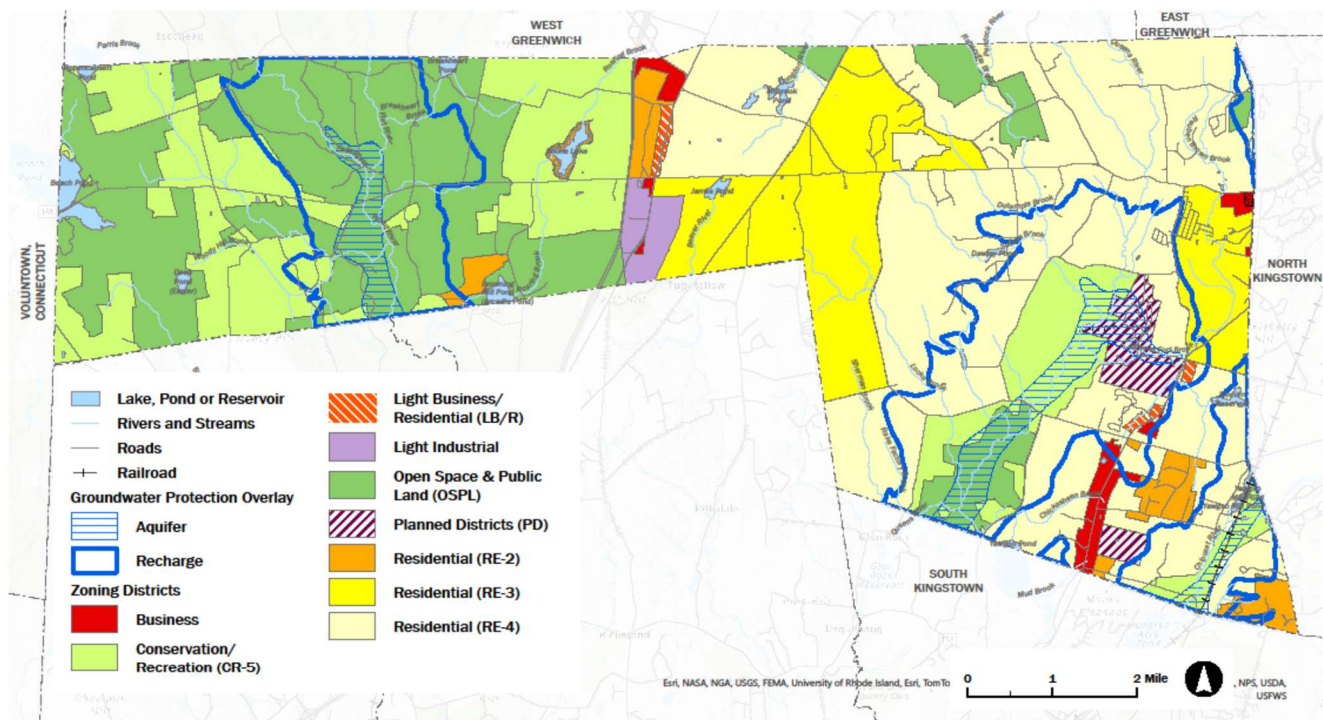
Recreation & Trails

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 18, 2024

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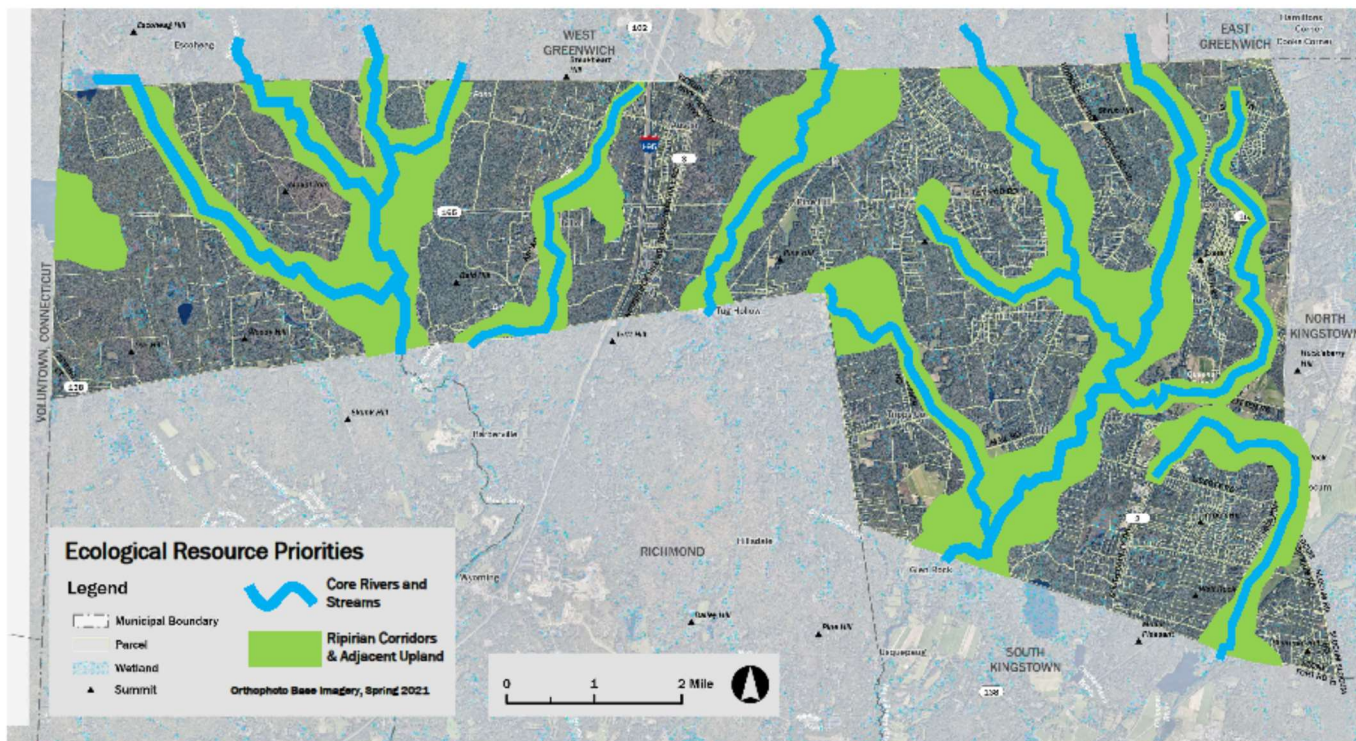
Zoning & Overlay Districts

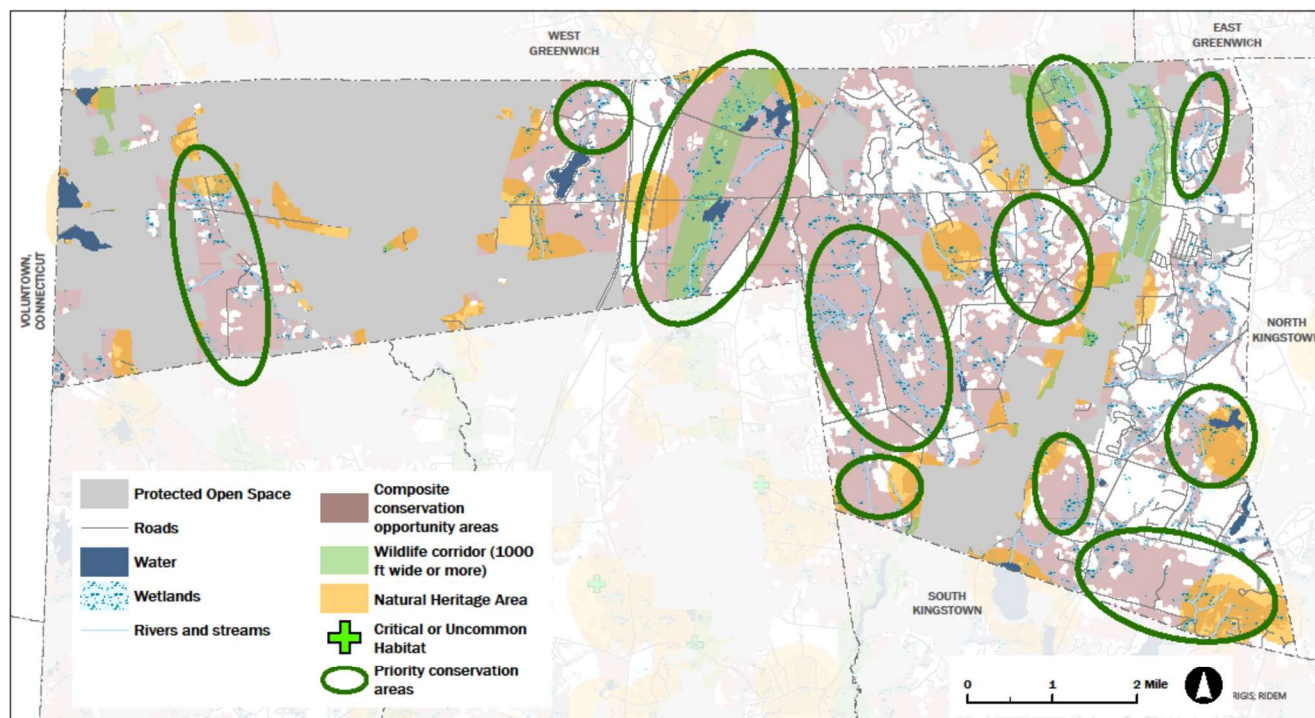
Date: January 4, 2024
Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP

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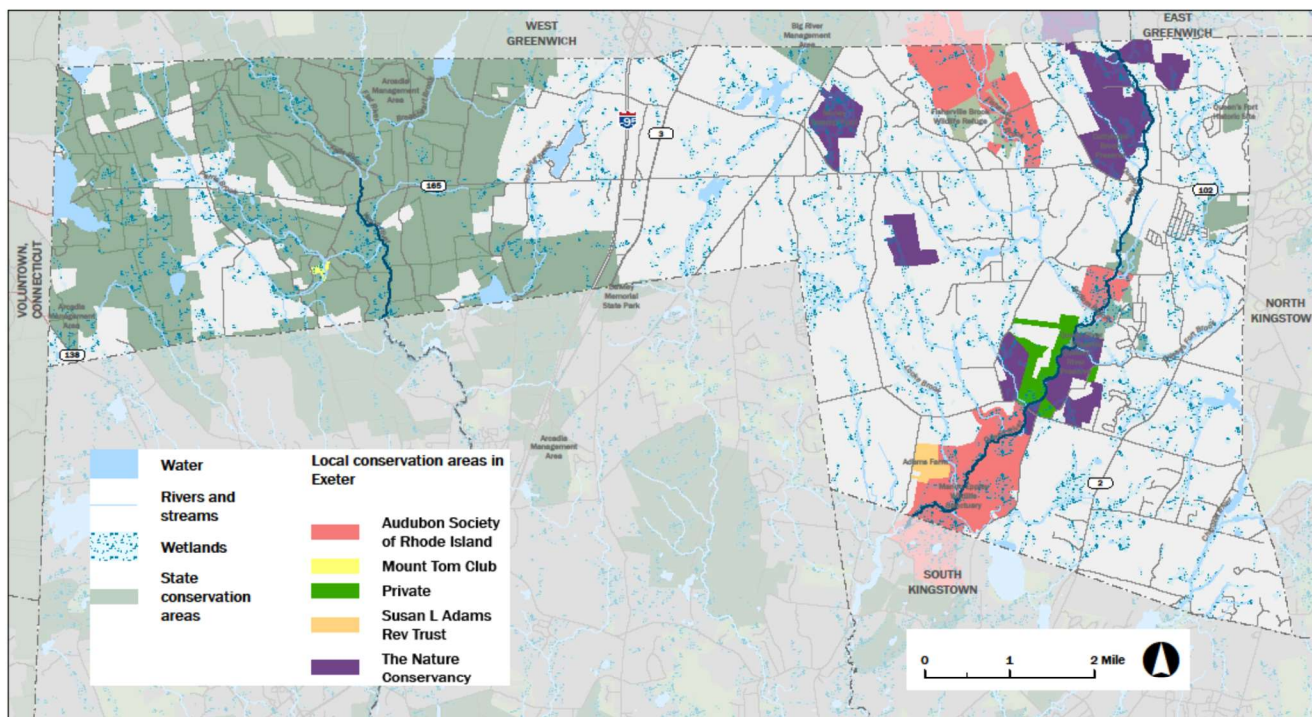
Priority Conservation Areas

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP; URI Environmental Data Center
Map Created: January 4, 2024

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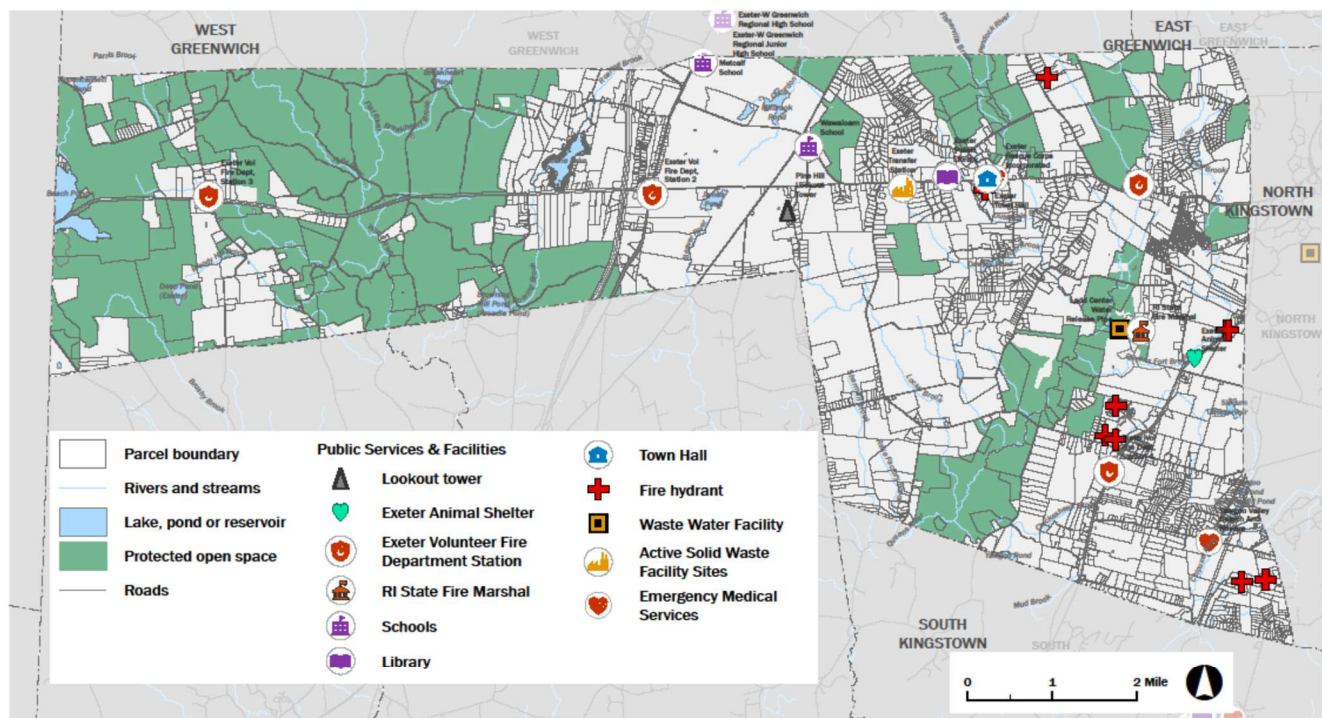
Protected Open Space

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map Created: January 4, 2023

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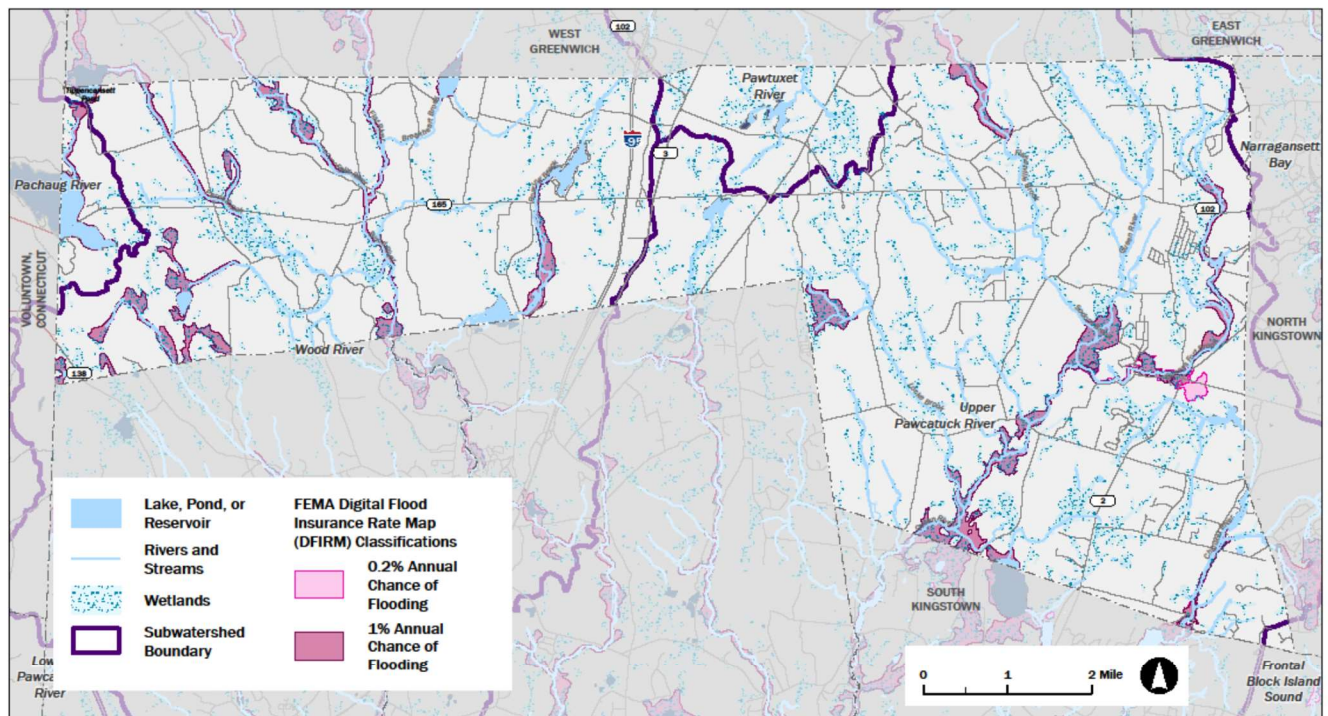
Public Services & Facilities

Sources: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
 Map Created: January 16, 2024

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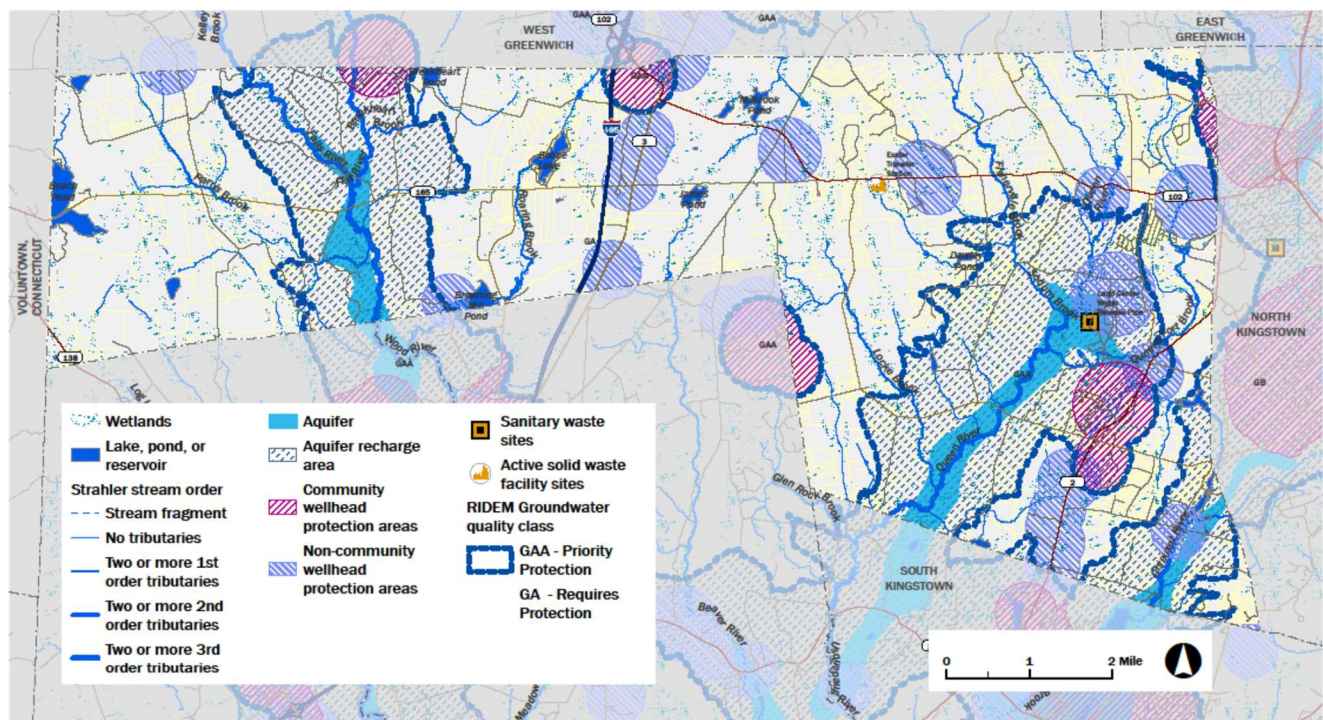
Hydrology & Floodplains

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map Created: January 4, 2024

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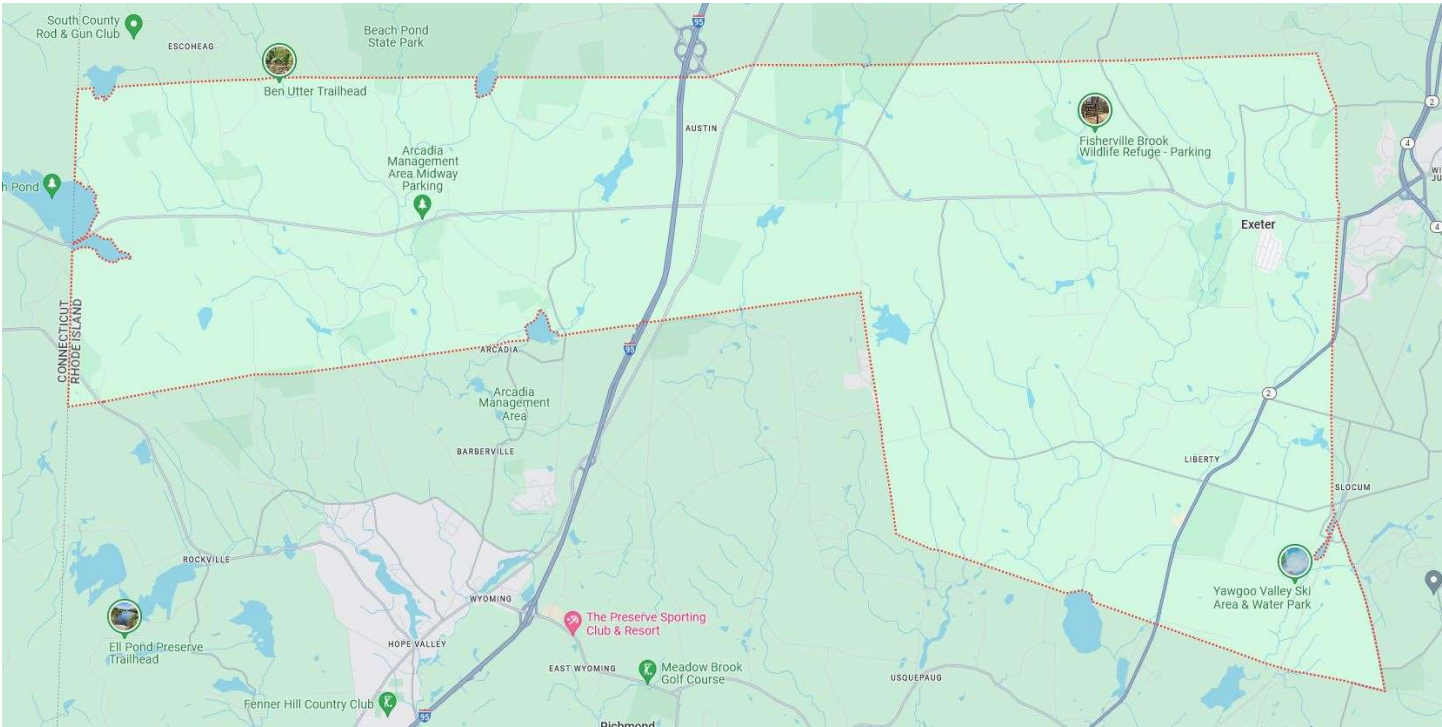
Water Supply Resources

Source: Town of Exeter, RI; RIGIS; Connecticut DEEP
Map created: January 19, 2024

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