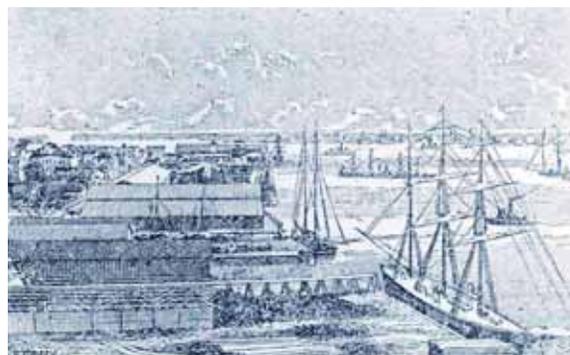




1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

Located in the center of the Hampton Roads region of Virginia (Map 1), Portsmouth is a historic waterfront city with a proud heritage. Portsmouth's last comprehensive plan was adopted in 1989. Since that time the City has experienced significant change. The City's population declined from 103,907 in 1990 to 100,565 in 2000, and key indicators such as the percentage of public schools accredited, per capita income, and median housing value rank below other Hampton Roads communities. As a mostly built out city with a large proportion of property owned by tax exempt entities such as the federal and state governments, Portsmouth has not shared in the growth experienced by neighboring communities with larger amounts of vacant land. Nevertheless, recent developments such as the Renaissance Hotel, NTELOS Pavilion, and Victory Crossing have generated momentum for positive change and bode well for Portsmouth's future.



Historic bird's-eye view of harbor looking north

Given the accelerating rate of transition and change in the City, Portsmouth has chosen to prepare a new comprehensive plan – Destination 2025 – at an important juncture in its history. The Code of Virginia requires each governing body to prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the land under its jurisdiction and generally prescribes the contents of the plan. While Virginia Code provides the legal basis, the Comprehensive Plan can go well beyond the minimum requirements of state law to establish a clear, unified vision and direction for the City's future. To fully appreciate the significance of the Comprehensive Plan for Portsmouth and its citizens, it is useful to consider its four basic purposes:

1. The Comprehensive Plan is a reflection of citizens' values, aspirations, and shared vision.

Just as one would not begin a journey without first identifying a destination, the process of preparing the Comprehensive Plan began with citizens identifying in meetings and workshops the kind of place they would like Portsmouth to become. These citizen-expressed values and aspirations provide the basis for a shared vision of the City's future. Presented in Chapter 2.0, this **Vision Statement** defines citizens' expectations and directions for the future, frames the mandate for the Comprehensive Plan, and provides the benchmark to measure progress.

2. *The Comprehensive Plan is a guide for the management of change.*

If the vision for Portsmouth’s future is to be realized, the Comprehensive Plan must positively and deliberately influence growth and change. To do so, the Plan must be actively applied as a framework through which decisions are made, priorities established, and actions taken that advance the City toward the Vision. While Portsmouth’s government will take a leadership role in this effort, the Plan calls on citizens, civic organizations, institutions, and businesses to coordinate efforts with a shared sense of direction and a renewed spirit of partnership.

3. *The Comprehensive Plan is the foundation for policies, strategies, and actions.*

The goals, policies, and action strategies laid out in the plan elements (Chapters 3.0 to 10.0) are based upon a thorough evaluation of the present policies, initiatives, and regulations of the City and allied institutions. They address a variety of topics, ranging from education to land use to economic development to protection of sensitive environmental resources. While the goals, policies, and action strategies are presented in separate elements, many of them are closely related and they are designed to work together to achieve the future Portsmouth envisioned by citizens. Integration of the goals, policies, and action strategies into the day-to-day decision-making and long-range planning activities of city government will result in significant adjustments to present policies, regulations, and investment priorities.

4. *The Comprehensive Plan is Portsmouth’s “To Do” list.*

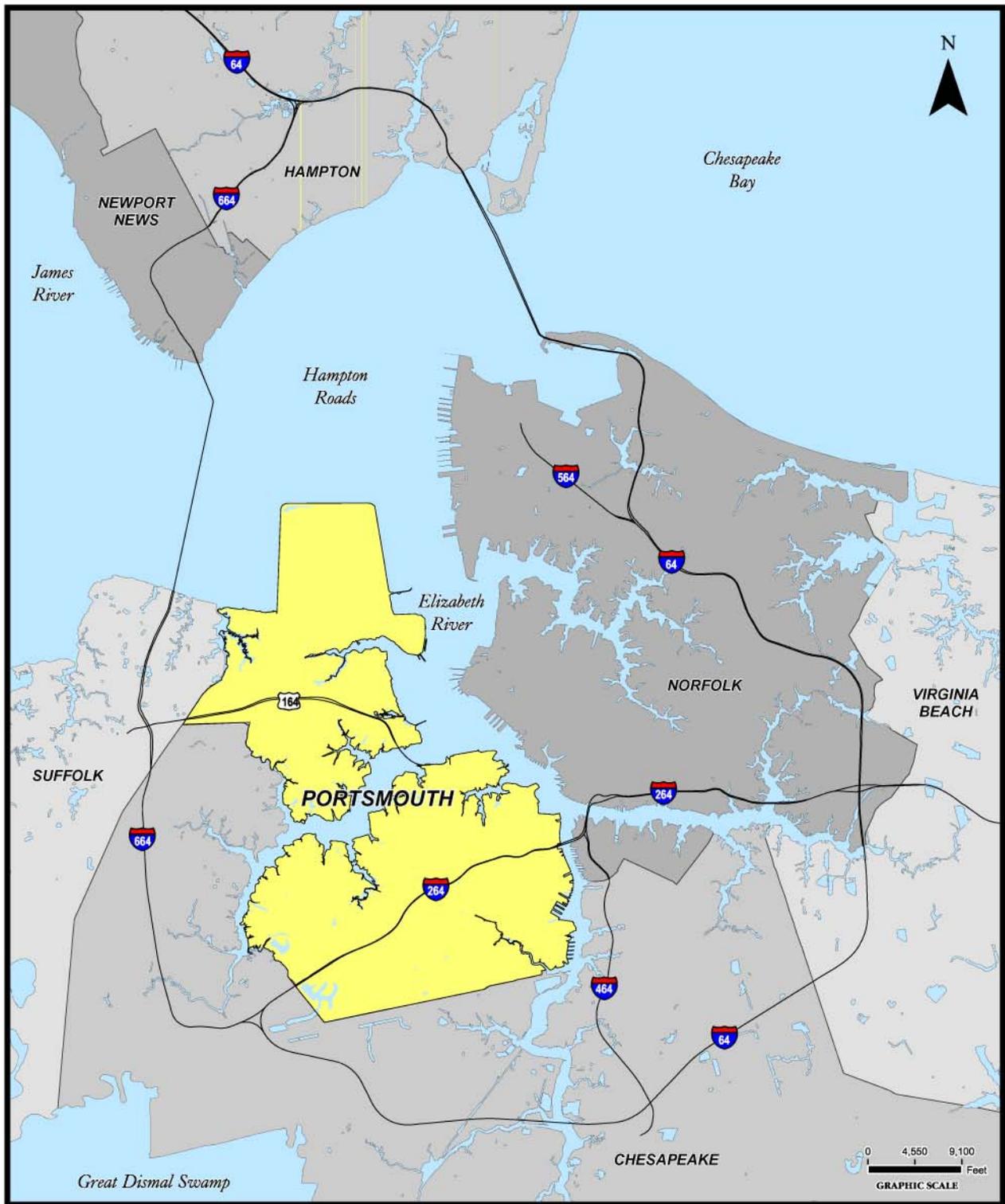
The Comprehensive Plan’s influence on Portsmouth’s future will be a product of the motivating power of its shared vision, and the effectiveness of actions taken to realize the Vision Statement. The Vision will not be achieved simply because citizens agree with the sentiments it expresses. Rather, it will be realized by steady progress in adhering to a well-defined “game plan” that sets priorities for effective short and long-term actions. Chapter 11.0 (FOCUS on Implementation) lays out a comprehensive program for action by the City as it seeks to transform the vision for the future of Portsmouth into reality.

1.2 Planning Process

Development of the Destination 2025 Comprehensive Plan began with two citizen surveys. The Wessex Group, a market research firm based in Williamsburg, conducted a random, statistically valid telephone survey of 400 Portsmouth citizens. Concurrent with the telephone survey, a written survey was distributed and received approximately 325 responses. The purpose of these surveys was to “set the stage” for the comprehensive planning process by gaining an initial



Citizens 2025
committee
meeting



LOCATION

PORTSMOUTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN


MAP 1
 DESTINATION 2025
Spring of a New Year, Center



understanding of citizens' opinions and perceptions regarding 1) present quality of life in the City and 2) important issues for the future. Subsequent to the surveys, the Citizens 2025 Committee – 25 citizens selected through an open application process to represent all areas of Portsmouth – was formed to guide development of the Comprehensive Plan. This committee worked with city staff and a consultant team led by Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC for over two years to develop the Vision, policies, and action strategies contained in the Plan.

The process of preparing the Comprehensive Plan consisted of three major phases:

1. Community Assessment
2. Policy Options
3. Plan Documentation

The purpose of the **Community Assessment** was to evaluate current conditions and trends in the City of Portsmouth, identify issues and values important to citizens, and develop a Vision Statement for Portsmouth's future (the year 2025) based upon citizen values. As part of this phase of work, interviews and small group exercises were conducted with stakeholders representing civic, neighborhood, and business interests. In the **Policy Options** phase, choices available to the City to address the issues identified by citizens in Phase One and to influence current conditions and trends in the direction of the Vision Statement were developed and evaluated. The end product of this phase was a set of preferred goals, policies, and action strategies. In the **Plan Documentation** phase, the preferred goals, policies, and action strategies were developed into this Comprehensive Plan document, consisting of topical elements (education, land use, transportation, etc.) and an implementation program.

Broad public input was solicited at key points in the planning process. In February 2003 a series of six community forums were held in different parts of Portsmouth prior to development of the Vision Statement. Citizen input at these forums was provided through small discussion groups with members of the Citizens 2025 Committee acting as facilitators. These groups were asked to consider present strengths and weaknesses of Portsmouth, as well as potential opportunities and threats in the future. The community forum results were tabulated and provided the “raw material” for development of the Vision Statement. A second round of public meetings was conducted in November 2004 to consider the preferred goals, policies, and action strategies prior to completion of the Comprehensive Plan document.



Community forum

1.3 Primary Themes

The Comprehensive Plan reinforces City Council’s three spheres of success – fiscal strength, economic development, and neighborhood quality – and the City’s ongoing initiatives in these areas. Looking toward the future, it lays out some significant new initiatives while identifying the need to **prioritize and focus** the City’s resources on strategic investments that **maximize return on investment**. Three primary themes provide the basic underpinnings of the Plan. These themes are:

- ***The most important step that the City can take to secure its future is to improve the quality of the public school system.*** Improving the public schools is essential to achieving Comprehensive Plan goals such as economic vitality and quality neighborhoods that retain long-time residents and attract new residents to Portsmouth. Education was consistently identified by Portsmouth residents and members of the Citizens 2025 Committee as the most important issue for the City’s future.
- ***Economic development projects and initiatives should be carefully targeted to ensure the highest and best use of the land and return on investment.*** Factors to be considered include not only the fiscal benefits, but also the broader effects of public and private sector projects on Portsmouth’s quality of life and community character, with the goal of “raising the bar” on development quality.
- ***Investment by the City in neighborhood revitalization should also be strategically targeted and staged over time.*** Major investments by the City to date have been concentrated in selected areas, such as the Downtown and Victory Crossing. The Comprehensive Plan identifies the need to extend these investments to “at-risk” neighborhoods and areas with obsolescent land uses. However, the extent of these areas and the total investment required necessitates that the City carefully “choose its targets” for intervention and investment based on a rational framework for prioritization.



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The above three themes are reflected throughout the Comprehensive Plan document, beginning with inclusion of Education (not normally addressed as a separate component by municipal comprehensive plans) as the first topical element and continuing through to the FOCUS on Implementation chapter.