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Regional Planning and the Special Purpose District: A Case Study of Rhode Island

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REGIONAL PLANNING AND THE SPECIAL

PURPOSE DISTRICT:

A CASE STUDY OF RHODE ISLAND

BY

JOHN F. LENOX

A THESIS-PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Through the years, the special purpose district has quietly been expanding and growing more important. This is true both in our own state of Rhode Island, as well as across the nation. Today the special district plays a very significant role in the governmental pattern of the United States. Indicators of their importance include their number, geographical extent, functions, and finances. Despite the importance of this emerging power the special district is often ignored and seldom understood. As the district device comes into increasing use it is important that the planner understand what it is, what it can be used for, and what implications this special administrative and financing device may have upon planning at all levels of government.

It is the intention of this paper to evaluate the special purpose district in terms of the general principles of regional planning, and to relate this study specifically to the State of Rhode Island.

Chapter I consists of background regarding the role of the special district, a definition of terms, a national overview, and a regional planning commentary. Chapter II deals specifically with the role of the special district in Rhode Island and provides a detailed current inventory. Chapter III presents conclusions which are drawn from the study, as well as resulting recommendations.

The substance of this paper reflects detailed research, analysis, and practical recommendations. It provides a better understanding of an important class of governmental units.

CHAPTER I
REGIONAL PLANNING AND THE SPECIAL PURPOSE DISTRICT

A) BACKGROUND

One of the recurring problems faced by government is the question of how to perform functions which do not conform to established or easily recognizable boundaries. This problem is not unique to the United States, but rather it has been common to all societies through the ages. Wars have been fought over imaginary lines of boundary and much energy has gone into servicing lands and people which are divided only by a line on the map.

The historian can go back through the years and gather many examples of the problem referred to here. Perhaps the clearest example and one which is most widely known, is the boundary dispute which occurred between Spain and Portugal upon the discovery of the New World by Columbus. Each government believed that they had certain rights of exploration and settlement in the Americas and they turned to Pope Alexander VI to make a decision. A "Line of Demarcation" was arbitrarily drawn through South America, with lands to the west to be recognized as Spanish, and those to the east as Portugese. The initial support for this arrangement soon dissolved for the location of the imaginary line had no rational basis. Admittedly, this example represents an extreme case which occurred almost five centuries ago. However, the same basic sort of problem exists today in our own country in regards to governmental boundaries.

The United States is organized as a federal system, with

many separate governmental bodies coming together in what some believe to be a hierarchical fashion. Goodman and Freund claim that the relationship between these bodies may be classified into two general categories for the purpose of discussion.¹

1) Vertical Relationships: The link between jurisdictions to governments of higher and broader jurisdictions.

2) Horizontal Relationships: A government's relation with its neighbors across adjacent boundary lines.

In the discussion at hand we are primarily concerned with those relationships classified as "horizontal." It is extremely important that we understand the associated interaction and attempt to refine it in a rational manner. The particular perspective taken here to analyze certain relationships in American government is that of "regional planning." An explanation of this perspective is in order.

The American Institute of Planners in their constitution defined planning as that particular sphere of activity which deals with:

the unified development of urban communities and their environs, and of states, regions, and the nation, as expressed through determination of the comprehensive arrangement of land uses, land occupancy, and the regulation thereof.

Although this definition does provide a general framework regarding the role of the planner, much is left open for personal interpretation. It is useful to emphasize that planning is concerned with rational advancement and with preparation for the future as opposed to mere reaction to present occurrences. The term "regional planning" generally

refers to the application of basic planning principles to an area which "cuts across the existing boundaries of government to embrace some underlying social, economic or natural entity."² This brings us back to our initial topic regarding the problems of governmental boundaries.

The United States Bureau of the Census conducts a Census of Governments every five years. This process of enumeration is an attempt to get somewhat of a hold on the structure of American government, at least to the point of having basic reference data. One needs only to count the stars on our flag to know the number of state governments. However, it is the determination of total sub-state units which becomes quite a bit more confusing. Table IA shows the number of units of local government in the United States between 1942 and 1977.

TABLE IA
UNITS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, 1942-1977

Counties	3,050	3,052	3,050	3,043	3,049	3,044	3,042
Municipalities	16,220	16,807	17,215	18,000	18,048	18,517	18,862
Townships	18,919	17,202	17,198	17,142	17,105	16,991	16,822
School Districts	108,579	67,355	50,454	34,678	21,782	15,781	15,174
Non-School Special Districts	8,299	12,340	14,424	18,322	21,246	23,885	25,962
Total	155,067	116,756	102,341	91,186	81,248	78,218	78,862

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census Of Governments, 1967&1977.

As the figures demonstrate, the number of sub-state governmental units has shown a steady decline since the 1940's, with 1977 being the only exception. It is interesting to note, however, that it is the substantial decrease in the number of school districts which has had primary impact on the approximate 50% decline in total units over this time period. On the other hand, it is the number of non-school special districts which has more than tripled that has prevented the 50% decline from becoming even greater.

In attempting to analyze figures such as those presented in Table I^A it is necessary to put matters into perspective with time. The post World War II era saw the federal government make various initiatives which had the largely unintended effect of accelerating the dispersal of the urban population. The two initiatives generally given credit for encouraging the population to live outside of the central cities were the Federal Highway Administration's major expansion of the highway system and the insured mortgages provided by the Federal Housing Agency and the Veteran's Administration. The special district device was used quite often as a means of fulfilling the needs of the shifting population.

B) THE SPECIAL DISTRICT: A WORKABLE DEFINITION

What exactly is a special district government? The starting point in addressing such an inquiry would appear naturally to be the approach used by the Census Bureau. In attempting to define the term "governmental entity," the Bureau provides the following summary description:

A government is an organized entity which, in addition to having governmental character, has sufficient discretion in the management of its own affairs to distinguish it as separate from the administrative structure of any other governmental unit.³

This definition contains three important elements;

1) existence as an organized entity; 2) governmental character; and 3) substantial autonomy. No specific statement, however, is provided by the Bureau as to how the special district fits into this framework. It appears that almost any unit of government which cannot be classified as state, municipal, township, or school district is considered to be a special district.

The growth of the special district in the post-war era began to attract the attention of certain academicians.

John C. Bollens in the late 50's commented:

Only one kind of special district, the school district, is reasonably well known, although subject to frequent misconceptions, and many non-school districts are erroneously regarded as parts of other governments. Special districts, particularly those in the non-school category, constitute the 'new dark continent of American politics', a phrase applied earlier in the century to counties.⁹

In order to analyze the role of the special district in the American government it is necessary to first make certain that there is a reasonably clear definition of the entity being considered. Bollens uses the following definition:

They (special districts) are organized entities, possessing a structural form, an official name, perpetual succession, and the rights to sue and to be sued, to make contracts, and to obtain and dispose of property. . . Moreover, they have considerable fiscal and administrative independence from other governments. The financial and administrative criteria

distinguish special districts and other governments from all dependent or subordinate districts and from most authorities which, lacking one or both of these standards, are not governmental units. . . Unlike most other governments, individual special districts usually provide only one or a few functions.⁵

The use of this definition narrows the scope of the project at hand such that we shall now give primary attention only to a portion of the number of units which the Census Bureau classifies as "special districts." From this point on, the definition provided by Bollens shall be used as a key determinant, with the terms "special district" and "special purpose district" used interchangeably.

C) NATIONAL OVERVIEW

As the district device comes into increasing use, it is important that the planner understand what it is, what it can be used for, and what implications this special administrative and financing device may have upon the planning process. The following discussion constitutes an overview of the current role played by the special district in American government, and is broken down into four sections.

Number and Geographical Extent: With the exception of Alaska, the special purpose district is found in every state and in the District of Columbia. Statistics presented earlier in Table IA, demonstrate a dramatic growth in the use of this device as documented by the efforts of the Census Bureau. It has been determined that between 1942 and 1977 the number of special districts in the United States increased from 8,299 to 25,962. This represents a

growth factor of over 300%. This growth has been quite constant, with recent increments giving no indication of a potential slow-down.

Generally speaking, much latitude is given to the special district in terms of location and territorial extent. Their area tends to be extremely flexible, with many empowered to contain large amounts of territory without regard to the boundaries of other governments. This flexibility accounts for the fact that territorially most special districts are not exclusive from standard general purpose governments, and many are not even exclusive of one another.

The size of the special district is not a common attribute. Although a large number of districts cover less than four miles, there is a sizable proportion which cover over four hundred. Table IB displays the wide range of district sizes.

TABLE IB
SIZE OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS IN THE U.S. BY RELATIVE PERCENT

<u>SIZE OF DISTRICTS</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
400 square miles or more	18.3
100 - 399.9 square miles	12.4
36 - 99.9 square miles	14.0
16 - 35.9 square miles	11.1
4 - 15.9 square miles	20.1
less than 4 square miles	24.1
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>100.1</u>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 1972 Census of Governments, Vol. I, p. 5.

Many districts are larger than the entire state of Rhode Island, and in many cases more than one S.M.S.A. is included within the district area. An occasional district even includes area within more than one state, as a result

of interstate pacts.

Functions: A key factor in determining the role played by the special district is the function performed. Although special districts are established to perform a particular function, the number of different types is quite extensive. Table IC displays the many different functional types as well as the associated number and percent.

TABLE IC
SPECIAL DISTRICT FUNCTIONS BY NUMBER AND PERCENT

<u>FUNCTION</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
Natural resources	25,962	100.0
Soil conservation	6,595	25.4
Drainage	2,431	9.4
Irrigation, water conservation .	934	8.7
Flood control	681	3.6
Other natural resources activity	294	1.1
Fire protection	4,187	16.1
Urban water supply	2,480	9.6
Housing and urban renewal	2,408	9.2
Cemeteries	1,615	6.2
Sewerage	1,610	6.2
School building authorities	1,020	3.9
Parks and recreation	829	3.2
Highways	652	2.5
Hospitals	715	2.8
Libraries	586	2.3
Other single-function districts .	1,545	6.0
Multiple function districts	1,720	6.6

Source: U.S. Bureau of The Census. 1977 Census Of Governments, Vol. I, p. 5.

As the figures show, more than one-fourth of all special districts are concerned with natural resources. Fire protection constitutes one-sixth, while housing authorities and water supply districts each make up approximately 10%. A variety of functions make up the remaining number. It should be noted that the category "multiple function districts" has been limited here to units of consequential size -- those having at least five full-time employees or \$100,000

of long-term debt. A number of special districts having concern for more than a single function, but which fall below these minimum standards are classified as single function districts according to their primary activity.

Finances: The independent nature of the special district mandates an individualized source of revenue. The financial provisions in acts of incorporation tend to be rather brief and general. Quite often these provisions lack clarity and completeness and sound procedure must depend largely on the discretion of the officers involved.

There are generally two means by which districts finance their operations -- user charges and tax revenues.⁶ In some cases there exists a transfer of funds between governmental units; however, this source usually plays a minor role.

1) User Charges - Those are fees required for the direct provision of service and based on the level of consumption. Services normally financed in this manner are utilities (gas, electricity, water), transit, and some recreation. These charges have an advantage of flexibility, as well as ease in assessment and collection.

2) Tax Revenue - This source of funding is tapped when the service provided cannot easily be broken down in terms of personal consumption. It involves the levy of a property tax or special assessment in order to fund services such as fire protection and flood control.

Factors Behind Formation: In attempting to understand the sudden popularity of the special purpose district one can become easily confused, for there is no single cause for

their growing occurrence. In fact, there is usually a series of factors behind the formation of any particular district.

Quite often it is the unsuitability of established units of government in terms of area which brings about the felt need for the creation of a new district. As discussed earlier, the area of service need does not always correspond with the boundaries of local government. Despite the upsurge in annexation by cities and towns which occurred around World War II, the limits of most governments are rigidly or relatively inflexible. Often a functional need can encompass part or all of the existing units. Area unsuitability of general governments is frequently an outgrowth of factors such as population shifts, technological changes and new knowledge and methods.

Another reason for the expanded use of the special district device is the unsuitability of other governmental units in terms of finances and functions. Oftentimes a general government attaining its tax or debt limit is prevented from expanding functionally. Special districts are sometimes created as a direct means of circumventing financial restrictions. There are many examples of this occurrence in such widely separated geographical locations as urban sections of Illinois and rural lands in the Columbia River Valley of the Pacific Northwest.⁷ Debate has occurred through the years as to how the constitutional or statutory debt limit is affected by the existence of separate political units with identical or overlapping

boundaries. It is now the generally accepted rule that in applying debt-limit provisions to separate and distinct political units, only the indebtedness of the unit in question can be considered.⁸ Clearly this interpretation opens the door to the pre-stated circumvention.

In contrast to this negative perspective of financial motivation, there is the actual desire for efficient organization. In many cases, special purpose districts have been used to pool the financial resources of an area that includes at least several governments which feel that their individual financing ability is inadequate to undertake a particular function.

Another characteristic of established governmental units often given credit for inspiring the creation of special districts is its seeming unsuitability in terms of administration and attitude.⁹ Some general governments simply are not administratively capable of assuming new responsibilities. This could be credited to inefficiency, mismanagement or to the idea of political incompatibility. Oftentimes the elective status of governing body members, and the desire to keep the tax rate low has a powerful influence in forming a negative response to added duties. Whether voluntary or involuntary, many districts are a product of this unresponsiveness.

In other situations, however, there is a great concern by some for a single program or service. Here the idea of "keeping it out of politics" may take hold. Here again we see a lack of confidence in the current governmental

structure. The desire for independence, or for "grass roots government" is a carry-over from the belief that government can be better observed and controlled if it is kept small. Large numbers of governments are regarded as preferable to huge operations by fewer governments. This sort of idea is quite similar to that professed by E. F. Schumacher in Small Is Beautiful.¹⁰ Some do not react as favorably however, and feel that the creation of special districts is a result of the actions of functional specialists, who in their shortsightedness are interested in only a specialized approach.

As a general rule it can be said that state enabling legislation governs the formation of a special district. Specific rules or regulations tend to be scarce however, and provide little guidance. The abolition of a particular district, though, can often be more difficult than its creation. Many districts established through the action of another government need an election in order to be dissolved. An extraordinary vote is sometimes required for dissolution, as compared to only a majority for formation (i.e. Irrigation and Library Districts in California can be established through majority consent, but need two-thirds in order to be abolished.)¹¹ In some areas it is a legal impossibility to abolish certain districts for there is no procedure for elimination. Because there isn't any way to avoid perpetuation in instances where a district is only of transitory value, many districts become inactive without formally dissolving.

D) A REGIONAL PLANNING COMMENTARY

The previous section indicated to the reader the diverse qualities and extensive numbers associated with the special purpose district. It is already evident that for even the simplest planning purposes such a number of separate and unique jurisdictions involves problems of coordination, competition and political and social distance between people.

The special purpose district by its very nature provides specialized services for an area with the result being that there is an overlap of governmental units. These districts in many cases have great power and responsibility, although they are subject only to limited control and are not responsible in their long-range planning to the planning agency of the community or general region. Through recognizing that the density pattern, the quality and the character of future development are directly related to the availability of public services, it is evident that there is value in having a coordinative planning effort.

Economies of scale: A basic intent of regional planning is to recognize that contiguous areas have certain common or complementary characteristics. Through this recognition it becomes easier to effectively deal with interarea activity or flows. This translates to an ideal which is not only basic to planning but actually is common to all activities -- it is important that one not wear blinders, but rather that he keep things in proper perspective and deal with a situation as it actually exists.

Quite a number of years ago Adam Smith pointed out that:

. . . specialization is limited by the size of the market. In a narrow market (e.g. an isolated village), a worker must be able to turn to many different jobs. The demand for his services in any one of these jobs will not be sufficient to keep him continuously occupied in it.¹³

This is not only true of the craftsman, but also of the special district. It is often inefficient for an administrative structure to be established for only the purpose of providing a particular service for a limited area.

Economic theory tells us that the total cost per unit of output (in this case public service) does not always increase when the quantity of output increases, and it's quite possible to produce more output at a lower cost per unit of production. This concept is generally known as the "economies of scale."

The acceptance of the reasoning behind the notion of economies of scale does not force one to take any rigid position in regard to the special district, for each district must be evaluated individually. Rather, it provides a certain flexibility and a framework for evaluation. In times of growing complexity regarding financial and developmental matters it is important that we view public activities with a discerning eye and remain conscious of the issues of scale.

Capital Improvement Programming: Until the late 1920's, the idea of systematic budgeting of funds for capital improvements was not a commonly accepted tool in planning implementation. In fact it was only in 1909, when architects Arnold Brunner and John Cannere suggested the need for such financial planning in a report to the Comprehensive City Planning Commission of

Grand Rapids, Michigan, that the notion was given much thought.¹⁴

Capital improvement programming presents the opportunity to schedule projects over time so that the various steps in the development of an area logically follow one another. The special purpose district through its splintering of governmental activity serves to cloud the advance picture of future needs and development activities. According to Goodman and Freund:

An important function of capital programming lies in the area of coordination. The systematic review of proposed projects affords an opportunity to tie them together as to timing, location and financing.¹⁵

As previously described, the special purpose district in the United States provides a myriad of service types. In the construction of roads, or the laying of water mains, or the location of fire fighting facilities, the special district gets involved with large capital outlays which have a clear impact on the development of an area. It is clearly advantageous for governmental units to coordinate the planning of such projects and to interact both at the community and regional level. A significant element of such a process should be a fiscal analysis aimed at minimizing the negative impact of improvements upon the citizenry.

E) EVALUATION

So far in this study we have dealt with the special purpose district almost from an aloof position. We have looked at aggregate figures and theoretical concepts. Although this preceding discussion is necessary for an

understanding of the subject at hand, by itself it does not provide the substance necessary for proper analysis and constructive recommendations.

The following chapter reveals the findings of a case study regarding the special purpose district in the State of Rhode Island. This detailed study will allow us to draw some valid conclusions in regards to our subject.

CHAPTER I.
FOOTNOTES

- ¹William I. Goodman and Eric C. Freund, Principles And Practice of Urban Planning (Washington, D.C.: International City Managers Association, 1968), p. 32.
- ²Martha Derthic, Between State And Nation (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1974), p. 3.
- ³United States Bureau of the Census, Census of Governments, 1977, p. 14.
- ⁴John Bollens, Special District Government In The United States (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), p. 1.
- ⁵Ibid., pp. 1 and 2.
- ⁶Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, The Problem of Special Districts In American Government (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 34.
- ⁷Bollens, Special District Government In The United States, p. 7.
- ⁸George M. Parmele and M. Blair Wailes, eds., American Law Reports, Vol. 94, (Rochester, N.Y.: Lawyers Cooperative Publishing Company, 1935), pp. 818-826.
- ⁹Bollens, Special District Government In The United States, p. 10.
- ¹⁰E. F. Schumacher, Small Is Beautiful (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), entire.
- ¹¹Bollens, Special District Government In The United States, p. 20.
- ¹²Harvey S. Perloff, Regions, Resources, And Economic Growth (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1960), p. 1.
- ¹³Alec Cairncross, Introduction To Economics (London: Butterworth & Co., 1973), p. 102.
- ¹⁴Mel Scott, American City Planning (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 137.
- ¹⁵Goodman and Freund, Principles And Practice of Urban Planning, p. 388.

CHAPTER II
THE SPECIAL PURPOSE DISTRICT IN RHODE ISLAND

A) METHODOLOGY

In Chapter I we touched briefly upon the problem in relating the concept of the special district, as we are dealing with it in this study, with the figures compiled on a regular basis by the U.S. Census Bureau. Table IIA reflects the number of special districts in Rhode Island over the past 25 years, as determined by the Census of Governments.

TABLE IIA
NUMBER OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS IN THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND:
1952, 1962, 1967, 1972, 1977

	<u>1952</u>	<u>1962</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1977</u>
RHODE ISLAND	49	56	67	73	78

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Governments, 1972 and 1977.

These types of figures provided by the Census Bureau can be best used in terms of general reference.

By establishing a time sequence one needs only to carry out a simple trend analysis in order to determine what direction his particular area is heading in in terms of alternative forms of governmental organization. Unfortunately, because of the way in which the Census Bureau defines the "special district," final totals are left extremely ambiguous. It is known that in their meaning a district is not a city and it is not a town, but there is little other than that of which one can be sure.

In the year 1977, the Census Bureau determined that there were 78 special district governments in Rhode Island. This figure includes not only autonomous entities such as fire,

lighting, and water districts (which are accepted as special districts under the definition used in this study) but also others such as local housing authorities and disposal authorities. It should not be assumed, however, that the mere mention of the word "district" qualifies an entity as a special district government. Perhaps the best example of a body that should be excluded is the Blackstone Valley Sewer District.

In 1947, the General Assembly of Rhode Island established the Blackstone Valley Sewer District in order to deal with the problem of sewage and industrial wastes which originate in several municipalities located in the Blackstone and Mashassuk River valleys of northern Rhode Island. According to Chapter 21 of the State's General Laws, the Blackstone District is a "state agency" whose commission members are appointed by the governor. It is financed in part by the "pledging of credit of the state." It is evident that this district does not meet our basic qualifications regarding autonomy.

The approach which the Census Bureau has taken to the subject of the special purpose district has lowered this form of government almost to that of a residual category. Data provided by the Census Bureau is very often relied upon by the planner, as well as many others, to serve a key role in the formation of recommendations. In the task at hand, however, it is important that we do not take this data at face value, but rather we take it with the proverbial "grain of salt."

We are extremely fortunate in that our case study relates to the smallest of our fifty states. Because of the limited land area of Rhode Island (only 1214 square miles), and the relatively few number of cities and towns (39), we do not need an agency with the resources of the Commerce Department to develop an inventory of special districts. The most recent attempts at such an independent inventory were conducted by Frederick L. Bird in 1958,¹ and by Efraim Torgovnik in 1968.² Both were associated with the University of Rhode Island's Bureau of Government Research. It is to our advantage that these projects relied on a definition of the special district which conforms quite favorably to that referred to in Chapter I. Unfortunately, the passing decades have rendered much of their information invalid for current reference.

The information presented in the following sections of this chapter represents an update of previous investigations. The special district being what it is, it has a tendency to appear and disband in various locations over time. In order to get an accurate picture of the situation in Rhode Island in 1979, several sources have been crossreferenced. Along with the original Bird and Torgovnik studies, the Providence Journal was found to be quite helpful. Through their bureau chiefs, general information was collected under the topic of Fire, Lighting and Water Districts. More specific information regarding water districts in the state was acquired through the files of the Rhode Island Water Resources Board. Supplementary data was also provided by the Insurance Service Office, a national insurance rating

organization. As is often the case in a project such as this, personal interviews became a necessity. Direct contact, both in person and by phone, with planners, fire protection officials, and municipal and district employees proved to be an invaluable method of acquiring information.

The following section of this chapter serves as a general overview of the special district in Rhode Island. By keeping a wide perspective it is hoped that the more important points will be highlighted, and the insignificant overlooked.

B) GENERAL OVERVIEW

Historical Development: The special purpose district has a long established history in the State of Rhode Island. As the records show, it was in 1797 when the district device first made an appearance in the form of the East Greenwich Fire District. Although the formation of this district did not bring down a flood of requests upon the General Assembly for district incorporation, it did open the door for a form of local government which would slowly grow more powerful over the next two centuries.

It was in 1870 with the formation of the Westerly Fire District that the popularity of this device became more widespread.* In the final three decades of the nineteenth century there were seven additional special districts formed. From 1900 to 1929, 12 more came into existence, and from 1930 to 1960 there was a net increase of 29.³ This total of 49 special district governments in 1960 matches identically the 1979 updated totals. This 19 year period,

*Figures provided concerning formation of districts represent net increases.

however, saw the passing of two districts (Tiogue Lighting District and Johnston Sanitary District), as well as the formation of two (Shady Harbor Fire District and Charlestown Fire District).

The growth of the special district in Rhode Island has followed a pattern quite similar to that of other states. Incorporation occurred, for the most part, in scattered villages which were isolated by poor transportation and communication. The town governments often felt that they had no responsibility to use general tax revenues to provide services to meet the specialized needs of these village communities. This failure of the established town government often forced localities to turn to the special district device. Another important factor involved with Rhode Island districts is seasonality. Those areas of the state bordering either on the Narragansett Bay or the Block Island Sound are natural summertime attractions, and special districts often have been formed in an attempt to cope with the seasonal population increases.

Incorporation Process: All special purpose districts are required to apply to the Rhode Island General Assembly for an act of incorporation. In most cases, once authorization has been granted, it is the vote of the citizens of the proposed district area which puts the incorporation into effect. If at a later date the district desires to change any aspect of its initial mandate it is required once again to approach the Assembly for permission. Such an appeal has occurred on numerous occasions for such reasons as a name

change, the adjustment of district boundaries, the provision of a new service or the realignment of a ruling body.

Although this process has been in operation for almost two centuries, it has never been spelled out in any general legislation. The only recognition given to special districts by the state Constitution is in Article XX of the amendments adopted in 1928. In this amendment the right of qualified citizens to vote in "town or ward meetings" was changed to "town, ward, or district meetings."

The acts of incorporation for the districts tend to be quite similar. They normally state the name of the district, its boundaries, the functions which it may perform, the structure of its government, and the means of public finance. Once the papers have been passed through the General Assembly, the involvement of the state in the affairs of the special district has for the most part come to an end. Although subject to the same 3% debt limitation as cities and towns, districts are not required to submit to an annual audit.

It apparently is assumed that the required annual meeting of district voters provides enough overview of its operations.

Present Operation: As noted earlier, it has been determined that there are 49 special districts currently in operation in the State of Rhode Island. Of the 39 cities and towns, 16 have at least a portion of a special district within their boundaries. The towns of Coventry and Lincoln share the honor of having the most, each with a total of seven. The East Greenwich Fire District stands alone as the only district which conforms perfectly to the boundaries of the local

community.

In an attempt to convey to the reader a certain geographic sense of district location, Table IIB relates the district count both to municipality and county.

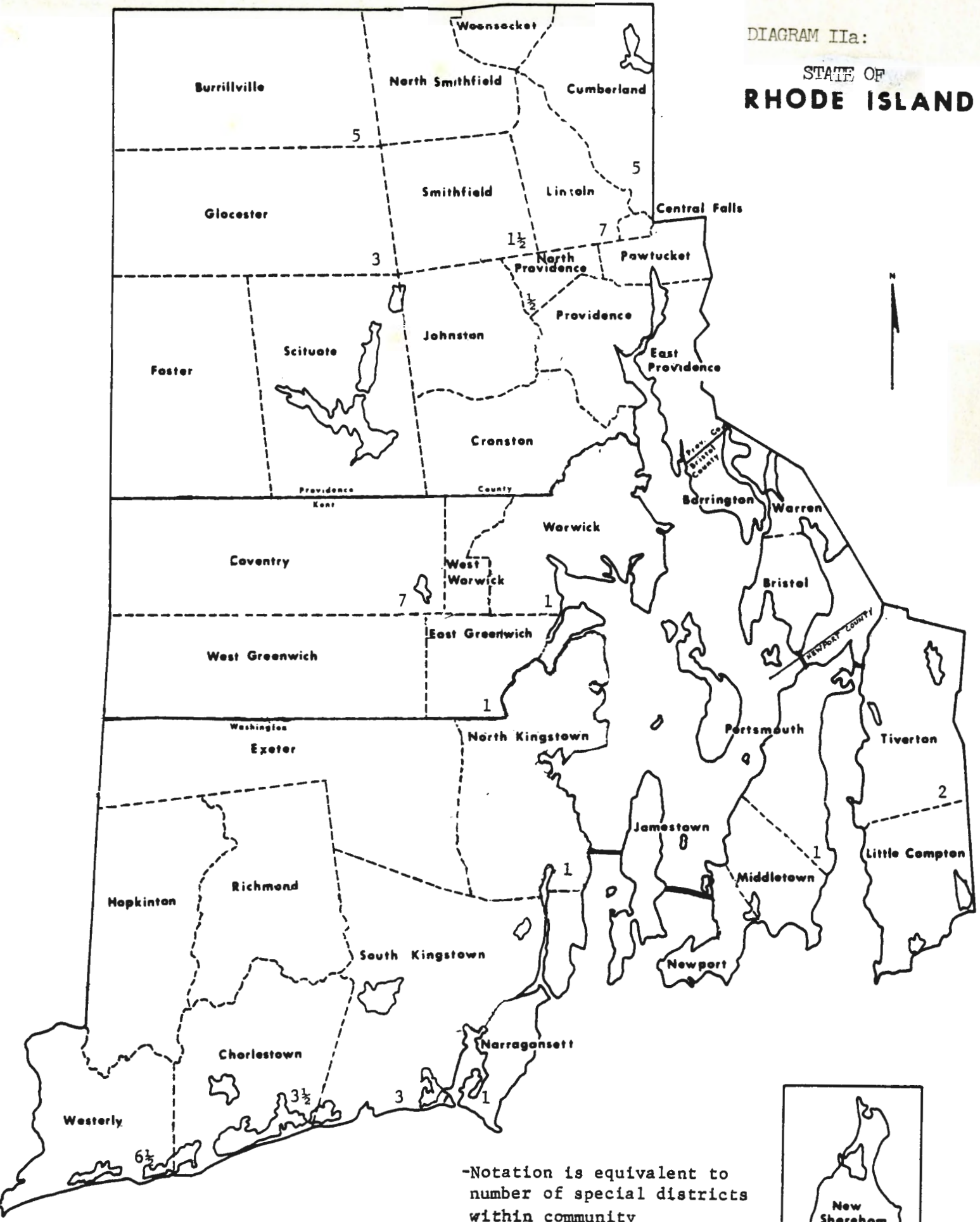
TABLE IIB
NUMBER OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS IN RHODE ISLAND
BY COUNTY AND MUNICIPALITY, 1979

<u>COUNTY - MUNICIPALITY</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS*</u>
Providence County	22
Burrillville	5
Cumberland	5
Glocester	3
Lincoln	7
North Providence	$\frac{1}{2}$
Smithfield	$1\frac{1}{2}$
Washington County	15
Charlestown	$3\frac{1}{2}$
Narragansett	1
North Kingstown	1
South Kingstown	3
Westerly	$6\frac{1}{2}$
Kent County	9
Coventry	7
East Greenwich	1
Warwick	1
Newport County	3
Tiverton	2
Portsmouth	1
Bristol County	0
None	0

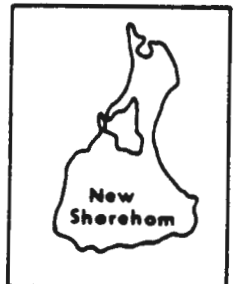
*Notation of $\frac{1}{2}$ refers to any portion of a district

The data presented in Table IIB lends itself well to a number of observations, particularly if it is crossreferenced to the map on page 26. Obviously, certain pockets of special purpose districts have developed. The primary concentrations appear in the area north of Providence, as well as in the coastal communities of the west bay. The inventory of special districts presented in section C will shed some light on this pattern.

DIAGRAM IIa:
STATE OF
RHODE ISLAND



-Notation is equivalent to
number of special districts
within community



Of the 49 special districts in the state, 28 could be considered "single purpose," 11 "dual purpose," and 10 "multi-purpose." The 28 single purpose districts break down further to those which provide only water (5), and those which provide only fire protection (23). In total, there are 12 different services provided through the district device in Rhode Island. Table IIC lists these services as well as the number of districts currently providing each one.

TABLE IIC
SERVICES PROVIDED THROUGH SPECIAL DISTRICT DEVICE
BY NUMBER OF DISTRICTS PROVIDING THEM, 1979

<u>SERVICE</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
Recreation	5
Police	2
Sidewalk Maintenance	1
Road Maintenance	9
Street Lighting	10
Mosquito Control	3
Fire Protection	36
Garbage Collection	4
Beach Maintenance	6
Dock Repair	3
Water Supply	11
Electricity	1

From the data presented in Table IIC we can see that fire protection is clearly the dominant activity of the special purpose government. Unlike some of the other activities which are provided on a seasonal basis, fire protection is a year-round service. Because of the obvious importance of fire protection, it will receive particular attention in section D of this chapter.

C) INVENTORY OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS

This section consists primarily of descriptions of each of the 49 special purpose districts in Rhode Island. This comprehensive file is the result of research previously

discussed in section A of this chapter.

An attempt has been made to put the individual district into some sort of regional perspective. This has been accomplished through the grouping of districts according to community, and relating the district to its place in that community. Further, the community as a whole is dealt with in terms of location, background, and situation. A map has been provided for each town, which specifically identifies the special districts. Each map is at the same scale for the sake of comparison. Once again the map of Rhode Island on page 26 is useful for reference.

For the most part the information contained on the following pages requires no elaboration. A particular exception, however, is the reference to the "fire protection classification," which is included whenever a district has the responsibility of providing fire protection. The "fire protection classification" is a rate which refers to the quality of protection provided for a particular area. The rates used in this study have been assigned by the Insurance Services Office of Rhode Island. This organization has carried out an evaluation of each of the fire districts which we are concerned with and has assigned both a letter and a number grade. The letter grades are handed out on a scale of A through F, with A being the best. This refers to protection afforded dwelling units. The number grades go from number 1 through 10, with 1 being the best. This scale is applied to mercantile units. The rating association plays a key role in insurance pricing. Therefore, the classifications to which we refer are of primary importance.

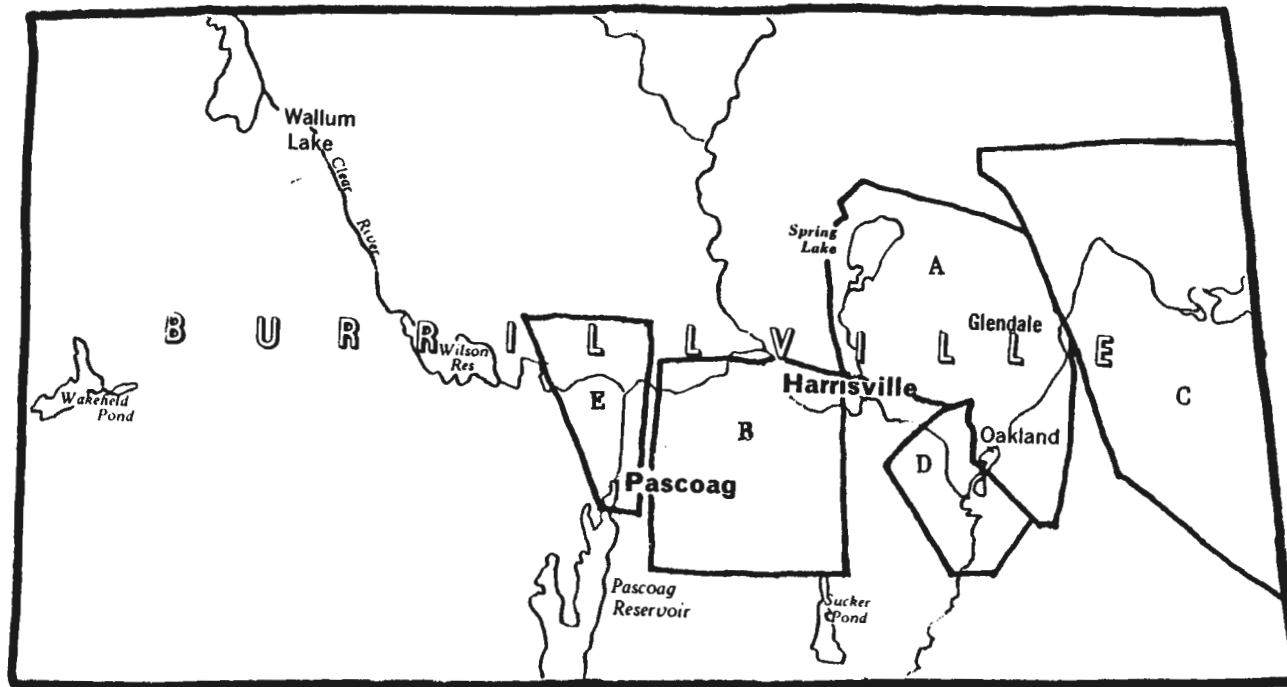
BURRILLVILLE

The Town of Burrillville is located in the northwest corner of Rhode Island, approximately 20 miles from the City of Providence. It is bounded on the north by the State of Massachusetts, on the south by the Town of Glocester, on the west by the State of Connecticut, and on the east by the Town of North Smithfield.

The Town of Burrillville, which was named for Senator James Burrill, was set off from Glocester in 1806 and incorporated as a separate township. Today, Burrillville remains a largely rural community of 55.8 square miles. Situated in a relatively isolated corner of the state, this area is not subject to the same development pressures as some of its neighbors but there has been a conscious effort to direct development which has occurred to the vicinity of existing villages. The Pascoag business area is seen as a focal point for unified town growth. There are five special purpose districts in Burrillville, having fire protection as their common service.

Glendale Fire District: The Glendale Fire District, which was incorporated in 1942, is located in the eastern portion of Burrillville around the Village of Glendale. This district, which is responsible for providing fire protection for an area approximately 5 square miles, includes Spring Lake and the southern portion of the Black Hunt Management Area.

The Glendale Fire District has been assigned a protection classification of 9E. The one fire station responsible for this area is located on Main Street, north of Victory Highway.



- A-Glendale Fire District
- B-Harrisville Fire District
- C-Nasonville Fire District
- D-Oakland-Mapleville Fire District
- E-Pascoag Fire District

DIAGRAM IIb

TOWN OF BURRILLVILLE AND INCLUDED

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Harrisville Fire District: The Harrisville Fire District was incorporated in 1910 for the primary purpose of providing fire protection for an area of approximately 4.0 square miles around the Village of Harrisville. In 1911, a private company was given the responsibility of providing water supply to the district as well as to the neighboring district of Pascoag. In 1936, facilities and responsibilities for water supply were assumed by the appropriate districts.

Today, the Harrisville Fire District provides street lighting, recreation, water supply and fire protection. A fire protection classification of 6C has been assigned to this area having one fire station, which is located on School Street, west of Main Street.

Nasonville Fire District: The Nasonville Fire District is located on the eastern border of Burrillville in an area of 6.0 square miles which includes the villages of Nasonville, Mohegan, Oak Valley and Tarklin. Incorporated in 1943, this district provides fire protection and street lighting.

The one fire station in Nasonville is located on Victory Highway (Route 102), just east of its intersection with Douglas Pike (Route 7). A protection classification of 9E has been assigned to this district.

Oakland-Mapleville Fire District: The Oakland-Mapleville Fire District was incorporated in 1934, and provides fire protection and street lighting for the area around two villages of that same name. Victory Highway is the major artery in this area of approximately 2.5 square miles.

The one fire station serving the Oakland-Mapleville

District is located on Victory Highway, just south of Central Street. This area has been given a protection classification of 9E.

Pascoag Fire District: The Pascoag Fire District is located in the central portion of Burrillville, centering in the villages of Pascoag and Bridgeton. In this area the district device is today used to provide more services than just the fire protection for which it was incorporated in 1887. In 1936, Pascoag took over responsibility for water supply for the district area of approximately 5.0 square miles, and later developed an electrical distribution system which also serves the Harrisville District and the entire western portion of the town. This electric utility involvement is subject to regulation by the Public Utilities Commission.

The two fire stations in the district are located on Main Street at Nahant Place and on Howard Avenue south of Laurel Hill Avenue. A protection classification of 6C has been assigned to the district. The past several years have brought increased problems with the supply of water for the district, and despite the connection with Harrisville for an emergency amount, a permanent solution must be found.

CHARLESTOWN

The Town of Charlestown is located in the southwest portion of the State of Rhode Island and consists of an area of approximately 41.2 square miles. Taken from the neighboring Town of Westerly and incorporated on August 22, 1738, Charlestown was named "to the honor of King Charles II who granted us our charter."⁴

Today, Charlestown is bounded on the north by the towns of Hopkington and Richmond, on the south by the Block Island Sound, on the east by the Town of South Kingstown, and on the west by the Town of Westerly. This community consists largely of rural, shore oriented population which almost doubles during the summer months. There are four special purpose districts in Charlestown which are described as follows.

Charlestown Fire District: The Charlestown Fire District is the most recently formed special district in the state. Incorporated in 1972, this district reflects a consolidation of two independent fire stations which were formerly subsidized out of the town coffers.

Fire protection is the only service provided by this district. However, the area for which it is responsible is expansive, and includes the villages of Carolina and Charlestown, as well as Indian Cedar Swamp Management Area and approximately half of Burlingame State Park.

The available fire stations within this district are located on Shannock Road at the Charlestown-Richmond line, and on Matunuck School Road at Cross Mills. The public protection classification assigned to this area is 9E.

- A-Dunn's Corner Fire District
- B-Charlestown Fire District
- C-Bradford Fire District
- D-Westerly Fire District
- E-Watch Hill Fire District
- F-Misquamicut Fire District
- G-Weekapaug Fire District
- H-Shelter Harbor Fire District
- I-Quonochontaug Central Beach
Fire District
- J-Shady Harbor Fire District

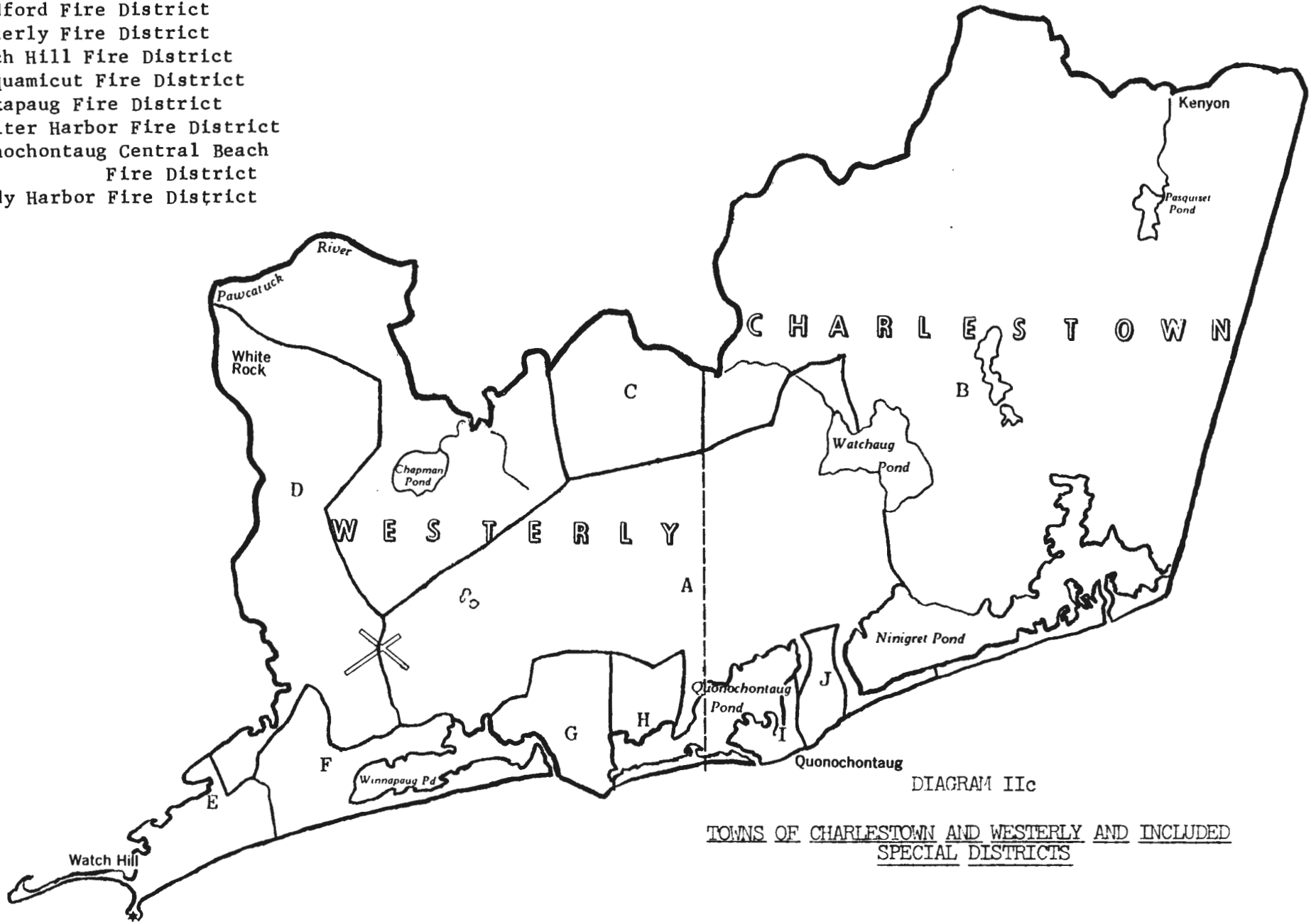


DIAGRAM IIc

TOWNS OF CHARLESTOWN AND WESTERLY AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Dunn's Corner Fire District: The Dunn's Corner Fire District has the unique distinction of being the only special district in Rhode Island whose taxing powers for fire protection cross municipal lines. Incorporated in 1952, Dunn's Corner serves the sole purpose of providing fire protection in the eastern part of Westerly and the western part of Charlestown.

In Charlestown, the Dunn's Corner District plays a dual role. It is directly responsible for protection of its district area, as well as that of two smaller fire districts on Quonochontaug Point with whom they have a contractual arrangement. The Shady Harbor Fire District, as well as the Quonochontaug Central Beach Fire District relies on their services.

A protection rating of 6C has been assigned to Dunn's Corner, whose two stations are located on Langworthy Road at Post Road in Westerly, and on Post Road west of East Beach Road in Charlestown.

Shady Harbor Fire District: The Shady Harbor Fire District is located on the northern portion of Quonochontaug Point in Charlestown, which borders on Block Island Sound. This area of approximately 0.3 square miles was incorporated as a district in 1964, and serves primarily a seasonal population. Services provided to this area through Shady Harbor include water supply, road and beach maintenance, and recreational supervision. Fire protection is provided by the Dunn's Corner District through a contract mechanism, and therefore this area shares its protection rating of 6C.

Quonochontaug Central Beach Fire District: The Quonochontaug

Central Beach Fire District is located on the eastern bank of Quonochontaug Pond in the area of a village by that same name. Established in 1930, the district device is used in this area of approximately 0.3 square miles to provide water supply, garbage collection and road and beach maintenance. Just as its neighbors in Shady Harbor, Quonochontaug contracts with Dunn's Corner for fire protection and shares its classification of 6C.

The water supply system in this district operates on a seasonal basis from April 1 through November 1. During the seven month period over 125 homes are served. However, during the off-season about 25 of the homes must receive water from private wells. As the system currently operates, distribution mains are within the frost line and it's necessary to drain them in the winter.

COVENTRY

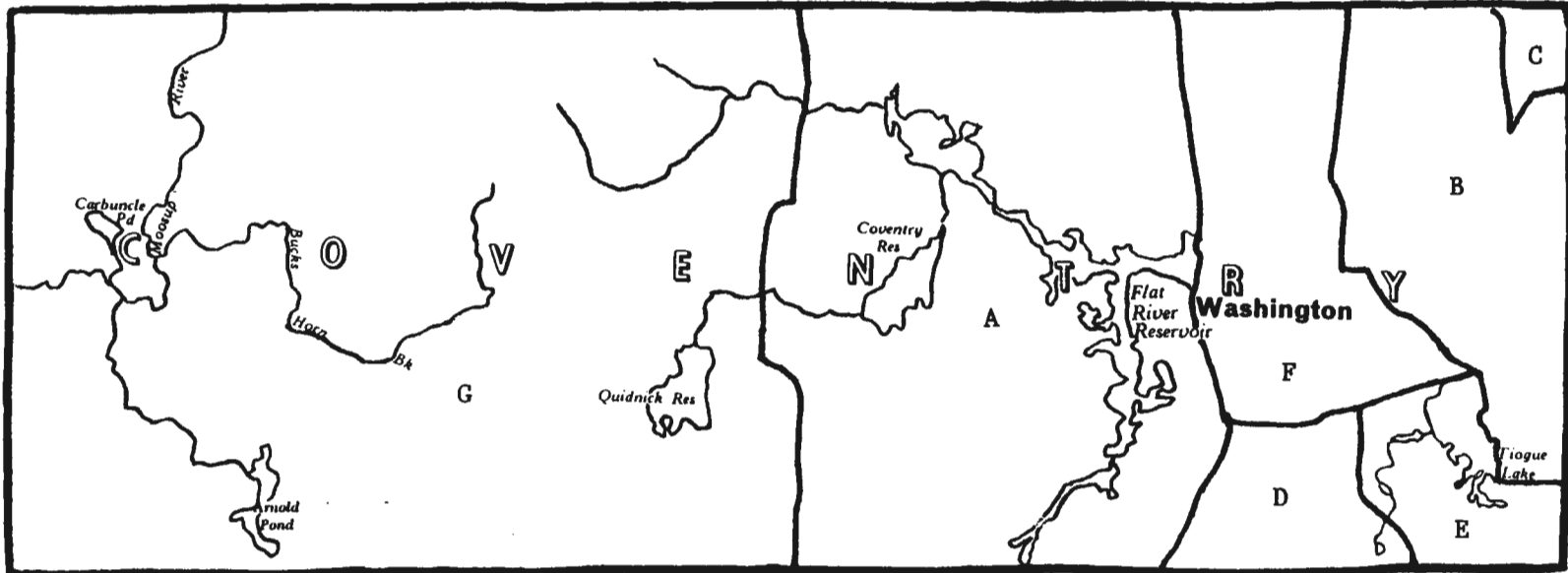
The Town of Coventry is located in Kent County at the approximate center of the West Bay area of the State of Rhode Island. It is bounded on the north by the City of Cranston and the towns of Foster and Scituate, on the south by the towns of East and West Greenwich, on the east by the Town of West Warwick, and on the west by the State of Connecticut. It was in 1741 that Coventry was taken from neighboring Warwick and incorporated as a separate community.

At the present time there is a total of seven special purpose districts which among them cover every acre of the 62.2 square miles in the town of Coventry. These districts are as follows:

Central Coventry Fire District: Incorporated by the General Assembly in 1959, the Central Coventry Fire District is the newest of the seven special districts in Coventry. It is responsible for providing fire protection and street lighting to approximately 19.9 square miles of the town in the vicinity of the Flat River Reservoir.

The fire protection provided by this district has been judged to be quite poor and has been given a classification of 9E. The available fire stations are located on Hill Farm Road, east of Shady Valley Road, and on Route 117 near Old Flat River Road.

Coventry Fire District: The Coventry Fire District is located on the eastern border of the town, adjacent to West Warwick. Incorporated on April 24, 1889, the Coventry district is responsible for providing fire protection and street lighting



- A-Central Coventry Fire District
- B-Coventry Fire District
- C-Harris Fire & Lighting District
- D-Hopkins Hill Road Fire District
- E-Tiogue Fire District
- F-Washington Lighting District
- G-Western Coventry Fire District

DIAGRAM IId
TOWN OF COVENTRY AND INCLUDED

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

for an area of approximately 7.1 square miles in the vicinity of the Village of Anthony. This is a highly developed area which is served by Route 117 and Route 116 as the major transportation routes.

The fire protection provided in the Coventry Fire District is judged to be quite good and a rating of 4B has been assigned. The one fire station in operation is a modern structure located at Washington and Fairview Streets.

Harris Fire and Lighting District: The Harris Fire and Lighting District is located in the Village of Harris in the northeast corner of the Town of Coventry. This district is one of the more unique to be located in the state. Incorporated in 1872 as part of the Phenix Fire District, protection was provided for an area crossing over the Coventry town line into what is today West Warwick. In 1947 the Town of West Warwick submitted a request to the state that they be granted the authority to consolidate those fire districts within their community in order to form a unified municipal department. This request was granted, along with the stipulation that the fire station serving the Phenix District be turned over to the citizens of Coventry who relied on it for protection. This district was renamed "Harris" in order to reflect the name of the primary village now served.

Today, the Harris Fire and Lighting District provides street lighting and fire protection for an area of approximately 1 mile square. The public protection classification assigned to this district is 6C and the one fire station is located on Main Street, opposite LaValley Road.

Hopkins Hill Road Fire District: The Hopkins Hill Road Fire District was incorporated by an act of the General Assembly in 1955; and presently provides fire protection and street lighting for an area of approximately 1.6 square miles in the southeastern portion of Coventry. There is no distinct village around which this district was formed, but rather interestingly it is the segment of Hopkins Hill Road which serves as the focal point of attention as well as the major artery.

The quality of fire protection in the district has been assigned a rating of 6C. The only station is located on Bestwick Trail at Hopkins Hill Road.

Tiogou Fire District: The Tiogou Fire District, which was incorporated on April 8, 1954, is located in the southeastern corner of Coventry, and provides fire protection and street lighting for a 1.6 square mile area around Tiogou Lake. The quality of fire protection provided by the one station located on Arnold Road near Vale Street has been judged to warrant a classification of 6C.

Washington Lighting District: The Washington Lighting District serves an area in the east central portion of Coventry of approximately 2.0 square miles. Incorporated in 1911 to provide lighting for the Village of Washington, the local role was expanded in 1947 when the district accepted responsibility of providing fire protection as well. Today, the latter function is considered to be the primary, and a move has recently been made to apply to the General Assembly for an official name change which would indicate the district's

primary obligation. The name under consideration is "Washington Fire and Lighting District."

The level of fire protection by the one station located on Main Street between Station and Holden Streets has been evaluated as deserving a rating of 6C.

Western Coventry Fire District: The Western Coventry Fire District was incorporated in 1942, and mandated to provide just one service, that being fire protection. The area over which the district has responsibility, however, is approximately 29.0 square miles. This is far and away the largest geographically of the seven districts in Coventry.

The population of this area is widely dispersed, with the highest concentrations occurring in the villages of Greene and Summit. Fortunately, the two district fire stations are located in close proximity to these points. However, the quality of protection leaves much room for improvement and a rating of 9E has been assigned.

CUMBERLAND

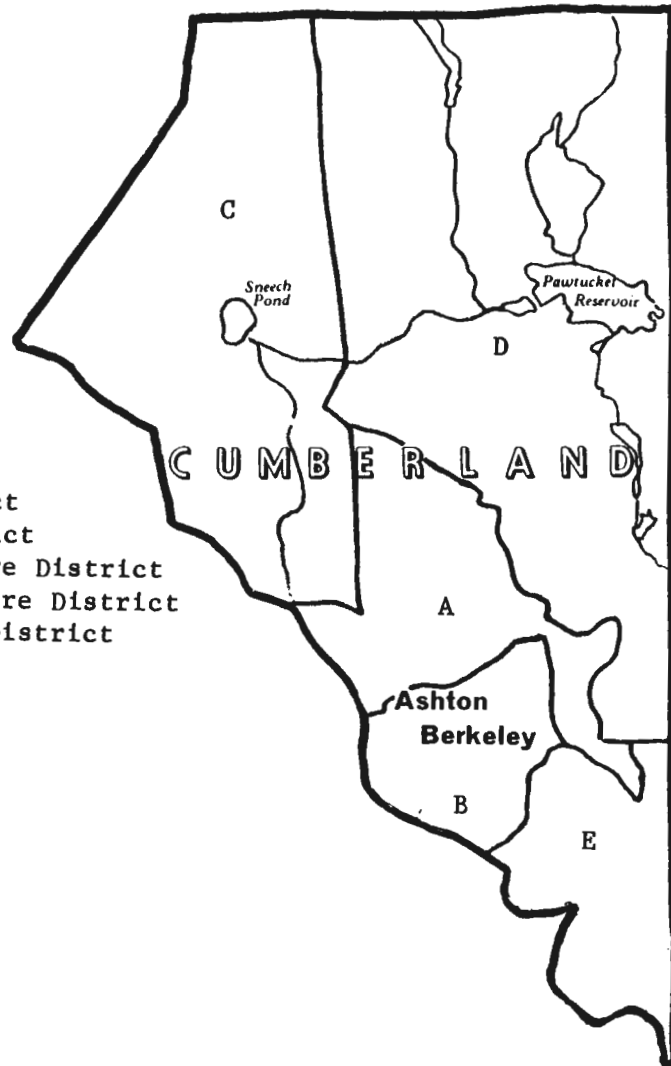
The Town of Cumberland is located in the northeast corner of Rhode Island, approximately 13 miles from Providence. It is bounded by the State of Massachusetts on the north and east, by the City of Central Falls on the south, and by the City of Woonsocket and the Town of Lincoln on the west.

Cumberland was known as Attleboro Cove until 1746 when it was incorporated as a township. Just as many other communities in Rhode Island, Cumberland owes much of its early growth to industry which developed along the Blackstone and Abbott Run Rivers. Today, Cumberland is largely a suburban residential area, and there are five special districts located within its borders.

Ashton Fire District: The Ashton Fire District, which was incorporated in 1932, provides fire protection for an area of approximately 2.5 square miles in the central area of Cumberland. This is the only service provided by the district and a protection classification of 6C has been assigned. The one fire station is located on Mendon Road, opposite Scott Street.

Berkeley Fire District: The Berkeley Fire District was incorporated in 1904, and provides fire protection for an area just over 1 square mile around the Village of Berkeley in the southwest portion of Cumberland.

Fire protection is the only function of the district, and a protection classification of 6C has been assigned. The single fire station in the district is located on Mendon Road, north of Whipple Street.



- A-Ashton Fire District
- B-Berkely Fire District
- C-Cumberland Hill Fire District
- D-North Cumberland Fire District
- E-Valley Falls Fire District

DIAGRAM IIe
TOWN OF CUMBERLAND AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Cumberland Hill Fire District: The Cumberland Hill Fire District is located in the northwest portion of Cumberland, and provides fire protection for an area of approximately 9.0 square miles. Within this district is included the Village of Cumberland Hill as well as the western portion of Diamond Hill State Park.

A protection classification of 6C has been assigned to this district. The single fire facility is located on Mendon Road, south of Wrentham Road.

North Cumberland Fire District: The North Cumberland Fire District was incorporated in 1959, and provides fire protection alone for an area of approximately 10.0 square miles in the northeast portion of Cumberland. Included in this district, which happens to be the largest in the community, is the Pawtucket Reservoir and a large part of Diamond Hill State Park.

The only fire station located in the district is on Whipple Road at Sneece Road. This area has been assigned a protection classification of 6C.

Valley Falls Fire District: The Valley Falls Fire District, which was founded in 1878, is the oldest special district in Cumberland. Included within this area of approximately 3.0 square miles is the highly urbanized village of Valley Falls.

The single fire protection facility in the district is located on Broad Street, south of Geldard Street. A protection classification of 6C has been assigned.

EAST GREENWICH

The Town of East Greenwich, which is located in the central portion of the state just off Interstate 95, has a long Rhode Island history. Incorporated as a township on October 31, 1677, East Greenwich covers an area of approximately 16.6 square miles. It is bounded on the north by the City of Warwick and the towns of West Warwick and Coventry, on the south by the towns of North Kingstown and Exeter, on the west by the Town of West Greenwich, and on the east by Greenwich Bay.



A-East Greenwich Fire District
(conforms to Town boundaries)

DIAGRAM II f
TOWN OF EAST GREENWICH AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICT

East Greenwich Fire District: The East Greenwich Fire District was incorporated in 1797 and today is the only district in the state having boundaries which conform exactly to town lines. The district provides fire protection to the 16.6 square mile area of East Greenwich, as well as on a contract basis to the Potowomut and Bay Ridge areas of Warwick. The oldest of all the special districts in Rhode Island, East Greenwich ended inclusion of the Coweset section of Warwick in 1973 so that today its taxing powers are limited to only one community.

One of the two fire stations in East Greenwich is located on Main Street, at its intersection with Long Street, and a 1971 facility is located on Frenchtown Road, just west of South Country Trail. A protection classification of 5C has been assigned to this district.

GLOCESTER

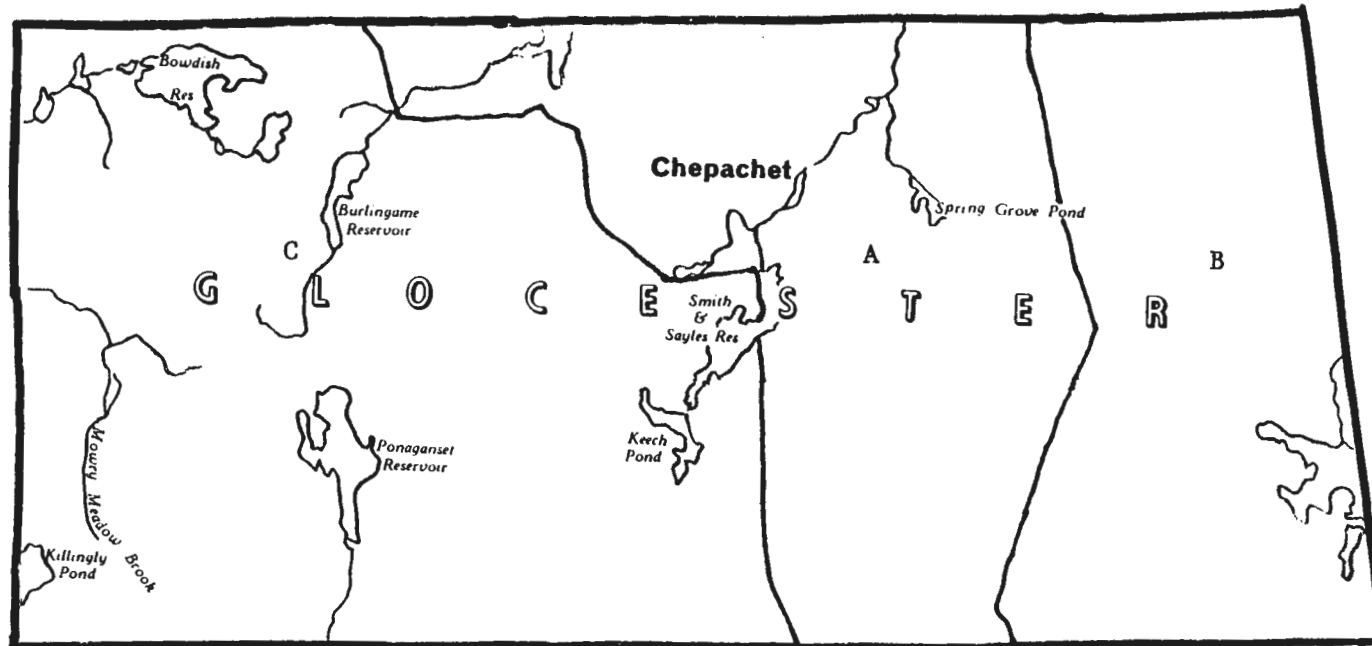
The Town of Gloucester, a largely residential and agricultural community, is located in the northwest portion of Rhode Island. It is bounded on the north by the Town of Burrillville, on the south by the towns of Foster and Scituate, on the west by the State of Connecticut, and on the east by the Town of Smithfield.

Gloucester was incorporated in the year 1730 when it was one of three towns set off from the City of Providence. The town was named after Frederick Lewis, the Duke of Gloucester.⁵ The State Land Use Plan recommends maintenance of the existing rural character of this area, as well as low pressure for development. There are three special purpose districts in the 57.2 square mile area of Gloucester.

Chepachet Fire District: The Chepachet Fire District was incorporated in 1912 and is located in the central portion of the Town of Gloucester. The district is responsible for providing fire protection for this area of approximately 16 square miles. Included in this area is the Village of Chepachet, as well as the eastern part of the Smith and Sayles Reservoir.

The one fire station in Chepachet is located on Putnam Turnpike (Route 44), just south of Harrisville-Pascoag Road. A protection classification of 9E has been assigned.

Harmony Fire District: The Harmony Fire District was incorporated in 1945, and provides fire protection for an estimated area of 12.0 square miles in the eastern part of Gloucester. Included in this area is the village of Harmony,



(48)

A-Chepachet Fire District
 B-Harmony Fire District
 C-West Gloucester Fire District

DIAGRAM IIg

TOWN OF GLOUCESTER AND INCLUDED

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

as well as Waterman Reservoir.

The one fire station in Harmony is located on Putnam Turnpike, east of Sawmill Hill Road. A protection classification of 9E has been assigned to this district.

West Gloucester Fire District: The West Gloucester Fire District, which was incorporated in 1959, is responsible for providing fire protection for an area of approximately 28.5 square miles in the western portion of Gloucester. Included in this district are the Burlingame Reservoir and Durfee Hill Management Area.

There is one fire station in West Gloucester, located on Putnam Turnpike (Route 44), just west of Reynolds Road. A protection classification of 9E has been assigned.

LINCOLN

The Town of Lincoln is a triangular shaped community in the northeast section of Rhode Island. It is bounded on the north by the City of Woonsocket, on the south by the cities of Pawtucket, North Providence and Central Falls, on the west by the towns of Smithfield and North Smithfield, and on the east by the Town of Cumberland.

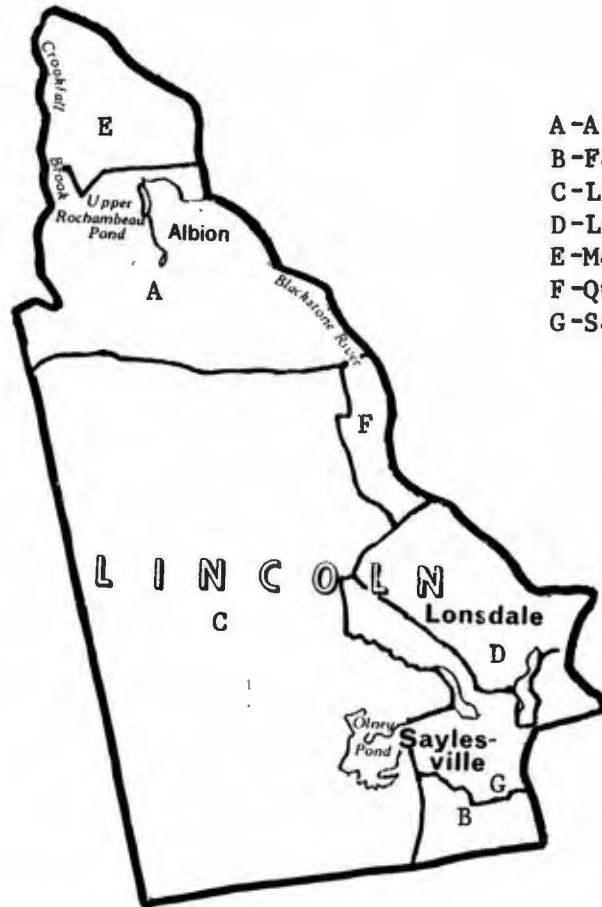
In 1871, the Town of Lincoln was set off from Smithfield and incorporated as a separate township. Named after President Abraham Lincoln, this town of approximately 19.0 square miles on the Blackstone River relies heavily on manufacturing for its livelihood. There are seven special districts located here.

Albion Fire District: The Albion Fire District was incorporated in 1941 for the purpose of providing fire protection for an area of approximately 4.0 square miles around the Village of Albion. This area occupies the central portion of Lincoln, and enjoys easy access to the rest of the region through the interchange of I-295 and Route 146.

The single fire station in this district is located on School Street, west of Main Street. A protection classification of 4B has been assigned.

Fairlawn-Lincoln Fire District: The Fairlawn-Lincoln Fire District is located in the southeast corner of Lincoln, bordering on Pawtucket and Central Falls. It was incorporated in 1922 for the purpose of providing fire protection for this area of only about 0.5 square miles.

The one fire station in this district is located on



- A-Albion Fire District
- B-Fairlawn-Lincoln Fire District
- C-Limerock Fire District
- D-Lonsdale Fire District
- E-Manville Fire District
- F-Quinnville Fire District
- G-Saylesville Fire District

DIAGRAM IIn
TOWN OF LINCOLN AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Smithfield Avenue at Webster Avenue. A protection classification of 4B has been assigned.

Limerock Fire District: The Limerock Fire District, which covers approximately 8.5 square miles in the western portion of Lincoln is by far the largest district in the community. Formed in 1941 to provide only fire protection, this district includes Lincoln Woods State Park, and a portion of North Central State Airport.

The two fire stations in Limerock are located on Great Road at Anna Sayles Road, and on Louisquisset Turnpike at Twin River Road. A protection classification of 4B has been assigned.

Lonsdale Fire District: The Lonsdale Fire District, which was incorporated in 1882, provides fire protection for an area of approximately 2.5 square miles around the Village of Lonsdale, in the eastern portion of Lincoln. The available fire station in this district is located on Front Street, opposite Pleasant Street. A protection classification of 4B has been assigned.

Manville Fire District: The Manville Fire District was incorporated in 1891 for the purpose of providing fire protection for the village of the same name in the northern portion of Lincoln. Today fire protection for this area of approximately 1.5 square miles remains the sole district responsibility.

The one fire station in Manville is located on Old Main Street opposite from Cross Street. A protection classification of 4B has been assigned.

Quinnville Fire District: The Quinnville Fire District is located on a narrow portion of land running parallel to the Blackstone River in the east-central portion of Lincoln. Incorporated in 1941, the district provides fire protection for this area of only about 0.5 square miles.

The one fire station in Quinnville is located on Lower River Road, at Avenue B. A protection classification of 4B has been assigned.

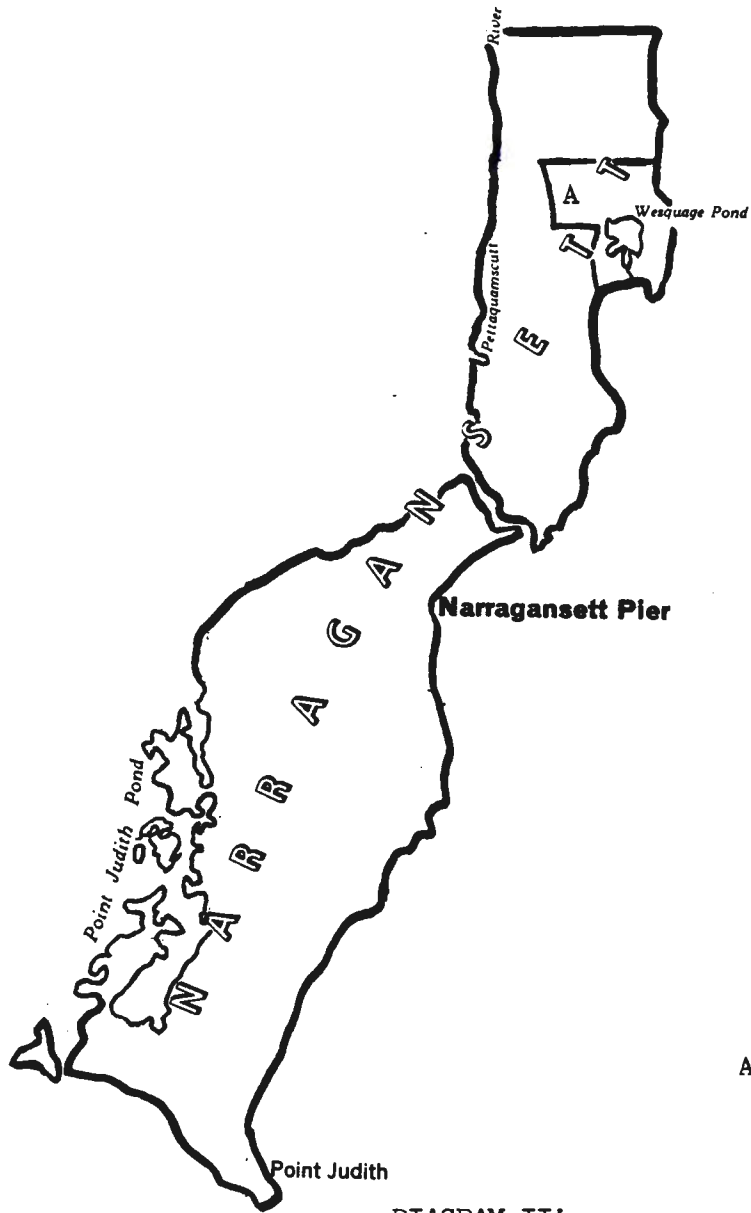
Saylesville Fire District: The Saylesville Fire District was incorporated in 1896 for the purpose of providing fire protection for an area of approximately 1.5 square miles around the Village of Saylesville. Today the one fire station in Saylesville is located on Chapel Street at Walker Street. A protection classification of 4B has been assigned.

NARRAGANSETT

The Town of Narragansett is located in Washington County where it runs parallel to the Narragansett Bay. This largely summertime community is bounded on the north by North Kingstown, on the south by Block Island Sound, on the east by the Bay, and on the west by the Town of South Kingstown.

Narragansett has a special significance in considering the special purpose district for in March of 1888 it was taken from South Kingstown and incorporated as a special district. Three years later, on March 28, 1901, Narragansett was incorporated as a full-fledged town. The community of 13.9 square miles currently has within its boundaries one special purpose district.

Bonnet Shores Fire District: The Bonnet Shores Fire District is located in the northern portion of Narragansett in the area of Wesquage Pond. Incorporated in 1932, the district provides road maintenance, garbage collection, street lighting, recreation and police for this area of approximately 0.6 square miles. Fire protection is provided through a municipal fire department.



A-Bonnet Shores Fire District

DIAGRAM III

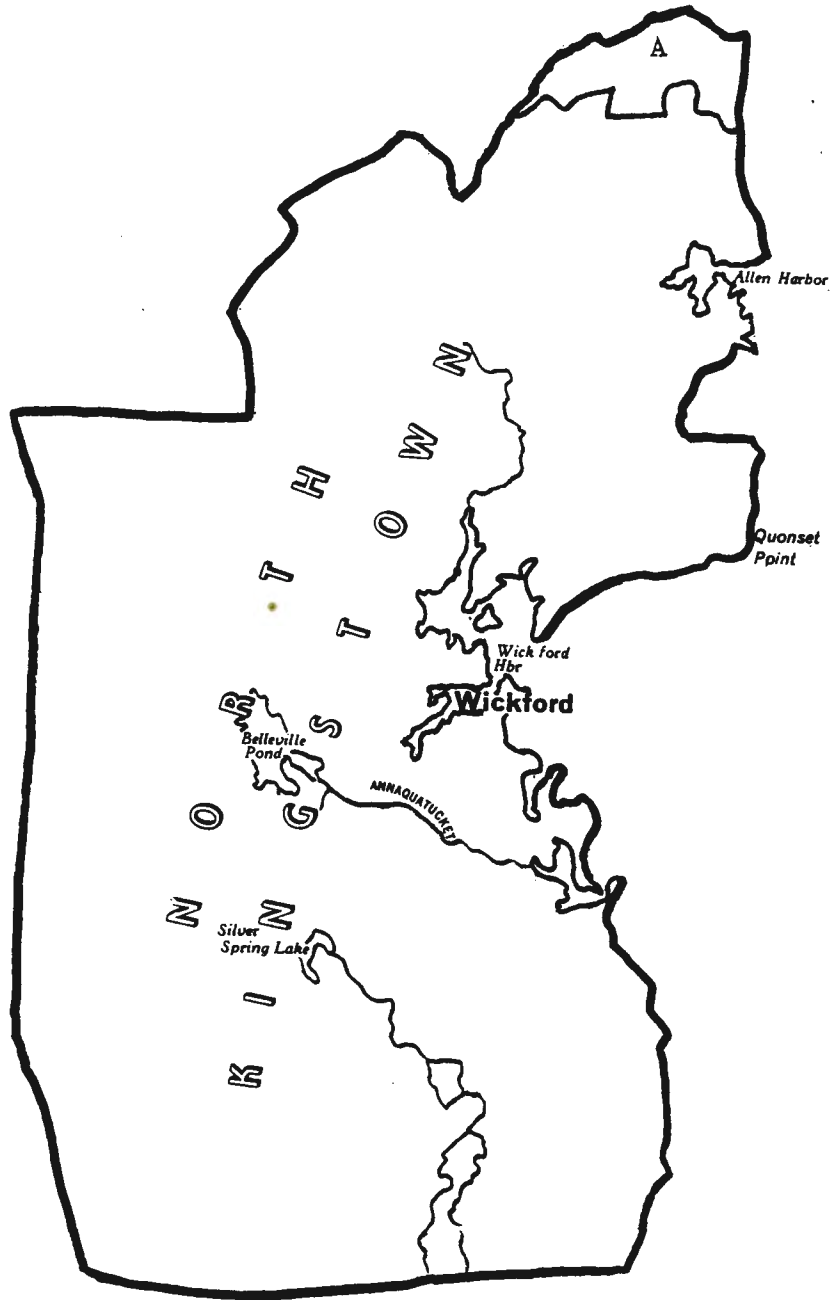
TOWN OF NARRAGANSETT AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICT

NORTH KINGSTOWN

The Town of North Kingstown is located on the shores of Narragansett Bay, on the northern edge of Washington County. North Kingstown is bounded on the north by the City of Warwick and the Town of East Greenwich, on the south by the Town of Narragansett and the Town of South Kingstown, on the east by the Bay and on the west by the Town of Exeter.

North Kingstown is a diversified community which offers a myriad of residential settings as well as commercial and industrial opportunities. The character of this area went through a period of substantial change in 1973 when the Navy withdrew from its facilities on Quonset Point. This pullout brought with it a total reduction in the local population of about one third. The Quonset Point facilities have since been targeted by the state for re-use as the regional corner stone for economic development. Although this area provides its own fire protection, sewage disposal and overall maintenance, these services are administered by the State of Rhode Island. Quonset Point does not qualify as a special district. However, the neighboring area of Pojac Point does meet the basic qualifications.

Pojac Point Fire District: The Pojac Point Fire District is located in the extreme northern portion of North Kingstown, with frontage on Narragansett Bay. Incorporated by the General Assembly in 1950, the district device is used here to provide primarily road and beach maintenance and special police protection. The Town of North Kingstown, through its municipal department provides fire protection for the area of approximately 2.0 square miles.



A-Pojac Point Fire District

DIAGRAM IIj
TOWN OF NORTH KINGSTOWN AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICT

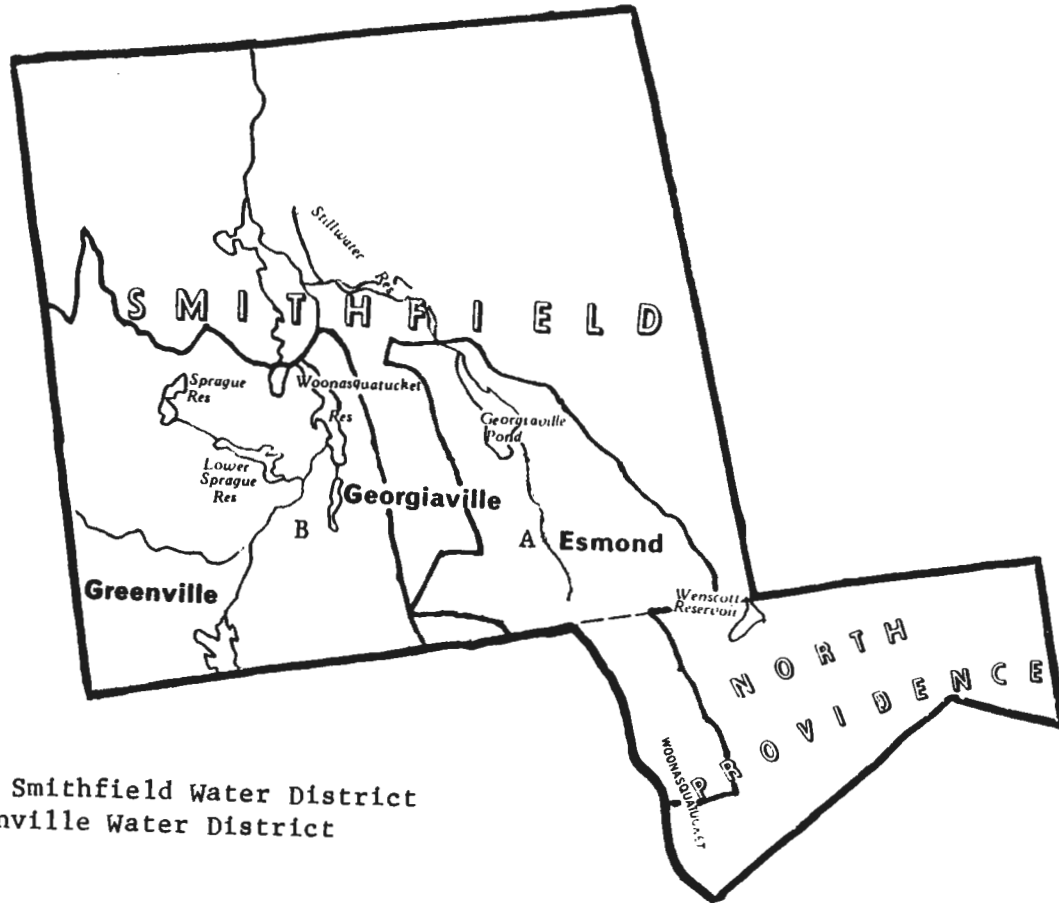
NORTH PROVIDENCE

The Town of North Providence is approximately 5.8 square miles and is located along the northern border of the City of Providence. Besides being bounded on the south by the capital city, the Town of Johnston is to the west, the towns of Smithfield and Lincoln are to the north, and the City of Pawtucket is to the east.

The fact that North Providence is contiguous to the highly urbanized areas of Providence and Pawtucket has contributed to a high population density. This relatively homogenous community presently has only one special district.

East Smithfield Water District: The East Smithfield Water District was incorporated in 1934, and currently provides water for an area of approximately 4.25 square miles in North Providence and Smithfield. This is the only district in Rhode Island operating a water distribution system which crosses municipal boundaries.

The North Providence portion of the district includes the Village of Greystone and a portion of Peter Randall State Park. The supply of water for this district is provided by the Providence Water Supply Board.



A-East Smithfield Water District
 B-Greenville Water District

DIAGRAM IIk

TOWNS OF NORTH PROVIDENCE AND SMITHFIELD AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

(52)

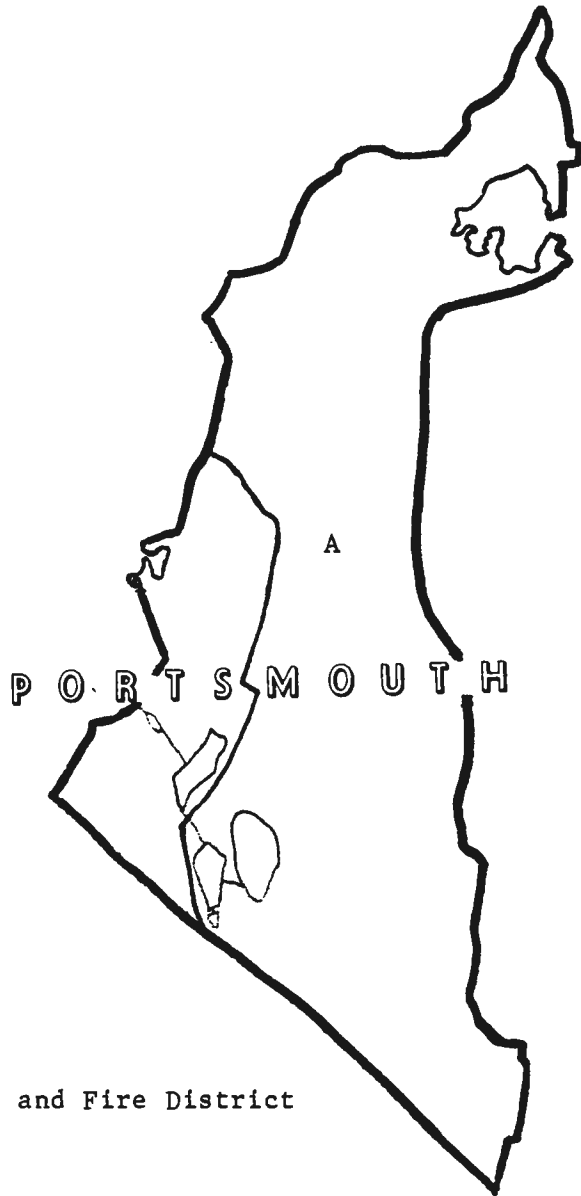
PORTSMOUTH

The Town of Portsmouth is located on the northern portion of Aquidneck Island in Newport County. It is bounded on the north by the Mount Hope Bay, on the south by the Town of Middletown, on the east by the Sakonnet River, and on the west by Narragansett Bay.

A large section of Aquidneck Island is oriented toward the water, and the seasonal residents which it attracts. Portsmouth which has approximately 23.3 square miles, is the largest of the three towns on the island and has a direct link to the Providence area by means of the Mt. Hope Bridge. There is just one special district within the community.

Portsmouth Water and Fire District: The Portsmouth Water and Fire District was incorporated in 1952 by an enactment of the General Assembly to provide services for a small area at the northern tip of Portsmouth. The original name of "Island Park and Common Fence Point" was changed in an amendment of 1956.

Today the district device is used only to provide water. However, the area has also expanded its responsibility to the entire community, excepting a small area in the southwest portion. The district, in this example, owns only the distribution system and not the supply. A contractual agreement exists whereby water is supplied by the City of Newport, as well as the Stone Bridge Fire District in Tiverton.



A-Portsmouth Water and Fire District

DIAGRAM III
TOWN OF PORTSMOUTH AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICT

SMITHFIELD

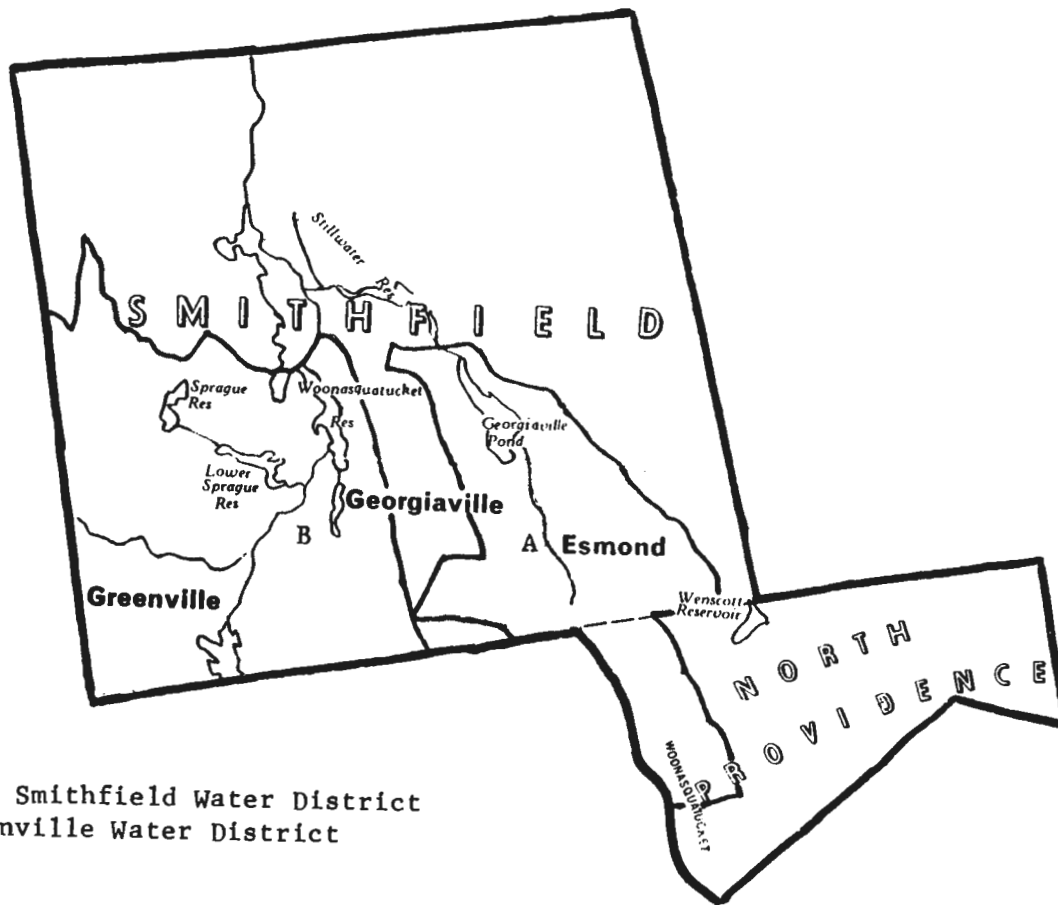
The Town of Smithfield, which was incorporated in 1730, is located approximately 11 miles northwest of Providence. It is bounded on the north by the Town of North Smithfield, on the south by the towns of Johnston and North Providence, on the east by the Town of Lincoln, and on the west by the Town of Gloucester.

Just as many other Rhode Island communities, textile industries began to develop early along the rivers and streams in Smithfield. Although the days of the textile mill have passed the apple orchards are still productive and serve as an attraction both for their spring blossoms and fall harvest. There are presently two special districts active within the community, one of which ventures across the southern border into North Providence.

East Smithfield Water District: The East Smithfield Water District was incorporated in 1934, and currently provides water for an area of approximately 4.25 square miles in Smithfield and North Providence. This is the only distribution system operated through a special district in Rhode Island which crosses municipal boundaries.

The Smithfield portion of this district includes the villages of Esmond and Georgiaville, as well as Georgiaville Pond. The supply of water for this district is provided by the Providence Water Supply Board.

Greenville Water District: The Greenville Water District covers an estimated area of 12.0 square miles in the southwest portion of Smithfield. Incorporated in 1955, the



A-East Smithfield Water District
 B-Greenville Water District

DIAGRAM IIm

TOWNS OF SMITHFIELD AND NORTH PROVIDENCE AND INCLUDED

SPECIAL DISTRICTS

district provides water to this area which includes the villages of Spragueville and Greenville.

For many years the water supply was extracted from deep wells. However, in 1969, a tie-in with the Providence system was completed. This new connection virtually assures a reliable high quality supply.

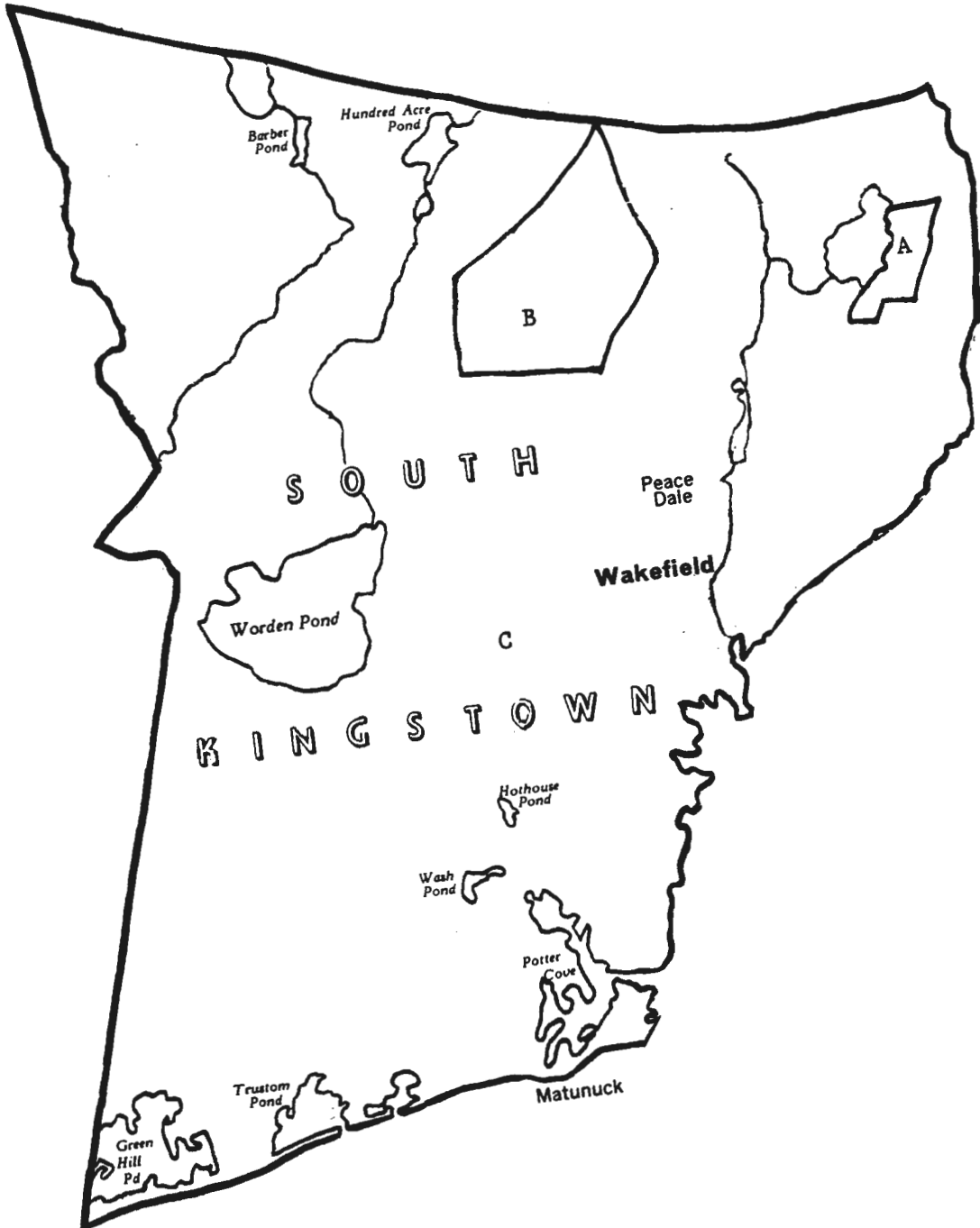
SOUTH KINGSTOWN

The Town of South Kingstown is located in the West Bay section of Rhode Island, on the southern edge of Washington County. South Kingstown is bordered on the north by the towns of Exeter and North Kingstown, on the south by the Block Island Sound, on the east by the Town of Narragansett, and on the west by the towns of Richmond and Charlestown. It has a total area of approximately 56.8 square miles.

South Kingstown is a community of the type commonly referred to as a "college town." The University of Rhode Island is located in the northern portion of the town, and the student population serves as a valuable market for both housing and commercial goods. The seasonality problem traditionally associated with college towns is more than mitigated here by the influx of summer visitors attracted largely by the fine beaches. There are three special purpose districts located in South Kingstown.

Indian Lake Shores Fire District: The Indian Lake Shores Fire District is located in the northeast portion of South Kingstown and as the name indicates, is on the shores of Indian Lake. Incorporated in 1946, this district provides water supply and plat improvement. For this area of approximately 0.3 square miles, fire protection is provided by the Union Fire District on a contractual basis.

The supply of water has long been of concern for the residents of this district whose existing supply has been judged "wholly inadequate" to provide year round service.⁶ An agreement was reached in December of 1978 for the Indian



A-Indian Lake Shores Fire District
B-Kingston Fire District
C-Union Fire District

DIAGRAM II
TOWN OF SOUTH KINGSTOWN AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

Lake Shores District to tie in with the investor owned Wakefield Water Company. The availability of this new supply should directly improve the level of local service.

Kingston Fire District: The Kingston Fire District was incorporated on June 13, 1923 for the purpose of providing fire protection for the Village of Kingston and the University of Rhode Island. In 1954, the district assumed responsibility for the provision of water to this area of approximately 2.5 square miles when it purchased the privately owned Bernan-Lemoine Water Company system.

The one fire station operating in Kingston is located on Bill's Road, 300 feet west of North Road, on the University of Rhode Island campus. The fire protection rating assigned to this district is 6C. The water supplied through the local system comes from gravel packed wells and requires no purification. It is generally regarded as being of good quality.

Union Fire District: The Union Fire District was incorporated in April of 1883 to provide fire protection for an area of approximately 7.0 square miles around the villages of Wakefield and Peacedale. In 1977, however, the district boundaries were expanded so that today the district is directly responsible for an area of approximately 54.0 square miles. Protection is also provided for the Indian Lake Shores District on a contractual basis.

With the expansion of the Union Fire District all of South Kingstown is now receiving fire protection and a rating of 6C has been assigned. The district has five fire stations

located on Robinson Street in Wakefield, High Street in Peacedale, Bliss Road in Snug Harbor, Tower Hill Road opposite Saugatucket Road, and on Matunuck School Road at Post Road.

TIVERTON

The Town of Tiverton is located on the Massachusetts border, in eastern Rhode Island. It is bounded on the west by the Sakonnet River, on the south by the Town of Little Compton, and on the north and east by Massachusetts.

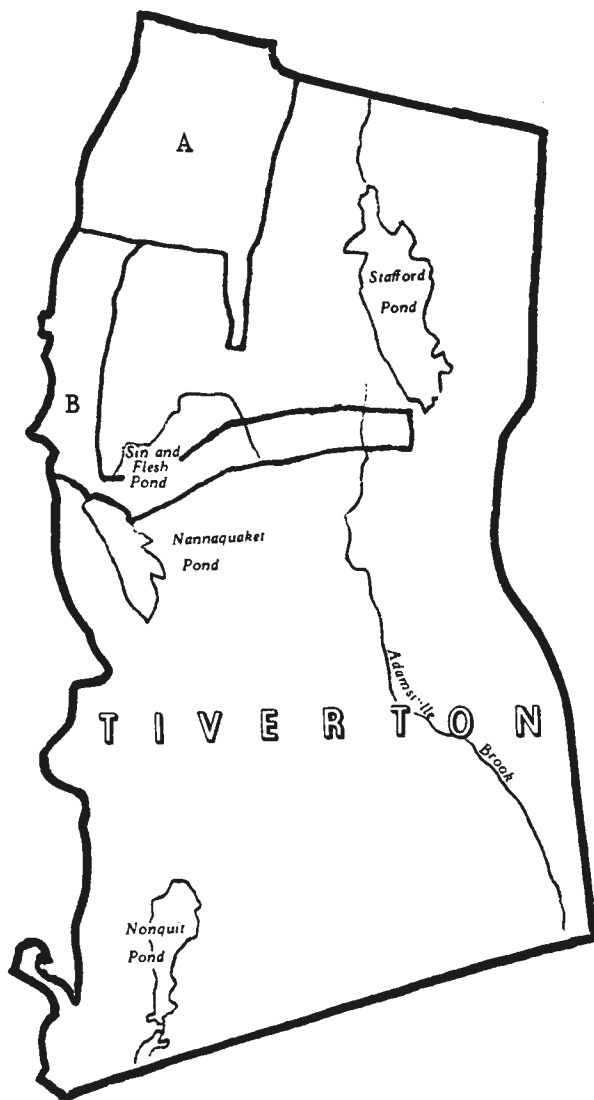
Tiverton was originally incorporated in 1694 as part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. However, in 1746 the township was annexed by Rhode Island along with several other communities. Today much of this area of approximately 35.5 square miles remains rural, despite increased seasonal and residential pressures. There are two special districts currently operating.

North Tiverton Fire District: The North Tiverton Fire District was incorporated by the General Assembly on April 23, 1926. It was in that same year that construction began on a water distribution system which became active in 1927.

Today the provision of water for this area of approximately 2.5 square miles is the only district function. The supply for this district is provided by deep wells, and in the case of an emergency, it can be supplemented by the Stone Bridge District through a stand-by connection.

Stone Bridge Fire District: The Stone Bridge Fire District, which was incorporated on April 11, 1940, is formed in a "V" shape which follows Routes 77 and 177 in Tiverton. Since its distribution system became operational in 1948, Stone Bridge has provided the water supply for its district population.

Today the provision of water is the sole district activity. The source of supply, Stafford Pond, is depended



A-North Tiverton Fire District
B-Stonebridge Fire District

DIAGRAM IIo
TOWN OF TIVERTON AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

upon not only by the Stone Bridge area but also by Portsmouth which has a purchase agreement. North Tiverton also takes advantage of this resource in times of necessity.

WARWICK

The City of Warwick is the second largest municipality in the state and is located in the eastern portion of Kent County. Warwick is bounded on the north by Cranston, on the south by the towns of East Greenwich and North Kingstown, on the east by the Narragansett Bay, and on the west by the Town of West Warwick.

Warwick takes its name from the Earl of Warwick, who played a key role in gaining a charter in 1647. A highly developed area of approximately 49 square miles, Warwick has a strong mayor form of government and currently there is only one district in operation.

Buttonwoods Fire District: The Buttonwoods Fire District was incorporated by the General Assembly in 1925 for the purpose of providing services for a finger of land which reaches almost reluctantly into Greenwich Bay. This area of approximately 0.5 square miles, which receives fire protection through the municipal department, still relies heavily on the district device, particularly for services relating to the beach area.

The act which incorporated the sea shore grounds belonging to the Buttonwoods Beach Association over fifty years ago, gave to the district responsibility to maintain local streets, repair and replace any breakwater, bulkhead or seawall deemed necessary to protect within the district from the "ravages of the tides." Today, the district continues to fulfill its original mandate.

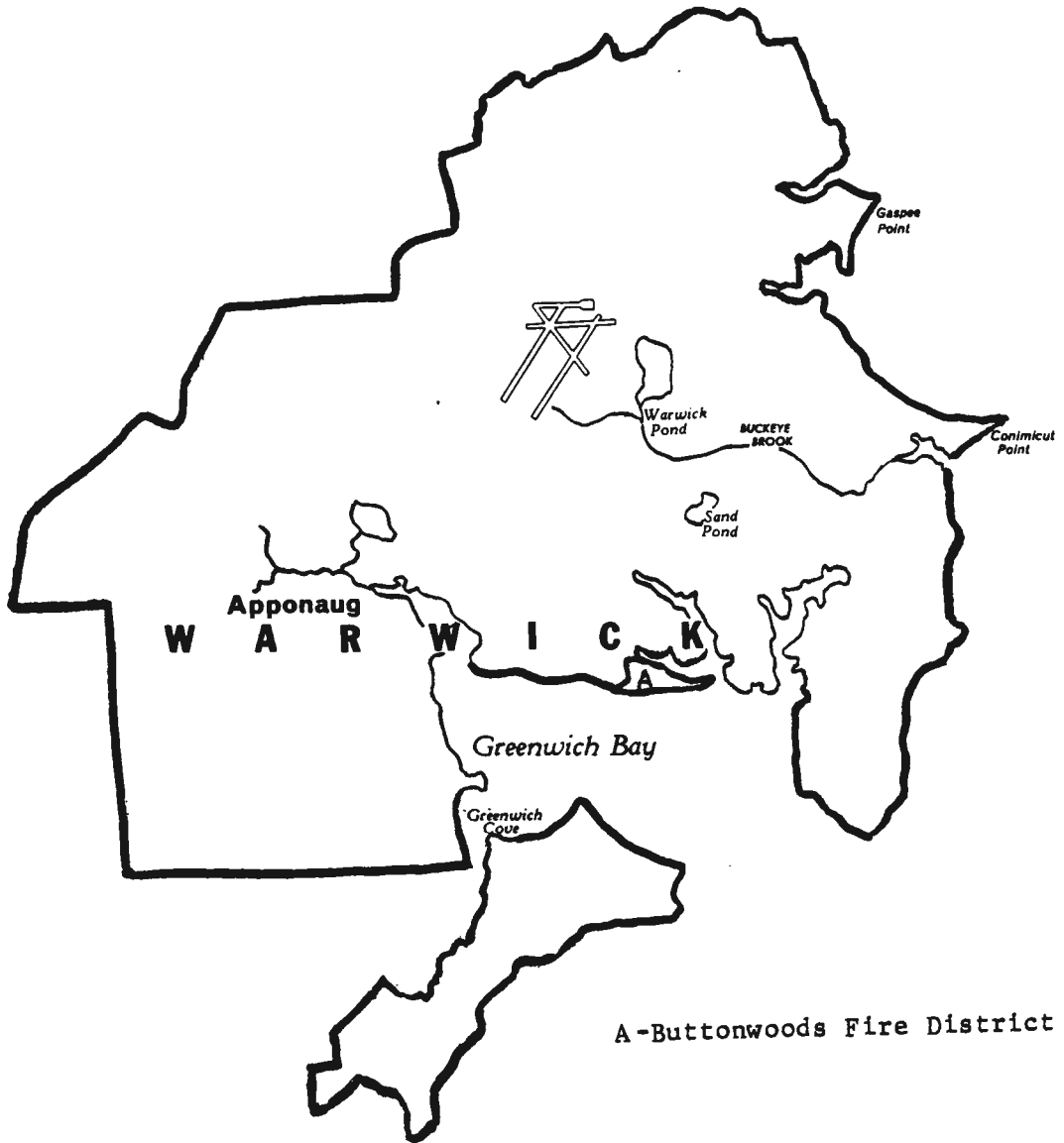


DIAGRAM IIp
CITY OF WARWICK AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICT

WESTERLY

The Town of Westerly is located in the southwest corner of the State of Rhode Island, approximately 42 miles from Providence. Westerly is bounded on the north by the Town of Hopkinton, on the south by Block Island Sound, on the east by the Town of Charlestown, and on the west by the State of Connecticut.

When Westerly was incorporated as the fifth town of the colony in 1669, the present towns of Richmond, Charlestown, and Hopkinton were original parts. Charlestown and Richmond were taken from the town in 1738 and Hopkinton in 1757, leaving the present area of 33.0 square miles. With over 6 miles of sandy beaches, Westerly is a favorite summer resort area.⁷

The map on the following page shows that there are now seven special purpose districts operating in Westerly. One district, Dunn's Corner, has boundaries which extend into the neighboring Town of Charlestown. These districts provide fire protection for the majority of the land area in Westerly. However, a sizable portion of the town remains without organized protection. Negotiations are currently underway to expand district protection to the area around Chapman Pond, north to the Pawcatuck.

Bradford Fire District: The Bradford Fire District was incorporated by the General Assembly in 1937 and today provides fire protection for approximately 4.1 square miles in the northeast corner of Westerly. The Village of Bradford serves as the focal point of the district and is located at the point of interchange between Routes 91 and 216.

- A-Dunn's Corner Fire District
- B-Charlestown Fire District
- C-Bradford Fire District
- D-Westerly Fire District
- E-Watch Hill Fire District
- F-Misquamicut Fire District
- G-Weekapaug Fire District
- H-Shelter Harbor Fire District
- I-Quonochontaug Central Beach Fire District
- J-Shady Harbor Fire District

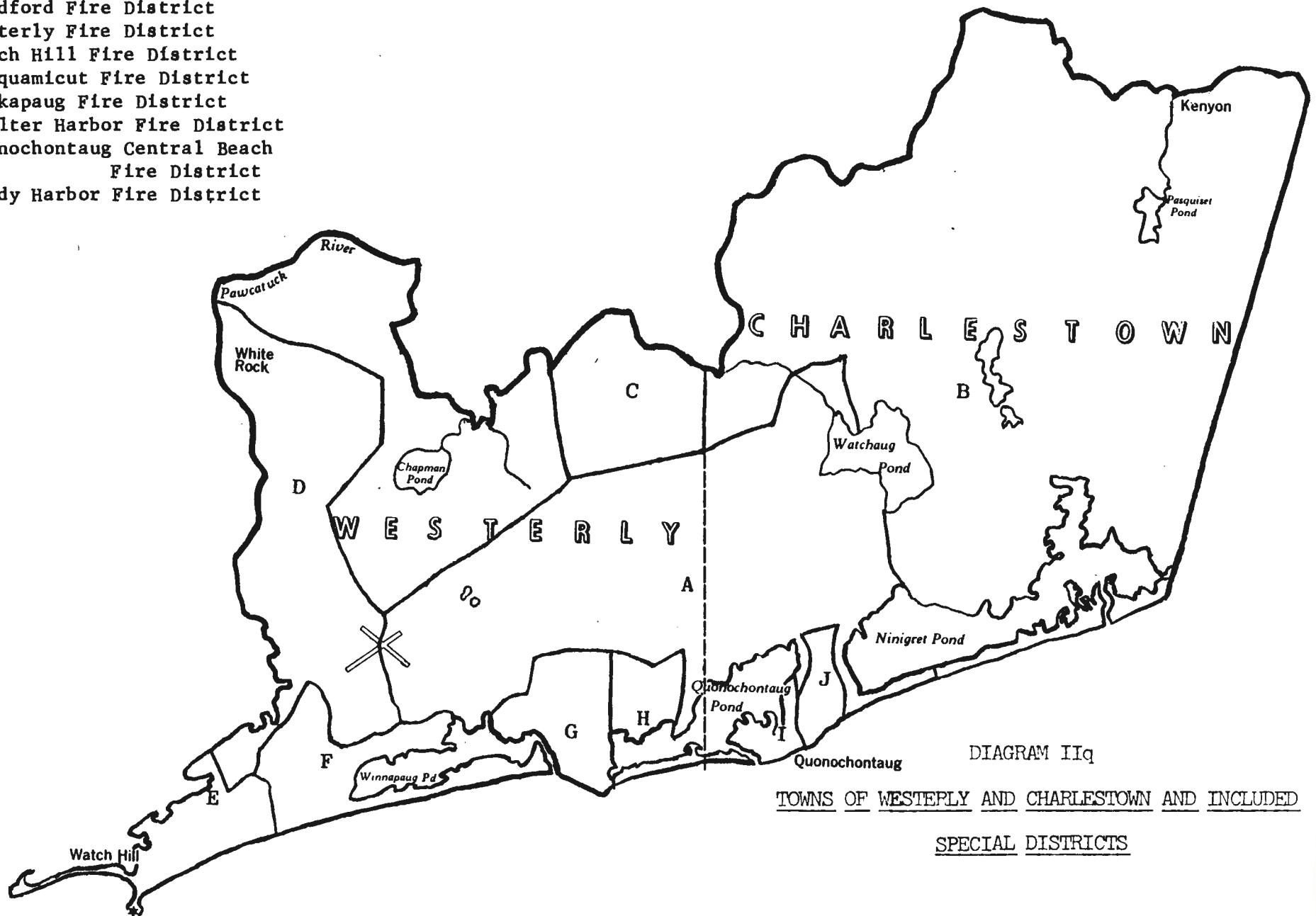


DIAGRAM IIq
TOWNS OF WESTERLY AND CHARLESTOWN AND INCLUDED
SPECIAL DISTRICTS

The single fire station in Bradford is located in the garage of the Bradford Dyeing Association. The fire protection classification assigned to the Bradford Fire District is 6C.

Dunn's Corner Fire District: The Dunn's Corner Fire District has the unique distinction of being the only special district in Rhode Island whose taxing powers for fire protection cross municipal lines. Incorporated in 1952, Dunn's Corner serves the sole purpose of providing fire protection for a sizable area in the eastern part of Westerly and the western part of Charlestown.

In Westerly, Dunn's Corner shares responsibility for protection of Westerly State Airport and a sizable portion of Woody Hill Management Area. A contractual agreement also obligates them to protect the area encompassed by the Shelter Harbor Fire District and the Weekapaug Fire District.

The available fire stations are located on Longworthy Road at Post Road in Westerly, and on Post Road west of East Beach Road in Charlestown. The protection rating for this district is 6C.

Misquamicut Fire District: The Misquamicut Fire District was incorporated in 1917, and today serves an area of approximately 3.6 square miles in the southern portion of Westerly near Winnapaug Pond. Along with fire protection the district is also responsible for garbage collection, mosquito control, recreational supervision and beach and sidewalk maintenance.

The one fire fighting facility in Misquamicut is located on Crandall Avenue near Shore Road. The district has been assigned a protection rating of 6C.

Shelter Harbor Fire District: The Shelter Harbor Fire District is located over Quonochontaug Pond in the southeast portion of Westerly. Incorporated in 1937, Shelter Harbor is responsible to this area of one square mile for mosquito control, dock and road repairs and recreational supervision. Fire protection for this area is provided by the Dunn's Corner District on a contractual basis.

Watch Hill Fire District: The Watch Hill Fire District was incorporated in 1901 to serve the needs of the residents of Watch Hill, a peninsula jutting out into the Block Island Sound. This area of approximately 2 square miles is provided fire protection through the district, as well as dock repair, garbage collection and park maintenance.

The single fire station in the Watch Hill district is located on Watch Hill Road, opposite Nepun Road. A fire protection rating of 6C has been assigned.

Weekapaug Fire District: The Weekapaug Fire District is located in the southern part of Westerly, just east of Winnapaug Pond. Incorporated in 1937 for the purpose of serving this summer area of just one square mile, the district provides mosquito control, road, beach and dock maintenance and overall seasonal supervision. Fire protection for this area is provided by the Dunn's Corner District on a contractual basis.

Westerly Fire District: The Westerly Fire District, which is located along the Pawcatuck River at the western edge of town, is both the largest and the oldest district in the community. Incorporated in 1879, this district provides fire protection for an area of approximately 8.1 square miles. With a station

located on Union Street just south of East Broad Street, the
Westerly Fire District has a protection classification of 6C.

D) FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

Before attempting to draw any conclusions concerning the special purpose district in Rhode Island it is important that an evaluation be carried out concerning their functional effectiveness. As section "C" of this chapter has already revealed, the functions most common to special districts in the Ocean State relate to fire protection and water supply. The importance of considering these two services in particular is substantiated by the number of districts involved, the substantial costs associated with providing these services, and the key role which they play in everyday life.

The following discussion further elaborates on the role played by the special districts in regard to the provision of water and fire protection. Effort is made to avoid isolated consideration of the district, with attention being paid primarily to regional planning implications.

Water Supply: It has been well established through the years that the provision of utilities often acts as a triggering device influencing the direction and rate of development.⁸ Traditionally, however, water system planning has been treated largely as an engineering task, with little involvement on the part of the planner. It is imperative that the expertise of the planner be tapped, along with that of the engineer.

Although water has been largely ignored in planning literature, it has long been of great consequence to life itself. Our basic need for water has traditionally made this resource a critical factor in land settlement. It was mentioned earlier that many of the mill villages in Rhode Island located along

rivers such as the Blackstone and the Pawtuxet in order to take advantage of the flowing resource, and it was around these villages that many special districts were formed.

In the reasoning of classical economists, water is regarded as a free good associated primarily with a given portion of land. However, it is common for the demand of water in a particular area to be quite a bit greater than the local supply. Planning to meet this demand is essential, although quite often very difficult.

Water resource planning frequently involves more complications than any other type of land resource planning, and . . . these complications may be attributed in large part to two sets of factors: first, the diverse characteristics and nature of water resources, and second, numerous conflicts and contradictions in our private and public goals concerning the use of water.⁹

Increasing demand for water stimulated by such factors as population growth, and rising per capita use of water both for business and domestic purposes have stimulated much interest in the subject of water resource use in Rhode Island and in other parts of the nation and the world. The Rhode Island Water Resources Coordinating Board serves as the regional planning agency specifically overseeing water supply and distribution. The act creating the Board states the following:

The Board shall act in an advisory capacity in reviewing and interpreting the data pertaining to the water resources of the state and in studying and advising on area requirements and supplies for present needs and for meeting future demands, all with a view to formulating and coordinating a state water resources program and for intergrating, as far as possible, all local and state sponsored plans for conservation and development of the water resources of the state.¹⁰

There are currently 34 separate water systems in the State of Rhode Island of significant size. A minimum of 25 hookups is generally accepted as constituting "significant." It is the duty of the Water Resources Board to work with these various units, having a view towards their orderly and comprehensive development. Because surface and ground water sources of water seldom bear any relationship to municipal boundaries, water resource planning is a function best carried out at a regional level.

Of the 34 systems with which the Board is concerned, 4 are privately operated "investor owned" systems. Five are considered to be "institutional" systems, those being the Ladd School, Quonset Point Navy Base, University of Rhode Island, Zamborano Hospital, and the Rhode Island Medical Center. Twelve systems are municipally owned and operated, and 13 provide service on a non-profit or cooperative basis. This last total includes special purpose districts.¹¹

The role of the Water Resources Board is one which becomes easily clouded when considered with the existing institutional framework. The 34 systems referred to earlier, for the most part act independently of one another. There are contingency arrangements in certain areas for back-up aid. However, in many cases strong feelings of parochialism cause a splintering of resources. The Board can require individual systems to cooperate in terms of providing basic data and can play the role of the consultant when problems arise, but in the end it is the administrative body of the individual system which makes the decision.

In the past, water systems have very often been established to serve pockets of relatively isolated population. As the state has grown more unified, separate systems have also grown closer to one another. Significant efforts have been made in several cases to take a more unified approach. Through serving a larger area, it's possible for a system to take advantage of basic economies of scale which are not available through the standard municipal or district approach.

The Providence Water Supply Board was established in 1866 when the general assembly passed an act "for supplying the City of Providence with pure water." The role of this board has expanded far past its original mandate so that today this municipally controlled body operates a metropolitan water distribution system serving the cities of Providence, Cranston, Warwick and the towns of Johnston and North Providence. The Providence system also provides water for several other distribution networks. The Scituate Reservoir is the primary source of this metropolitan supply.

The Kent County Water Authority is also a good example of a system which possesses flexible, regional qualities. The controlling body is composed of representatives appointed by the legislative body of each of the Kent County communities. They have been given the power "to enter into cooperative agreements with cities, towns, or water companies within or without the district (county) for interconnection of facilities."¹² Approximately two-thirds of the Kent County water comes from seven gravel-packed wells

in East Greenwich, Coventry, and West Greenwich, with the remainder coming from the Providence system.

There are other examples of regional efforts for water supply. However, the fact remains that there are 34 significant distribution systems in the State, and almost one-third of this total are special districts. Out of necessity it appears that many of these districts are turning outside of their borders for water supply. In recent years, the Indian Lake Fire District in South Kingstown hooked up with the Wakefield Water Company, the East Smithfield District turned to Providence for aid, and others in the East Bay area also have sought outside supplements. The northern areas of Rhode Island have also witnessed a growing concern recently. The Town of Burrillville which relies on two special districts for centralized water supply has stated in its community policy plan that it must:

recognize that the problems existing in Burrillville concerning water supply are indicative of northern Rhode Island and should be solved on a regional basis through a regional reservoir system.¹³

Section 208 of the 1972 Federal Water Pollution Control Act mandates that area-wide water quality plans be developed and implemented to assure adequate control of all sources of pollution. Such a recognition of water as a regional resource can be carried over to the realization that a fragmented structure of supply and distribution is inefficient. The district device can be used effectively in the provision of water only when local supplies are large, and those served are relatively isolated. Measures need to be taken to prevent inefficient fragmentation.

Fire Protection: The first duty of the fire protection organization is to prevent outbreaks of fire that may endanger public safety, and impose an economic burden on the community.¹⁴ In Rhode Island, these organizations take many different forms. However, the one with which we are most concerned is the special district. According to our inventory, 36 districts provide fire protection and a large number of these operate on a volunteer basis.

In colonial days, insurance companies frequently contributed to the support of volunteer fire companies, but fire fighting was performed under the authority of a municipality or by independent volunteer companies which owned their own stations and apparatus. Volunteers played a key role, acting as wardens, night watchmen, and fire fighters. In 1631, following a disastrous fire, Boston adopted the first fire ordinance in the New World, one which prohibited thatched roofs and wooden chimneys. This institution of basic building standards set an important planning precedent in regards to nuisance law and zoning. As a result of conflagration which destroyed 155 buildings and a number of ships in Boston on August 8, 1679, the first paid municipal fire department in North America was created. Twelve fire fighters were employed to operate an engine which was imported from England.¹⁵

Fire protection has become much more sophisticated over the past 300 years, with increased organizational development and advanced technologies. Today, the standards and recommendations of insurance rating bureaus have had

considerable influence in local determination of the type and quantity of fire protection to be provided. In the inventory section of this chapter we learned that the Insurance Service Office of Rhode Island provides a protection classification rating for each of the fire companies in the state. The rate applying to each special district has been included in the descriptive commentary.

According to the evaluation of the rating bureau, special districts provide a level of protection considered to be on the low end of the scale. An interesting exception to this pattern is the rating applied to each of the seven districts in Lincoln. The protection afforded this community is of substantially better quality than that of other special districts. It should be noted, however, that a large proportion of those other districts are located in rural areas and municipal systems in similar areas tend also to be assigned the same low ratings.

It appears that the residents of many Rhode Island communities have chosen to make a trade off between low quality fire protection and high insurance rates. However, it has been shown over time that inadequate protection is a losing gamble and a fire force capable of handling only routine small fires may give a false sense of security. Of concern to local officials should be recent court decisions which have held municipalities subject to suit to recover damages for failure to maintain a reasonably adequate and efficient fire department.¹⁶

According to Goodman and Freund, Rhode Island is not

unique in that its more rural areas benefit from a lower level of protection. Smaller communities usually have one station near to the municipal building or population center. Distribution standards recommended by the American Insurance Association are more stringent for business, industrial, and other high value areas than for an area of scattered residences.¹⁷

It could not be expected that the rural community would be able to provide for facilities and manpower comparable to that of a large city. However, improved planning can make a substantial contribution to the situation. Rarely do communities give adequate attention to the regional implications of fire protection. For example, seldom is there adequate regard for the location of fire companies in adjoining communities. A conscious planning effort at the time of facility construction can have a significant impact.

Such cooperation indicates that there would be arrangements made between districts or municipalities for joint response along common boundaries, and for assistance in covering vacated areas at times of major fires. However, where primary protection service is based on cooperation between autonomous forces, the team and tactical efficiency should be assumed to be somewhat less than where equal units are under united command.¹⁸

Of increasing occurrence in other areas of the country is the county fire department. This is an effort to organize numerous small suburban communities in order to enjoy the benefits of a large, professionally administered department,

with staff and facilities which ordinarily, few small communities could individually afford. Once again we witness the advantages of recognizing economies of scale and working together towards mutual goals.

Fire protection officials are often faced with the awkward situation whereby there are detailed standards provided by their profession which they can follow for an existing situation, but few guidelines relative to anticipating the future.¹⁹ It is essential that the skills of the planner be tapped, so that fire officials have some sort of grasp on plans for future improvements and development. The typical planning agency is most likely better equipped to carry out needed studies than are those concerned with day to day fire prevention functions.

Once again we are faced with a service which can be provided more efficiently when fragmentation is avoided. Through centralized administration and purchasing, valuable tax dollars can be saved.²⁰ The coordination of the regional location of facilities can drastically reduce response time and mutual aid agreements can literally be a life saver in times of particular trouble. Rhode Island municipalities and districts need to work toward a more unified approach in fire protection.

CHAPTER II
FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Frederick Bird, Local Special Districts And Authorities In Rhode Island (Kingston, R.I.: Bureau of Government Research, 1962), entire.
- ² Efraim Torgovnik, Special Districts In Rhode Island (Kingston, R.I.: Bureau of Government Research, 1968), entire.
- ³ Bird, Local Special Districts And Authorities In Rhode Island, p. 5.
- ⁴ Providence Journal-Bulletin, Rhode Island Almanac (Providence, R.I., 1977), p. 25.
- ⁵ Rhode Island Department of Economic Development, Monograph: Gloucester, R.I. (Providence, November 1968), p. 12.
- ⁶ Keyes Associates, An Engineering Study And Report To Determine The Adequacy of Indian Lake Shores Fire District Water Supply (Providence: Keyes Associates, 1977), entire.
- ⁷ Rhode Island Department of Economic Development, Monograph: Westerly, R.I. (Providence: November, 1975), p. 17.
- ⁸ E. Stuart Chapin and Shirley Weiss, eds., Urban Growth Dynamics In A Regional Cluster Of Cities (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962), entire.
- ⁹ Raleigh Barlowe, Modern Land Policy (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 225.
- ¹⁰ Rhode Island General Assembly, "An Act Creating The State Water Resources Coordinating Board," Public Laws Of Rhode Island, Chapter 3562, April 28, 1955.
- ¹¹ Rhode Island Water Resources Board, Public Water Systems (Providence: March 1971), entire.
- ¹² Rhode Island General Assembly, "An Act To Create The Kent County Water Authority," Public Laws Of Rhode Island, Chapter 1740, January 1946.
- ¹³ Rhode Island Department of Community Affairs, Policy Plan: Town Of Burrillville (Providence: April 1969), p. 19.
- ¹⁴ National Fire Protection Association, Fire Protection Handbook (Hartford: Connecticut Printers Inc., 1969) pp. 10-12.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 10-15.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 10-17.
- ¹⁷ William I. Goodman and Eric C. Freund, Principles And Practice Of Urban Planning (Washington, D.C.: International City Managers Association, 1968), p. 224.

- 18 National Fire Protection Association, Fire Protection Handbook, p. 10-11.
- 19 Goodman and Freund, Principles And Practice Of Urban Planning, p. 225.
- 20 Daniel Czamanski, The Cost Of Preventive Services: The Case Of Fire Departments (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1975), entire.

CHAPTER III
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus far we have surveyed the special purpose district both from a theoretical perspective, and one of actual operation. The information which has been gathered allows us to draw certain conclusions regarding the relationship between regional planning and the special district, as well as to make a number of recommendations.

In one sense, special purpose governments are capable of regional planning in that they can expand outward with changing needs, unlike general governments whose boundaries are for the most part inflexible. In fact they had become important metropolitan and regional planning units long before many general governments even realized the importance of planning. This activity as one might expect was related only to the specific function with which the unit was concerned. Whether it was a proposal for a roadway, bridge, fire station, or water system they had to try to determine need, to survey feasible sites, and to plan for construction. This was specialized planning in its most narrow sense.¹

By its very nature the special purpose district is the least suited of all government units to handle planning responsibilities. The statute by which a district is established directs that it be concerned only with its sole function(s), and it is here that it is expected to concentrate its expertise, leaving the district almost entirely free to handle that activity. It is totally inconsistent with the principles of planning to assign the task of planning to an agency which lacks an overview.

In evaluating the special purpose district it is important to remember that the policies of one government cannot be established without influencing the policies of others, particularly those functioning in the immediate area. Such policies require decisions on social and economic matters, and the people they serve are in turn affected by these governments.

Our present system of special purpose governments all too often does violence to the principles of regional planning. The special district forms a blind spot in the information that the area needs to plan for, **among other things, adequate services for its population, equalization of tax burdens, and revitalization of the economy.**²

The fragmentation and overlapping which is basic to special purpose districts can often cause confusion, misunderstanding, and indifference. In Chapter I it was mentioned that one of the reasons often given for the creation of a special district is a desire for "grass roots government." If this means broadly based public control, it is frequently an illusion. There are far too many separate governments, each controlling their own actions and planning for their own futures, to assure responsible action. A very important way to improve citizen control and to solve the problems of fragmentation is to have less independent action and more of a coordinated effort.

A basic goal of regional planning is the orderly development and sound utilization of the resources of an area. The use of the special purpose district, however, is a piecemeal

method of attempting to reach this goal. These splintered governments often have different approaches to a common problem, which often conflict and work at cross-purposes, thus dissipating needed energies. If a special district is to apply for a federal funding then its grant application is reviewed through the A-95 clearing house. However, such review only occurs when Washington becomes involved.

Perhaps the best example of lack of coordination that can be drawn from the Rhode Island case study is the way in which programs are financed. With very few exceptions, districts are not required to file financial reports of any kind, to any state department or agency. One of the rare examples of a special district which has any financial supervision is the Pascoag Fire District which because it is involved in the distribution of electricity, is subject to regulation by the Public Utilities Commission. Because of this independent action there often occurs an irrational competition for monies. Each organization has its own fiscal policy, and makes its own demands upon the total financial resources of the area. No distinction seems to be made between the legal debt limit of a community and the economic debt limit. Although financing through the district device may not affect the legal debt limit it does create an additional burden on the community in an economic sense.

It seems fair to say ... that the ability to borrow more expensively and with less restrictions is an insufficient justification for the use of (special districts), and could, in the long run, operate disadvantageously for communities harboring the delusion that the bonds which are not debt in the constitutional sense do not create a debt burden.

If (special districts) are to hold a continuing and constructive position in our government structure, it will be due, not to their means of evading debt limit, but to their ability to provide various essential public services more efficiently, more economically, more expeditiously and more flexibly than our established units of general government.³

Ingenious improvisation has gone into the development of special purpose governments; however, less attention has been given to whether or not they are the best among all possible alternatives. The conclusion one reaches after examining special districts is that some sort of reform is necessary if we are to have intelligent policy making, and effective planning. Although reform is definitely in order it would be irrational to proclaim simply that all special districts should be abolished immediately, or even advocate that a moratorium be declared on the creation of new ones.

The following recommendations are being proposed as an aid in reforming our presently splintered and uncoordinated system of special purpose governments. Although they are made with specific reference to Rhode Island, they could be easily modified, where necessary, to adapt to the needs of other states.

A) STANDARD RECORDS AND BUDGETING

In order to be assured of efficient government, and to be able to plan effectively for the future, it is important that there be a free flow of information. Standard records and accounts that can be easily compared are essential in assuring that this flow not be interrupted.

As the General Laws of Rhode Island are currently written:

Prior to the close of the fiscal year of each city and town in the state, such city or town shall retain the services of one or more certified public accountants holding a certificate from the State of Rhode Island, (or from any other state with whom the state board of accounting has a reciprocal relationship), . . . to make a detailed post audit of financial records of such city or town for the preceding fiscal year in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards.⁴

It is recommended that this requirement regarding annual audit reports be expanded to include all special purpose districts. Districts, like municipalities, are given their powers by the state. It is advisable that the Bureau of Audits, which is a part of the State Department of Administration, be looked to as an important check regarding these largely autonomous entities.

B) DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION

At several points in this report it has been noted that smaller, independent governmental units often do not benefit from the same assets that accrue to larger organizations. The special purpose district in Rhode Island is a prime example of a unit often operating at such a disadvantageous scale.

It is recommended that, whenever it is determined to be feasible, contiguous districts consolidate in order to increase coordination and decrease the negative effects of fragmentation. When consolidation takes place at a community wide level, it is recommended that the existing municipal body assume the responsibility for service provision. This sort of service transition has the greatest likelihood of success in an area which is fairly homogenous, and relatively developed.

The Town of West Warwick serves as a model for the

recommended district consolidation. On November 5, 1947, the voters of this community expressed their support for a petition to the General Assembly to allow the Town to take over the stations, apparatus and other assets of the 5 independent districts furnishing protection and utilize them as a nucleus of a new municipal department. A Providence Journal editorial written at the time of the consolidation commented that:

Distinctly better protection can be expected from a single, unified force, centrally operated and directed than has been possible under the old system which is a relic of the days when West Warwick was a series of scattered villages rather than a closely knit community.

Such a commentary could well be applied today to certain areas of Rhode Island which could benefit from an improvement in their fire protection rating similar to that experienced by West Warwick. Fire districts, however, are not the only units who should be considering consolidation. The following discussion refers to several district areas, concerned with numerous services, which should be considered as prime targets for consolidation.

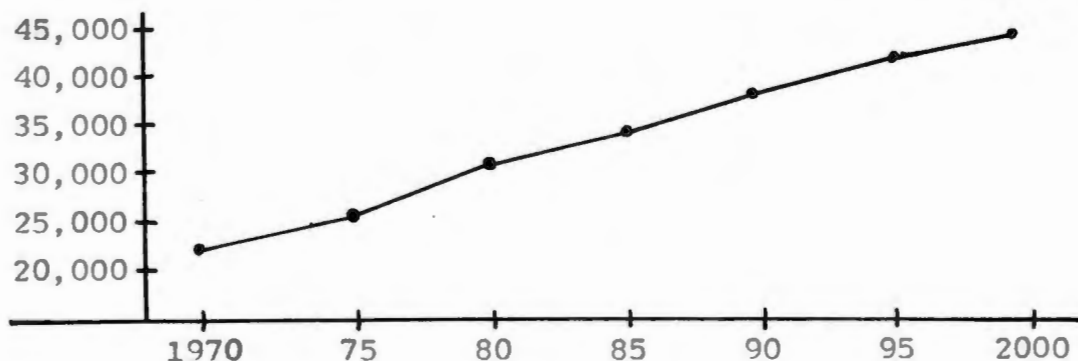
Coventry: For almost 40 years the Town of Coventry has been considering the idea of consolidating their fire districts to form a municipal department. In 1972 a committee was formed which consisted of the Chiefs and their Deputies from the seven independently operated districts. This committee recommended a phased consolidation of districts, which would eventually result in the formation of a town-wide department. Apparently a fierce attachment to the district system among

local citizens prevented the implementation of the proposed plan.

It is recommended that a consolidation of the sort suggested by the Chiefs be considered once again. Phase I of this plan would see the Coventry and Harris districts coming together, as well as the Hopkins Hill, Tiogue and Washington districts. Phase II would bring these newly aligned districts together so that the entire eastern portion of the town would be unified. Phase III would have the Central Coventry District combine with that from the east, and Phase IV would bring the largest district, Western Coventry, into concert with the others. The final step would see the local town government assume responsibility.

There are a number of reasons for isolating Coventry as an example at this time, one of which is the intense development which has occurred during the past decade and is expected to continue in the future. Table IIIA shows the projected population increase in Coventry for the years 1970 to 2000.

TABLE IIIA
PROJECTED POPULATION FOR TOWN OF COVENTRY, 1970-2000



Source: Statewide Planning. Rhode Island Population Projections, Technical Paper #25, 1975.

The forecasts for the year 2000 show a 30 year increase in population of 87.8%. Support for these figures, which were compiled by the Office of Statewide Planning, is provided by the Rhode Island Builders Association which reports that Coventry has ranked no lower than fourth among Rhode Island communities in regard to single family housing starts in each year since 1971.

These factors give somewhat of an indication of the development pressures which Coventry has to face. It is to the advantage of the entire community to have coordinated control over the provision of expanded local services, as well as a point of centralized purchasing with regard to the new facilities and equipment which are inevitable. The phased consolidation of the 7 fire districts is a recommendation deserving of careful consideration.

Cumberland: The Town of Cumberland has also experienced pressures through the years for the consolidation of their five fire districts. The most recent recommendation was made in 1976 by the Board of Fire Commissioners, who advised that a plan of total consolidation be implemented. This plan was rejected at the financial town meeting for fear of high initial costs.

It is recommended that this plan once again be placed before the people for their consideration. Proponents of the plan have an advantage in that the community is largely homogeneous and not subject to the same parochialistic opposition as are some other areas. If the long-term financial advantages of centralized fire protection are well

publicized the recommended consolidation should have a good chance for success.

Burrillville: As accounted earlier, the Town of Burrillville has five separate special districts which are located largely around the villages of the eastern portion. This community has not experienced the same growth pressures as some of the others with which we have dealt, and therefore the village concept remains operable. It is advisable that we deal with the existing pockets of population, however, and not allow them to be divided by obsolete district boundaries.

It is recommended that the Pascoag Fire District and the Harrisville Fire District consolidate in order to provide more efficient services for their adjacent areas. At this time the Pascoag district has already accepted responsibility for providing electric power for Harrisville, as well as the entire western portion of Burrillville. In fact, prior to 1936, these districts were even provided water by the same company. It was the district device which separated the common distribution system into two parts. These two districts currently have a great deal in common and consolidation could only be a plus.

It is also recommended that the three districts to the east of Harrisville consolidate. The Nasonville, Oakland and Glendale districts currently provide similar services, and although history does not provide them with the same sort of link that exists between their neighbors in Harrisville and Pascoag, they have a natural link in terms of operations and geography. Centralized provision of services could mean

increased benefits for the region.

Lincoln: The Town of Lincoln is a comparatively small community which consists of seven separate special districts. The Blackstone River forms the Town's eastern border and it was along this resource that numerous mill villages were established. The special districts in existence today are located in the area of these villages.

The differences which formerly divided these areas today are nonexistent. Lincoln is a relatively homogenous town and district boundaries relate to little other than fire protection. It is recommended that these seven districts consolidate so as to form a municipal department. This transition would be similar to that which succeeded in West Warwick, and promises to bring many of the same advantages.

Tiverton: The Town of Tiverton has within its borders two separate districts which each provide water supply for a portion of the community. The Stone Bridge Fire District and the North Tiverton Fire District are responsible for relatively small, adjacent areas, and their consolidation would be highly advantageous. Such a move would greatly enhance local abilities to plan for future development, as well as provide current services more efficiently.

C) MASTER PLANNING

At the present time, the General Laws of Rhode Island require that each of the 39 cities and towns compile a comprehensive plan which outlines local goals and objectives for the coming years. This requirement forces communities to look beyond their present situation and to prepare for the

future.

It is recommended that state requirements for comprehensive planning be extended to include special purpose districts. Because of the functional nature of these governmental units, perhaps the term "master plan" is more suitable. This requirement would force districts to make public a master plan regarding their particular service activity. Such a plan would not only directly benefit the particular district area, but also that of adjacent units. This increased flow of information would serve to encourage intergovernmental cooperation and allow for more of a regional approach to problem solving.

D) BOUNDARY COMMISSION

Rhode Island is not alone in facing problems of the special purpose district, and related governmental fragmentation. Other states have also recognized such problems and have attempted to deal with them through increased coordination. It is recommended here that Rhode Island follow the lead of such states as California, New Mexico, Washington, Oregon and Nevada and establish what is commonly known as a Boundary Commission.

A Commission such as that being proposed would be on a par with others such as the Public Utilities Commission, and the Bridge and Turnpike Authority. Members of this commission would be appointed by the governor and support staff would be made available.

The primary responsibility of this commission would be to review action pertaining to: the creation, dissolution, incorporation,

disincorporation, consolidation, or change in boundary of any city, town or special district; (or) the assumption by any city town of all or parts of the assets, facilities, or indebtedness of a special purpose district which lies partially within that town.⁶

This assignment of responsibility is for the purpose of providing a method for guiding the growth of local governments, to prevent the illogical extensions of boundaries, and to assure adequate quality and quantity of public services as well as the financial integrity of each unit.

The enabling legislation setting up such a commission in California requires the board to make studies and to furnish information which will contribute to the logical development of local government, so as to advantageously provide for the present and future needs of each region and its communities. Due to the fact that Rhode Island is the smallest state in the union and ranks 39th in population, such a regional approach is made quite a bit easier.

With the existence of a Boundary Commission special districts in Rhode Island would be forced to bring forth a petition requesting permission to make any change referring to such matters as district areas, functions, finances, or administration. In reviewing these petitions the commission would call for comments by other units of local government, as well as state agencies, such as the Department of Community Affairs, Statewide Planning or the Water Resources Board.

The ambiguity of present legislation and statutes concerning special purpose districts makes it imperative that

there be an improvement in legal codification. With the important position occupied by the special district it is only right that their position within the legal system be reviewed. An important initial task of a Boundary Commission would be to undertake a careful, comprehensive study so as to identify the possible ambiguity and deficiencies of existing statutes. The exact spelling out of powers and procedures would be a major step in achieving efficient organization.

The Boundary Commission offers many advantages in terms of increased coordination, and improved planning. It holds great potential regarding the smoothing over of fragmentation which is a highly disruptive factor in intergovernmental relations.

CHAPTER III
FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Robert Smith, Ad Hoc Governments (Beverley Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1974), p. 207.
- ² Frederick Bird, Local Special Districts And Authorities In Rhode Island (Kingston, R.I.: Bureau of Government Research, 1968), p. 30.
- ³ Frederick Bird, "The Contribution Of Authorities To Efficient Municipal Management," The Authority, December 1949, pp. 2-5.
- ⁴ State of Rhode Island And Providence Plantations, General Laws, Chapter 45-10-4.
- ⁵ The Providence Journal, "Editorial" (Providence, R.I.: October 2, 1947), p. 13.
- ⁶ State of Washington, General Laws Of 1967, Chapter 189.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In 1962, Frederick Bird asked an important question which deserves to be addressed. "Are special districts to serve merely as an intermediate stage in the transition from rural to urban living, or are they to become more and more a patchwork third layer of government that will vie with towns in importance?"

If faced with choosing between these two alternatives, the former seems to be the more attractive. The major problem is that for too long state and local government has seemed to take a "go-as-you-please" type attitude toward public management. If handled properly, the special purpose district can serve well as an intermediate stage in government. However, if ignored and allowed to operate solely on its own, the district can be highly disruptive.

The overall job of government has little chance of success unless there is teamwork, coordination and a steady flow of comparable data on the operation of its components. This would permit intelligent, area-wide analysis, policy making, and planning.

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