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Preserving Wickford Village in the Shadow of Wal-Mart

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PRESERVING WICKFORD VILLAGE IN THE SHADOW OF WAL-MART

BY

KRISTINE MAJOR

**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING**


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1996**

MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING
RESEARCH PROJECT
OF
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ABSTRACT

This study provides recommendations that should be considered as Wickford Village faces the location of a Wal-Mart store approximately two miles away from the village center. These recommendations are the results of observations of Wickford Village, interviews with business owners in Wickford Village, research on the effect of Wal-Mart on "Main Street, and the identification of strengths and weaknesses in Wickford Village." The recommendations are primarily concerned with the physical and economic effects on Wickford Village. While no one can predict the precise economic or physical effects Wal-Mart will have on Wickford Village, these recommendations are intended to make the negative effects minimal and allow Wickford Village to survive by becoming a year-round destination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people who helped see this study through to the end; Dr. Farhad Atash and Dr. Howard Foster for their time, commitment, and guidance on this project; Kevin Flynn and David Twombly for their advice, encouragement, and ideas; the merchants of Wickford Village who took the time to participate in my interviews; the North Kingstown planning office for their invaluable assistance in my research; my classmates for their support, friendship and humor throughout graduate school and particularly this project; and my family for their understanding and support.

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Chapter One Introduction

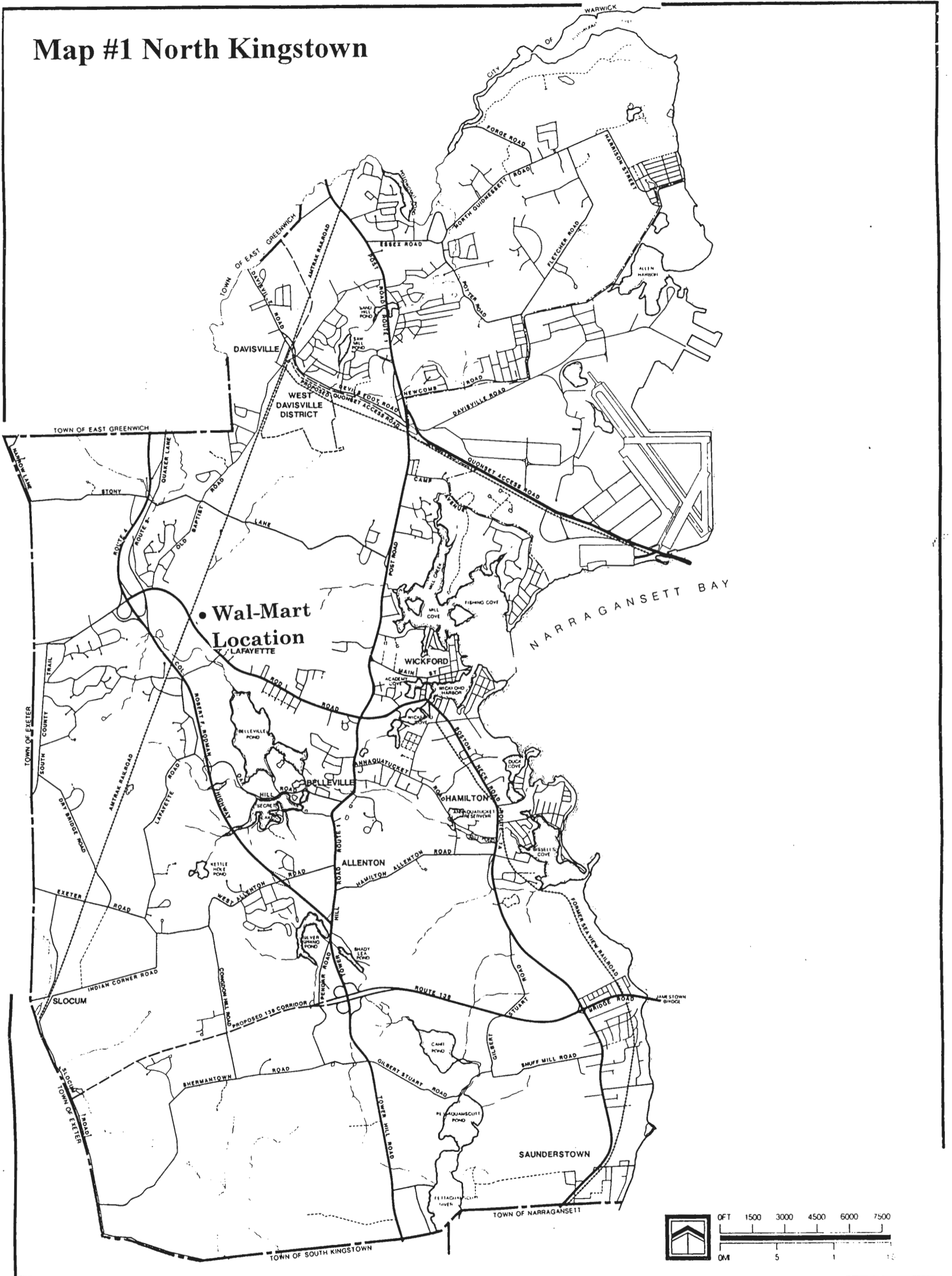
1.1 Background and Problem Statement

In October of 1995, the North Kingstown Planning Commission approved a project that will allow for approximately 300,000 square feet of commercial development (retail and office) on a sixty three acre parcel of land. The project was proposed by Wickford Junction Associates, LLC. The site is located on Ten Rod Road, North Kingstown, Rhode Island, one-quarter mile east of the junction between Route 4, Route 102 and Route 2 (Map #1). The site is currently zoned Planned Business District and is located within the groundwater overlay zone. A new commuter rail station is also proposed within the Wickford Junction development.

Wal-Mart is the first retail establishment that has agreed to be a part of the proposed commercial development. The proposed plaza will include the following uses:

#1	Single Story Structure	5,625sf
#2	Single Story Structure	5,625sf
#3	Single Story Structure	5,625sf
#4	Single Story Structure	22,000sf
#5	Medical Office Facility	10,000sf
#6	Two Story Structure	64,624sf
#7	Single Story Structure (Wal-Mart)	123,396sf
#8	Commuter Rail Station	2,600sf
#9	Commuter Parking Lot (266 Vehicles)	30,500sf
	Total	269,995sf

Map #1 North Kingstown

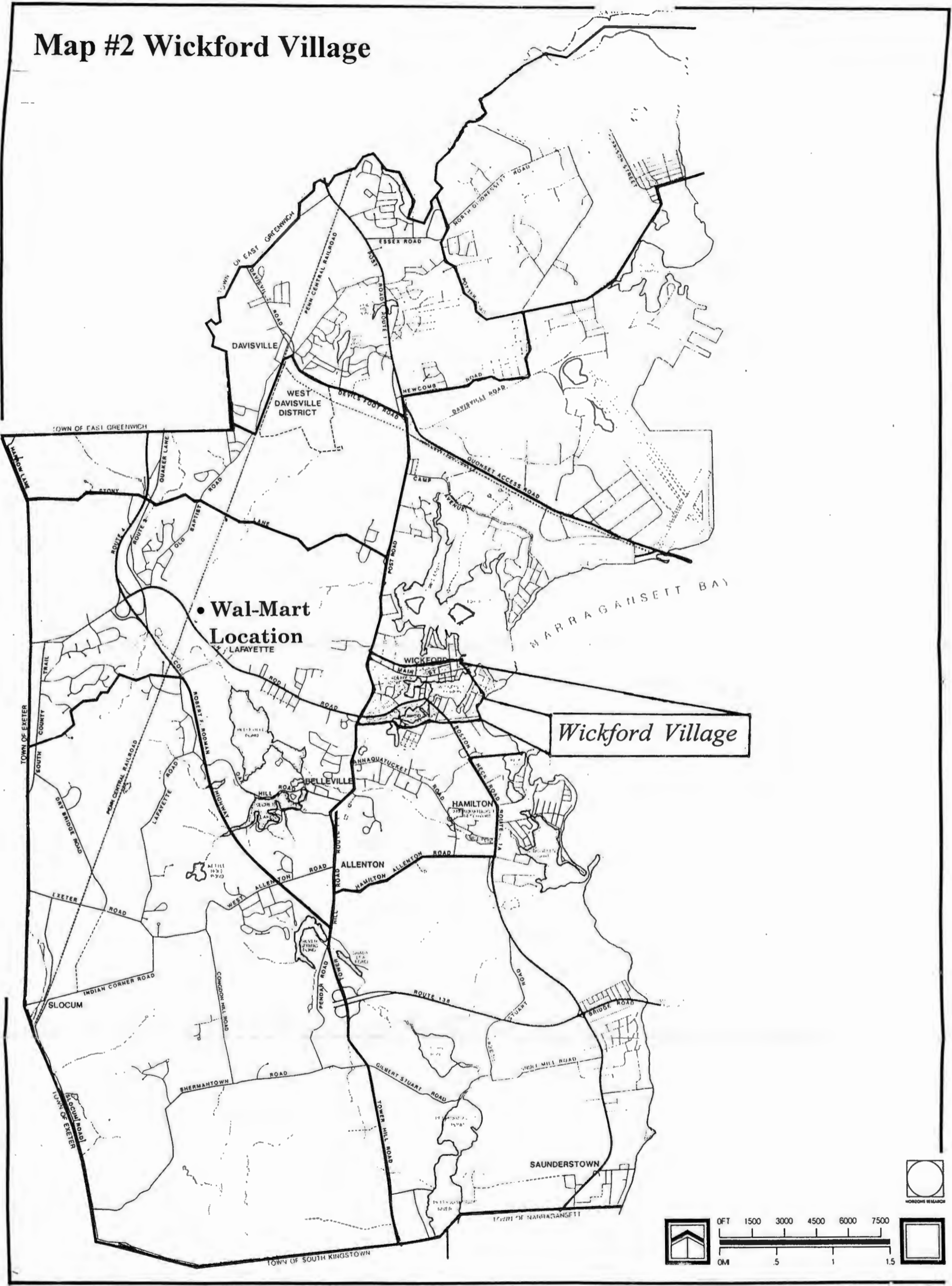


Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995

The announcement that Wal-Mart would be a part of this commercial development has made this project highly controversial. A lawsuit was filed by Wickford Junction Associates, LLC against the Town of North Kingstown concerning the rezoning of the parcel. The No-Mart Coalition filed lawsuits against the Town of North Kingstown Planning Board and Wickford Junction Associates, LLC. Various grass-roots organizations have formed both in support and against the development of a Wal-Mart Store in North Kingstown. Most of the concerns about the location of Wal-Mart center around the effects it may have on Wickford Village since Wal-Mart has been blamed for the demise of America's rural Main Street. The major concerns for the residents of North Kingstown and the surrounding area include the loss of the village character and sense of community, uncontrolled growth, the threat of additional retail "sprawl" and the economic threat to the existing businesses, particularly in Wickford Village (Map #2). The National Trust for Historic Preservation believes that retail sprawl and the economic threats to existing businesses are linked together (Beaumont 1994). This study will focus on both the economic and physical concerns for Wickford Village .

Although Wickford Village is not the typical "Main Street," that Wal-Mart has been accused of destroying, the Town of North Kingstown, the grass-roots organizations, and the independent business owners must still work together to devise and implement a pro-active plan that will allow the existing businesses and Wal-Mart to coexist. This plan needs to be developed and implemented before the arrival of the Wal-Mart Store in North Kingstown. If the plan is reactive to the arrival of Wal-Mart it may be too late for the existing businesses to survive along side the retail giant.

Map #2 Wickford Village



Source: Fanning and Scanlon 1995

This study will examine the past literature to identify the economic and physical harm associated with Wal-Mart. It will characterize and analyze what makes Wickford Village different from a strip commercial development, identify the strengths and weaknesses of Wickford Village, and provide economic and physical recommendations that will preserve Wickford Village in the face of Wal-Mart.

1.2 Significance of the Study

In recent years Wal-Mart, Inc. has captured not only twenty six percent of the discount retail market share but it has also caught the attention of the media. (Grover 1992) The media has ensured that “every community whether or not it has a Wal-Mart within shopping distance, knows plenty about this chain.” (Mammarella 1994). Until recently New England was considered one of the few markets untapped by the Wal-Mart Corporation. In recent years Wal-Mart Inc. has concentrated on locating its stores in New England.

Although Wal-Mart is not the only big box retailer in the United States, it is by far the most successful, efficient and aggressive, making it the most visible. Wal-Mart has received most of the negative media coverage for its supposed effect on Main Street. The negative media attention focusing solely on Wal-Mart is attributed to their rapid growth and expansion which exceeds the growth of other discount retailers. Attention has also been concentrated on Wal-Mart over questions as to their location practices within a community.

Planners, preservationists, and residents cite the “preservation of traditional downtown areas and stabilization of existing markets” as reason to oppose big-box development (Johnston 1995). Wal-Mart has concentrated on locating its stores at the crossroads of small communities with diverse populations and good highway access. Wal-Mart has shifted the retail center from the traditional downtown or main street of a community out to highway interchanges on the edge of town (Beaumont 1994). On average, Wal-Mart locates approximately one mile from the traditional downtown area. Wal-Mart also tends to locate in towns “where there are few, if any, restrictions on maximum store size, few parking restrictions, and no design guidelines” (Johnston 1995).

Many small merchants have found that they cannot survive with a Wal-Mart Store in town. Dr. Kenneth Stone of Iowa State University, suggests that a typical Wal-Mart store has annual revenues of approximately ten million dollars, eight million of which is taken from surrounding stores. General merchandise and specialty stores seem to suffer the most from the retail chain (Rawn 1990).

Wal-Mart has recently begun a strategy of expansion into unfamiliar territory. In the past, Wal-Mart limited its store locations to rural and middle income suburban markets, however, it is now expanding into more “upscale” areas. These “upscale” areas include higher income suburbs and historic areas where the retailers are generally upscale boutiques similar to those found in Wickford Village. The effects of this new location strategy on areas such as Wickford Village are yet to be documented.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study has three objectives. First it characterizes Wickford Village by identifying and comparing the village core to a strip commercial development. Second, it identifies the strengths and weaknesses of Wickford Village in relation to its unique character and the opportunity for survival along side a Wal-Mart store. Lastly it offers recommendations that address both the physical and economic effects of Wal-Mart.

1.4 Approach and Method of the Study

This study accepts the North Kingstown Planning Commission's decision to approve the Wal-Mart project and looks beyond the debate of whether or not Wal-Mart should be allowed to locate two and one half miles outside of Wickford Village. Instead this study will examine how to make the coexistence of Wickford Village and Wal-Mart possible. The project is divided into five chapters. Following the introduction, the study reviews the literature of Wal-Mart and its supposed effects on Main Streets. The literature on Wal-Mart can be found in many sources including the popular press and many scholarly journals. This chapter will address the major literature that address the physical expansion and growth patterns of Wal-Mart, economic impacts of Wal-Mart and commercial sprawl.

The third chapter provides a community profile of North Kingstown and Wickford Village while also comparing the village core to a strip commercial development. Using the results of business interviews and other observations, chapter four will identify strengths and weaknesses of Wickford Village.

The fifth chapter proposes a plan that will provide physical and economic recommendations that will protect and preserve Wickford Village along side of Wal-Mart. The final chapter will also provide an overall conclusion and outlook for this project.

Chapter Two Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the past literature on the Wal-Mart Corporation. There has been extensive documentation of Wal-Mart and the problems it appears to cause when it enters a community. This documentation has appeared in both the popular press and in scholarly journals. For the purpose of this study, the literature review examines the expansion pattern and growth of Wal-Mart, the economic impacts of Wal-Mart on a community, and the third is the impact of retail sprawl.

2.1 Expansion Pattern and National Growth

Several studies have been conducted studying the growth and national expansion of Wal-Mart. These include studies by Laulajainen, 1987, Graff and Ashton, 1993, Meyer and Brown, 1979, and Grover, 1992.

Wal-Mart's location strategies have been studied by Laulajainen (1987) who has determined that Wal-Mart's expansion and spatial distribution is very different from other discount retail chains. Unlike other discount retailers, Wal-Mart has targeted rural areas from the beginning. The demographics of a Wal-Mart store show that it locates in areas of low to middle income households with annual incomes of less than \$20,000. The company has applied a merchandising format that appeals to small town residents. Wal-Mart also differs from other retailers in that it opens distribution warehouses before opening new stores and focuses its expansion on small markets rather than metropolitan areas. In addition Wal-Mart chooses a site that is "geographically fortified", meaning

that they tend to group stores together. (Graff and Ashton 1993, American Demographics 1994) Laulajainen described this process of saturating rural markets before moving into metropolitan areas was “hierarchical diffusion in reverse order.”

Graff and Ashton have determined that Wal-Mart’s growth and expansion has occurred in four distinctive phases of development that signify its spatial and geographical tendencies. During the first phase, between 1962-1974, Wal-Mart located primarily in Arkansas and a few adjacent states. During the second phase of development, 1975-1984, Wal-Mart expanded regionally and began competing with other discount outlets. The third phase began in 1985 and saw Wal-Mart expand nationally to serve the entire country including New England. The fourth phase includes the expansion into international markets and the creation of new retail formats.

Phase One

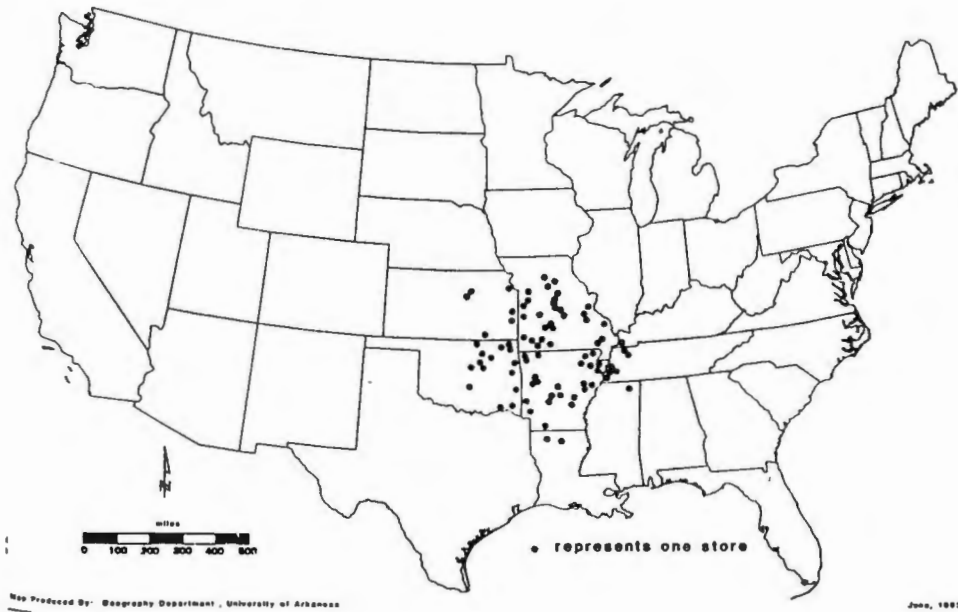
Wal-Mart was able to establish itself as a small-town retailer and began its regional expansion. The company began with a very conservative growth policy which can be attributed to its lack of capital (Meyer and Brown 1979). Wal-Mart was expanding in a contiguous pattern from its central location in the Northwest area of Arkansas (Figures 1 and 2). No store was located more than 400 miles from the company headquarters. The average distance from a store to headquarters was 100-173 miles. As new stores were established the distance increased. Graff and Ashton’s data in Table 1 indicates Wal-Mart’s small market preference. During this phase 51% of the stores were located in counties with less than 25,000 persons. Out of the 102 stores opened during this time, only five were in communities with more than 100,000 people.

Figure 1: Wal-Mart Store Openings: 1962-1969.



Source: Graff and Ashton (1993)

Figure 2: Wal-Mart Store Openings: 1970-1974.



Source: Graff and Ashton (1993)

In this stage of development Wal-Mart avoided the competition by locating in communities and towns that were too small for the other major discounters. The median population in these communities was 8,967. The original Wal-Mart stores that opened in metropolitan areas located in strip commercial developments in low-income neighborhoods. Even though Wal-Mart avoided larger cities it had no problem in locating in small towns in the outskirts of metropolitan areas. By 1970, Wal-Mart was selling stock to raise its capital which in turn allowed for more expansion. As the amount of capital increased so did Wal-Mart's expansion.

Table 1 Number of Wal-Mart Store Openings by Population Size of County: 1962-1990

Year of Opening	County Population (in thousands)									Total Openings
	<25	25-50	50-75	75-100	100-250	250-500	500-750	750-1,000	1,000+	
1962-1969	10 56%	4 22%	2 11%	1 6%	1 6%					18
1970-1974	42 50%	27 32%	8 10%	3 4%	2 2%	1 1%	1 1%			84
1975-1979	73 41%	67 38%	14 8%	7 4%	8 5%	4 2%	2 1%	1 <1%		176
1980-1984	106 23%	134 29%	65 14%	35 7%	71 15%	39 8%	9 2%	3 1%	7 2%	469
1985-1989	158 25%	132 21%	64 10%	51 8%	103 16%	72 11%	20 3%	16 3%	15 3%	631
1990	28 16%	42 24%	14 8%	13 7%	22 13%	23 13%	17 10%	6 3%	10 6%	175

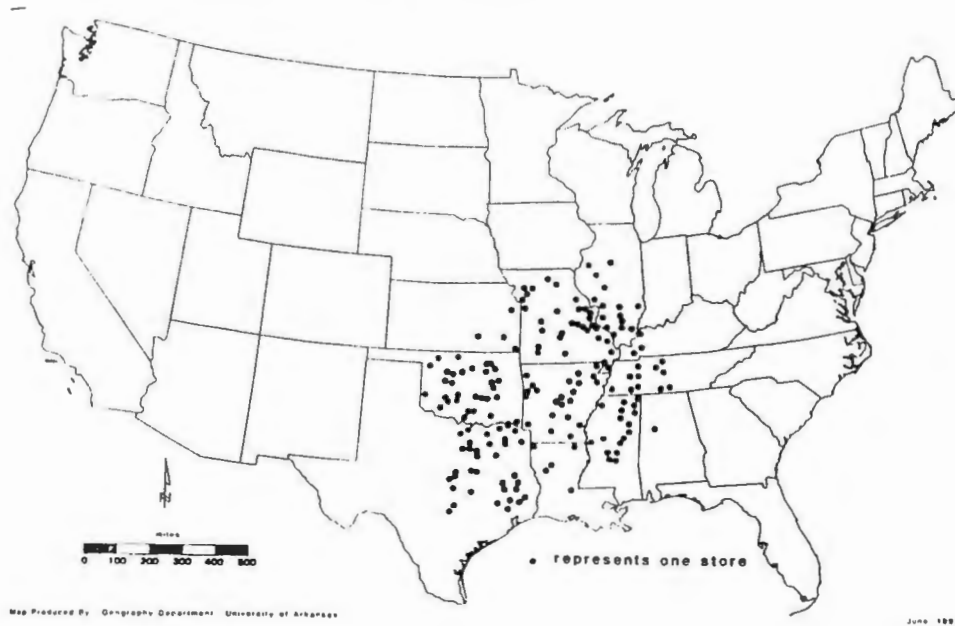
Note: Percentages have been rounded.

Source: Graff and Ashton (1993)

Phase Two

In the period between 1975 and 1984 Wal-Mart opened more than 400 new stores and began to acquire smaller discounters with financial problems. The retail chain also opened stores within central cities, resulting in the wide expansion of the chain's market

Figure 3: Wal-Mart Store Openings: 1975-1979.



Source: Graff and Ashton (1993)

Figure 4: Wal-Mart Store Openings: 1980-1984.



Source: Graff and Ashton (1993)

coverage (Figures 3 and 4). The average distance from a store to headquarters was changed to 273 to 451 miles. The increase in distance created the need to build new warehouses to serve these new store locations. Wal-Mart was also locating stores in communities with over 100,000 persons. Competition with other discounters such as K-Mart and Target, increased particularly in metropolitan locations.

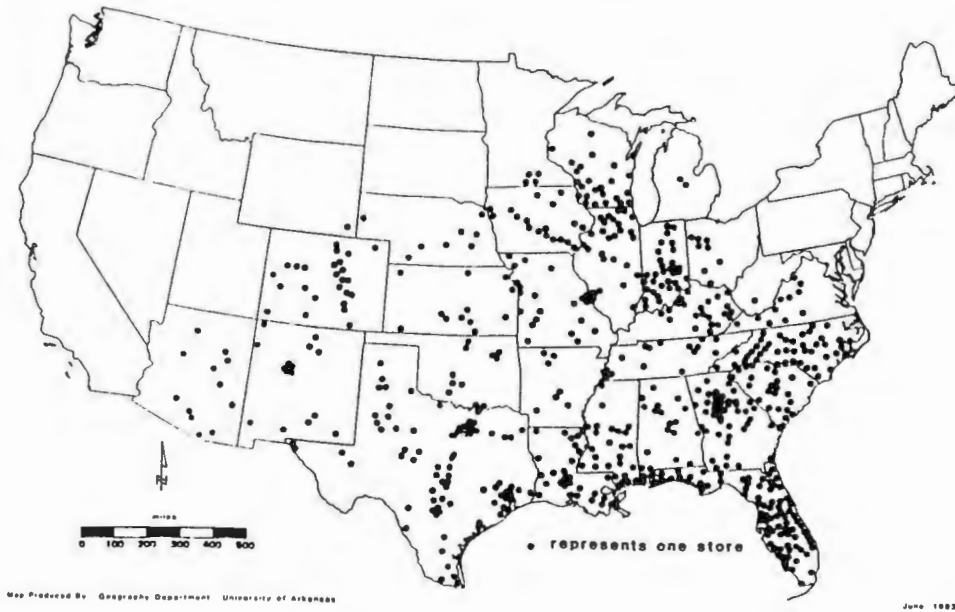
Phase Three

Since 1985 Wal-Mart has emerged as the largest retailer in the United States with 26% of the discount retail market share (Grover 1992). This development phase was primarily in new store development and not acquisitions of other retail chains. Distribution of stores became closer to nationwide during this time period (Figures 7 and 8). The average distance between headquarters and new stores is now 618-757 miles. Wal-Mart has saturated some areas of the country. Table 1 shows the increase in the number of stores opening in areas of over 100,000 persons. In an attempt to increase sales in its home State of Arkansas, Wal-Mart has begun to develop and test new retail formats.

Phase Four

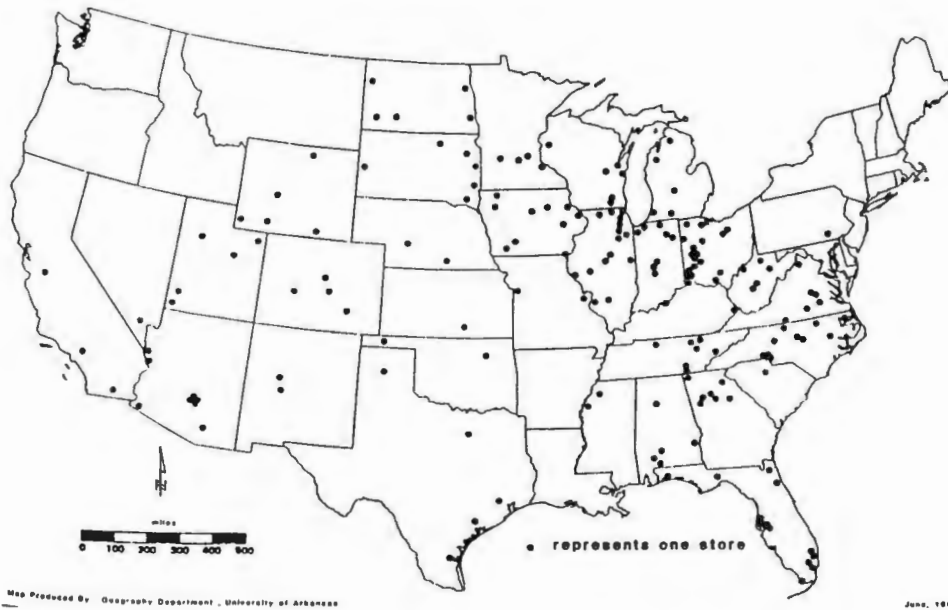
Since 1990, Wal-Mart has aggressively expanded into international markets and altered its domestic location practices. It currently has 123 stores in Canada, 96 in Mexico and plans to open stores in Argentina, Brazil and China during the 1996 fiscal year (Wal-Mart Annual Report 1995). Wal-Mart has acquired such a large portion of the discount market that it has begun to limit its own growth within its current market focus. This has forced Wal-Mart to expand into other retail markets and retail formats.

Figure 5: Wal-Mart Store Openings: 1985-1989.



Source: Graff and Ashton (1993)

Figure 6: Wal-Mart Store Openings: 1990.



Source: Graff and Ashton (1993)

The Wall Street Journal reports in 1996 that Wal-Mart has decided to enter unfamiliar territory with its expansion into upper middle class areas where the retail format is considered “upscale” or boutique. After decades of rural expansion, Wal-Mart’s greatest potential for sales exists in areas where there are high income shoppers. In these communities Wal-Mart is paying closer attention to its image and appearance while also carrying more high end merchandise such as computers, sporting goods, jewelry and different apparel lines. The Wall Street Journal attributes this new expansion pattern to the pressure for the retail store to keep growing after three years of stagnant growth. Wal-Mart is also changing its retail format with the expansion of its supercenter stores. These supercenters include a full size Wal-Mart store in addition to a Wal-Mart grocery store. Table 2 shows the number and distribution, by state, all of the Wal-Mart owned stores including the distribution warehouses in 1995.

2.2 Economic Impacts

There have been many individual economic impact studies conducted on Wal-Mart however the authors that have received national attention include Stone 1983, 1995; Beaumont, 1994; Daniels and Keller, 1991.

In 1988, Dr. Kenneth Stone of Iowa State University conducted a study of Wal-Mart’s expansion in Iowa towns. The purpose of the impact study was to “document changes in retail sales in the host community and in surrounding communities” (Stone 1995). He argues that once the economic impacts are identified programs could be designed to promote a coexistence between local merchants and Wal-Mart.

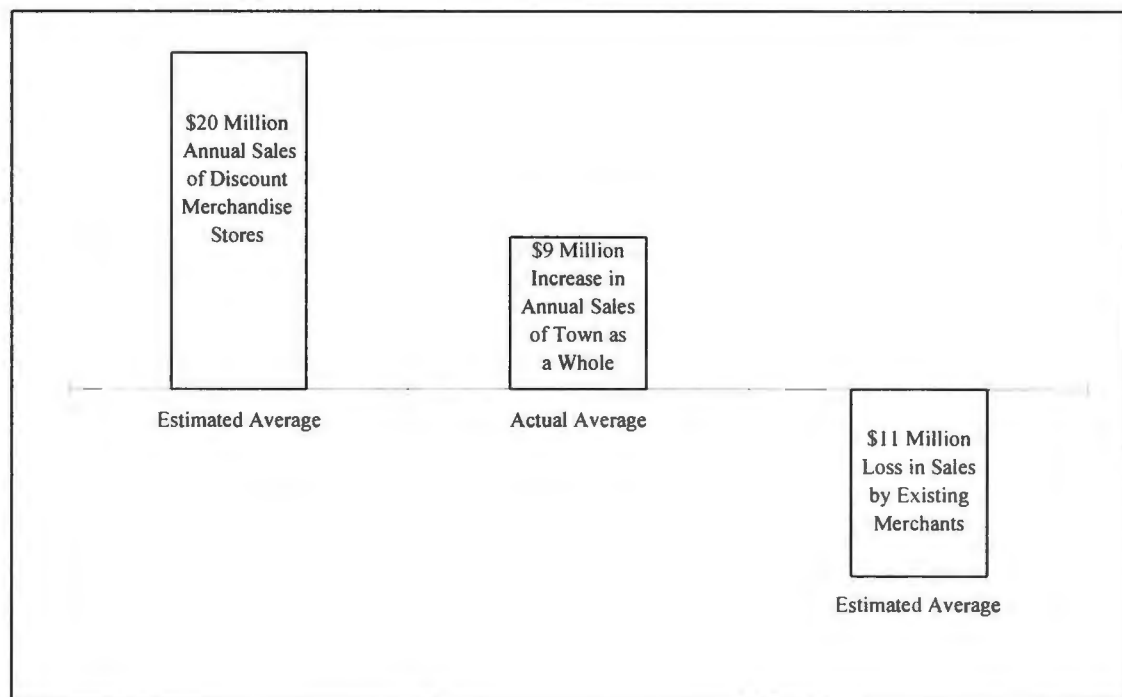
Table 2: Operating Units in the United States

	Wal-Mart Stores	Wal-Mart Supercenters	Sam's Clubs	Distribution Centers	McLanes
Alabama	69	6	8	1	
Alaska	3		3		
Arizona	31		6	1	2
Arkansas	60	17	4	6	
California	78		26	2	2
Colorado	34	1	9	1	1
Connecticut	4		3		
Delaware	2		1		
Florida	120	8	34	1	1
Georgia	81	3	15	1	1
Hawaii	1		1		
Idaho	7		1		
Illinois	102	2	24		1
Indiana	67	3	14	2	
Iowa	45		5	1	
Kansas	43	1	5		
Kentucky	65	3	5		
Louisiana	67	8	9		
Maine	18		3		
Maryland	15		10		
Massachusetts	16		5		
Michigan	36		22		
Minnesota	31		9		
Mississippi	49	8	4	1	1
Missouri	88	19	11		1
Montana	5		1		
Nebraska	15	2	3		
Nevada	7		2		
New Hampshire	14		4		
New Jersey	11		5		
New Mexico	19		3		
New York	37	1	16	1	1
North Carolina	80		12		
North Dakota	8		2		
Ohio	61		23	1	
Oklahoma	65	13	6		
Oregon	17				
Pennsylvania	44	1	12	2	
Puerto Rico	5		2		
Rhode Island	3		1		
South Carolina	50		6	2	
South Dakota	8		1		
Tennessee	79	7	9		
Texas	198	39	51	4	3
Utah	11		5	1	2
Virginia	41	1	9	1	2
Vermont	1				
Washington	9		2		1
West Virginia	12		3		
Wisconsin	50		11	1	
Wyoming	9		2		
Total U.S.A	1,991	143	428	30	19

Source: Wal-Mart Annual Report 1995

The study conducted over four years reported that most merchants in retail and service firms experienced economic losses when Wal-Mart came to town. Although the store claims that it provides an increase in consumer traffic the only stores who benefited were those that did not directly compete with Wal-Mart such as grocery and lumber stores. Profit losses in all retail categories ranged from eight to twenty five percent over the four year period. When estimating that a discount general merchandise store, such as Wal-Mart, “averaged annual sales of \$20 million, he found that the host town’s total sales rose by only \$9 million. His conclusion: the existing merchants lost \$11 million” (Figure 7) This conclusion stems from the fact that money generated by local stores typically recirculates in the community while that generated by superstores often goes directly to out of town corporate headquarters. (Beaumont 1994).

Figure 7: Effects of Super Discount General Merchandise Stores on Small Towns



Source: Beaumont 1994

Stone claims that there is a fundamental change in consumer habits after the introduction of a Wal-mart, resulting in more spending occurring at Wal-Mart and less at the local store level. This study indicates that there is a fixed “retail pie” that is reallocated in Wal-Mart’s favor when the retailer comes to town.

Beaumont (1994) believes that economic losses are caused when more commercial space is built in a community than the local economy can handle. The new discount centers displace existing jobs and businesses. The loss of revenue for existing merchants in small towns due to discount retailing has been compared to the impact regional malls had on larger cities.

Similar to Stone, Beaumont believes that too much retail space does not enlarge the economic pie, it simply reallocates the pieces. In most cases, independently owned businesses have slim profit margins and deal in small volumes of merchandise. The introduction of a discount retailer such as Wal-Mart may reduce the gross sales of a businesses by ten to fifteen percent, which may easily put a merchant out of business. Although this can be viewed as “Economic Darwinism” , progress and the “American Way”, Beaumont disagrees. She feels this is leading to the homogenization of the retail economy that will result in only a few national retailers in the United States. Beaumont also believes it is small business that creates economic diversity and is the important part of the American Way and culture.

Daniels and Keller (1991) comment on why Wal-mart is able to have such an effect on local businesses. They feel that Wal-Mart has four advantages over local merchants including price, cost, merchandising, and advertising. They compare Wal-

mart to a general store stocking varied merchandise but on an extravagant scale that usually equals the square footage of the traditional downtown stores (Keller and Daniels 1991).

Keller and Daniels believe that Wal-Mart is able to beat small retailers on cost of operations by utilizing their location strategy. That is locating and building stores on land outside of towns or cities which is often cheap and unzoned. In some counties this location practice may also result in lower property taxes. Many small retailers however are located downtown and rent their property which results in a higher cost of operations.

The most important economic advantage of Wal-Mart that they identify is their inventory control system. A satellite system connects each cash register to a computer in Bentonville, Arkansas that tracks the inventory as it is sold. It is this inventory system coupled with the location of nearby regional distribution warehouses that allows Wal-Mart to secure the lowest inventory and distribution costs in the retail industry even though they primarily serve outlying rural areas.

Wal-Mart also beats small retailers when it comes to advertising. Most retail stores publish a weekly flyer advertising sales and special offers. Wal-Mart, however, publishes its sales and special offers only once a month. This allows Wal-Mart to have the highest ratio of sales to advertising costs among the top 100 advertisers (Daniels and Keller 1991).

Wal-Mart's practice of advertising, inventory control, and cost cutting location strategies all result in a reduction of operation costs. This allows Wal-Mart the

opportunity to provide items at a lower cost. This is the most visible and harmful advantage Wal-Mart has over small retailers.

2.3 Retail Sprawl

There have been many studies done on the effects of suburban, urban, and commercial sprawl. This literature review is examining only those that pertain to the effects of Wal-Mart or retail sprawl. The studies on retail sprawl include those by Beaumont, 1994; Peterson, 1995; and Anderson, 1994 and Young, 1995.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines sprawl as low density, land consumptive, automobile-oriented development located on the outskirts of cities and towns. Sprawl is a consequence of both federal, state and local public policies and private development. The National Trust believes commercial sprawl is an epidemic throughout the United States. The indices they use to demonstrate this theory include the square footage of vacant shopping centers, increase in auto dependency, the existing amount of retail floor space in relation to population, and the amount of asphalt created for both driving and parking.

The public policies that have contributed to sprawl can be divided into federal, state and local policies. The federal policies that have effected sprawl include its housing policies, water and sewer grants, office location decisions, and mostly its transportation policies. The federal government has encouraged automobile dependence by promoting and subsidizing highway construction, and failing to prevent the deterioration of public transportation systems (Beaumont 1994). Road design standards which mandate wider

streets has become very land consumptive and made communities less walkable. State policies favor vehicular over public transportation systems. Walkable main streets are destroyed with the widening of streets, and the creation of strip commercial developments. Local policies effect sprawl through the placement and design of public facilities that are only accessible by automobile. Local zoning practices also contribute to sprawl if commercial or industrial zoning is concentrated around the highway interchanges or on the outskirts of the downtown.

Private development practices have also encouraged sprawl. Most of the national discount retailers including Wal-Mart have similar characteristics that contribute to commercial sprawl. First, their size alone ranging from 90,000 to 200,000 square feet, their tendencies to locate outside of the downtown, and act as a magnet for additional commercial outlets, including competitors. These retailers also rely on the design of a window-less box regardless of whether or not that is compatible with the community. The one story format requires the store to be spread out over many acres on the outside of town which also requires many acres of paved surface for cars making it difficult for pedestrian or public transit access.

Moore (1995) describes in his article how retail sprawl effects communities and why it is important to avoid or minimize the impact on the historic character of an area. He claims that Wal-mart and the sprawl associated with a supercenter development poses a threat to the historic preservation in many ways including locating their stores on average one mile from the traditional downtown of an area. It is destructive because these retailers are not part of the community. He states that they “stand aloof, literally

and symbolically cut off from the community by their location on the edge of town and their environmental impact due to their automobile dependency.” This sprawl only pulls customers away from the traditional downtown. He also claims that there are cultural and societal consequences to Wal-Mart sprawl. Wal-Mart may effect the layout of the town, which provides residents with a sense of community and home. Retail sprawl creates homogeneity with one town looking just like another, where people can lose sense of where they are.

Anderson (1994) describes Wal-Mart’s growth and location strategies as Sprawl Mart. She defines this as what happens when Wal-Mart locates along highways outside the traditional downtown area taking advantage of usually unzoned and inexpensive land. Wal-Mart becomes an attraction for other commercial development which contributes to and increases the negative effects of commercial sprawl.

Young (1995) defines sprawl as low density development on the edges of cities and towns that is “poorly planned, land consumptive, automobile-dependent, designed without regard to its surroundings.” One of the major causes of sprawl is the retail development that occurs along major arteries and at highway interchanges. Young states that historic preservationists should be interested in sprawl because it has “helped drain the life out of thousands of traditional downtowns.” He is concerned that sprawl is corroding the sense of community that binds us together as a nation.

This chapter has provided a brief history and overview, of Wal-Mart’s expansion pattern, and an examination of the physical and economic impacts of Wal-Mart on America’s “Main Streets, that has appeared in the major literature.” The following

chapter provides a historical overview of North Kingstown, and examines Wickford Village as a “Main Street.”

Chapter Three

Wickford Village

Wal-Mart has launched an expansion strategy that is taking it beyond familiar territory. In the past Wal-Mart has concentrated its stores in rural areas of low to middle income markets. Their new strategy for growth is taking Wal-Mart to higher income and historic areas such as the Wickford area, where the stores and clientele are very different. This chapter provides a community profile of North Kingstown and Wickford Village. This chapter will also contrast Wickford Village with strip commercial developments in order to examine the usual location of Wal-Mart versus its location in North Kingstown.

3.1 Community Profile

History of North Kingstown

The town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island is located on the western side of Narragansett Bay, twenty miles south of Providence, Rhode Island. The town is 44.5 square miles and shares borders with Warwick, East Greenwich, Exeter, South Kingstown, and Narragansett. In 1990 the population of North Kingstown was 23,861.

North Kingstown has a long history of settlement which dates back as far as 10,000 years before Roger Williams was granted land by the Narragansett Indians in 1636. The first settlements in North Kingstown were for trade with the Indians. In 1637 Roger Williams established a temporary trading post in the northern part of town. Richard Smith was the first permanent settler when he acquired land north of Wickford (North Kingstown Community Guide Plan 1988).

During the later parts of the Seventeenth Century and early Eighteenth Century settlements began in the other parts of North Kingstown aided by the construction of new roads. Ten Rod Road, the major east/west route spurred development of inland development and coastal development of Updike's Newtown, today known as Wickford Village.

The Nineteenth Century saw the development of cotton and wool mills along the three principal waterways in North Kingstown. The establishment of these mills created villages to house the workers and provide them with commercial services. During this time the development of the Wickford Branch Railroad and steamship service from the railroad terminal to Newport increased the presence of summer tourists (North Kingstown Community Guide Plan 1988).

During the early Twentieth Century, the development of summer resorts along the coast further shaped the residential character of North Kingstown. Development was being encouraged by the Sea View Trolley and the State of Rhode Island which began scraping and grading the existing roads and paving several of the roads in Washington County. Tower Hill Road was paved from Wickford to Wakefield in 1927, while Boston Neck Road was paved by the early 1930s from Hamilton to Saunderstown.

North Kingstown's unique character of small village settlements, farm and summer resort colonies underwent a dramatic change with World War II and the construction of Quonset Naval Air Station and Davisville Naval Construction Training Center. The 1930s construction of these two major naval bases changed not only the shape of the land when it created four hundred acres of fill, but strongly influenced the

pattern of surrounding development. The wartime activity is credited, by the town of North Kingstown, with bringing the modern subdivision to North Kingstown and the state of Rhode Island. Since World War II, extensive suburbanization of North Kingstown's rural lands has occurred.

Population Characteristics

Between 1960 and 1970 there was a significant increase of 57% in the population of North Kingstown from 18,977 persons to 29,793 persons. The Navy's withdrawal from Quonset Point/Davisville was the cause of a population decrease from 29,793 in 1970 to 21,938 in 1980. This was a decrease of 26.4%. The economic growth of the 1980s impacted North Kingstown with a population growth of 1,923 persons between 1980 and 1990 (North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995). Table 3 shows the population changes in North Kingstown between 1960 and 1990.

Table 3. North Kingstown Population Change: 1960-1990

Year	Total Population	Percent Change	Absolute Change
1960	18,977	-	-
1970	29,793	+57.0%	+10,816
1980	21,938	-26.4%	-7,855
1990	23,861	+8.8%	+1,923

Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995.

Population projections indicate a consistent growth rate for the town in the future. While the actual number of persons predicted may be effected by the changes in the economy, the population trend in North Kingstown will lean toward growth. Table 4 shows the population projections for North Kingstown from 1990 to 2010.

Table 4. Projected Population for North Kingstown: 1990-2010

Year	Estimated Population	Percent Change	Absolute Change
1990	23,861	-	-
2000	26,821	+12.4%	2,760
2010	28,271	+5.4%	1,450

Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995.

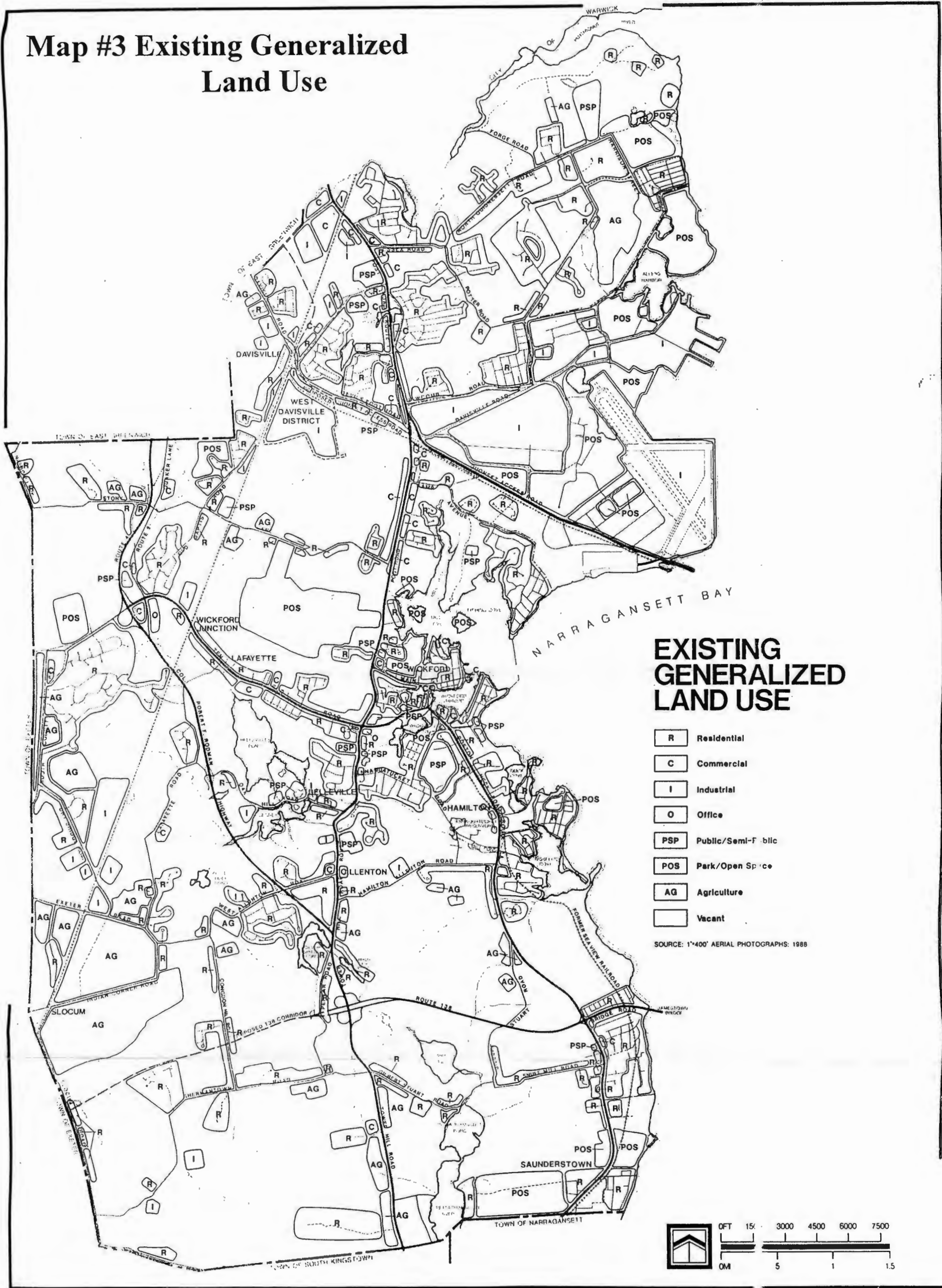
Approximately ninety seven percent of the population of North Kingstown is white, one percent is black, and the remaining two percent is divided up into other races. Thirty percent of the population has achieved higher than a high school education. The average age of the resident population is just younger than the state although it has increased to 32.7 years in 1987 from 30.2 years in 1980. The next larger population group in North Kingstown are those between the ages of 35 and 44.

Land Use

The major land use is single family residential development. Most of the residential development follows a linear fashion along the collector roads and the coastline (Map #3). Scattered subdivisions are a new form of development since historically residential units evolved around mill villages and major town roads (North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995). The residential development pattern of single family units has occurred for two reasons. One, the town has no public sanitary sewer system, which tends to limit multi-family high density units, and two, the preferred housing stock of residents is historically single family (North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995). High density residential development has occurred around Quonset

Point/Davisville and the existing mill villages. The subdivision of land for single family dwelling is expected to dominate the future residential land use patterns.

Map #3 Existing Generalized Land Use



Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995

The pattern of commercial development in North Kingstown can be largely attributed to the development of the two naval bases. For the most part, commercial development has been concentrated in a linear fashion along Post Road. The highest concentration of commercial development along this strip is between Frenchtown Road and West Main Street. Quonset Point/Davisville is approximately the midpoint between the two ends of the strip development. The uses along this strip development include many varieties of service retail, small office, automotive, and small motels. The sites along Post Road are characterized by “shallow access, poorly controlled access, and a proliferation of uncontrolled signage” (North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995). The North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 1995, includes a Post Road Corridor Concept Plan identifying a vision and the needs of Post Road. This plan recommends enhancing and revitalizing Post Road as the major commercial district in North Kingstown. The plan provides strategies to enhance economic activity, improve pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular safety while also “upgrading the image of the Post Road Corridor” (North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995).

History of Wickford Village

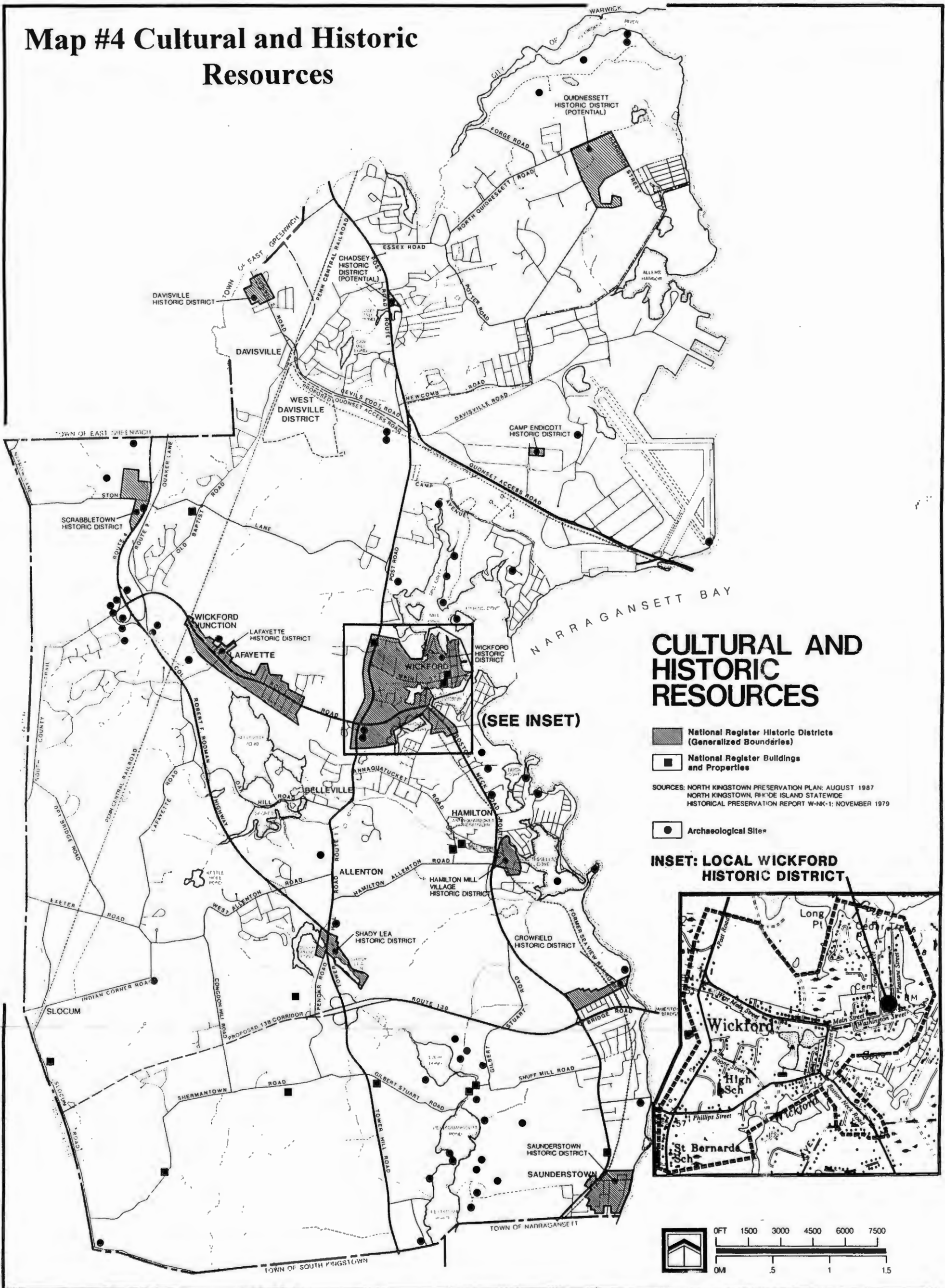
Although North Kingstown has experienced periods of rapid growth and subdivision of its land, it has maintained some of its historic villages which it refers to as village centers. Village centers are areas of North Kingstown that have historically served as centers of residential, commercial, and industrial development. The village centers of North Kingstown include Hamilton, Wickford, Saunderstown, and Lafayette.

The historic character of Wickford Village has been the most successfully preserved. Wickford Village is the only village in the town of North Kingstown under the protection of historic zoning (Map 4).

Wickford Village was settled in 1637 by Roger Williams who established a trading post north of the village proper. A trading post was also established by Richard Smith on the site now known as “Smith’s Castle (Fanning and Scanlon 1995). In 1651 Williams sold his land to Smith who incorporated it into his plantation. Lodowick Updike was the nephew of Richard Smith’s son and inherited this land. Updike began to lay out Wickford, which he originally called Updike’s Newtown , as a town within his plantation. Updike’s Newtown was later named Wickford when the wife of a Connecticut governor asked that the village be renamed after her birthplace in England (North Kingstown Community Guide Plan 1988). It is believed that the village with its “lead in road to the sea crossing a principal road which is parallel to the water and provides access to the wharf”, was modeled after Boston, Massachusetts (Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission 1979).

Wickford grew slowly during the Eighteenth Century but by the 1790s had become a busy port with the resumption of West Indian trading and coastal fishing. Wickford expanded to become the center for cultural, governmental, religious, and economic institutions. The moving of St. Paul’s church from “the Platform” to Wickford signaled the completion of the shift of wealth and population to the village (Fanning and Scanlon 1995). The Masonic Lodge and the Washington Academy were built in Wickford around 1800. By 1808, Wickford was a port of entry under the Newport

Map #4 Cultural and Historic Resources



Customs District and by 1820 there were twenty to thirty vessels registered and engaged in coastal trading and fishing.

By the 1830s the economic boom of the village came to an end when Brown and Ives, Providence traders, did not invest in the port due to high wharfage fees. This decline continued when the Providence and Stonington Railroad bypassed the village. Although the physical expansion of the village was halted, it remained a vital secondary port. The economic base was shifting to the textile mill villages in the surrounding areas. There was a handloom weaving operation that operated in Wickford from 1812 to 1842 employing six hundred area families. A jewelry manufacturer employing sixty to seventy persons, a bobbin mill, and a fish pressing plant were also located in Wickford. The village also supported two banks, two distilleries, a goldsmith, silversmith, and several taverns (Fanning and Scanlon 1995).

During the Nineteenth Century much of the existing architecture was updated in a Greek revival style. In 1888 the iron bridge to Boston neck was completed, opening new areas for development, including the location of the town hall. Wickford still remained the commercial center of North Kingstown.

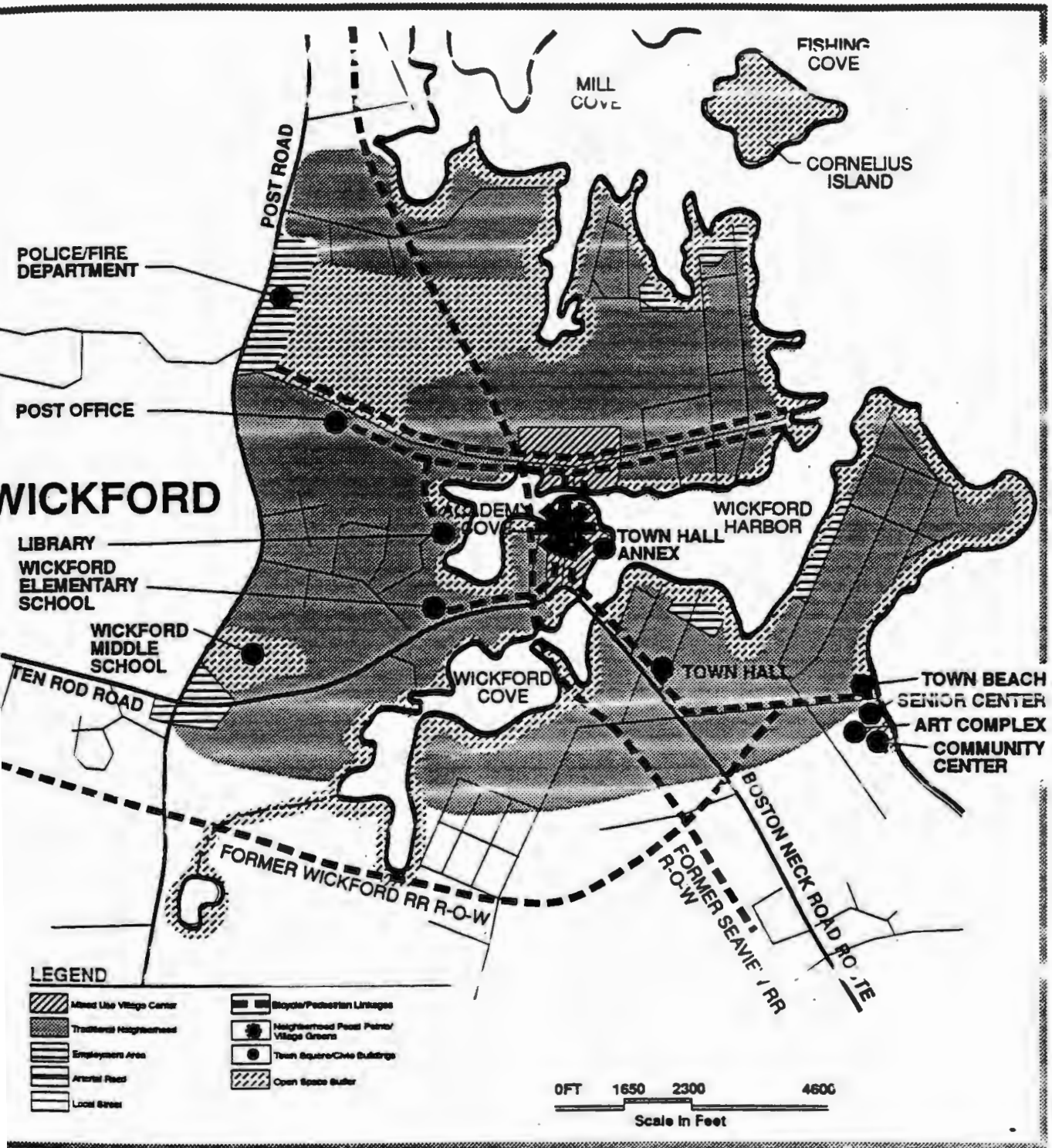
The Twentieth Century was a period of great economic stagnation for Wickford. However, this was also the period in which the town was discovered by tourists. The tourists were drawn to Wickford because of its historical ambiance and beauty (Rhode Island Historical Preservation Society 1979). The introduction of tourists into quaint, historic Wickford was assisted by the completion of the Wickford Branch Railroad and the steamboat service that ran from Newport to Wickford.

During the 1920s and 1930s there was a movement growing to improve and preserve the village. These preservation efforts led to the establishment of the Main Street Association in 1932. The Association paved sidewalks, erected historical markers on homes and commercial buildings and created the first zoning ordinance for the village. In 1937 the Association published the book *Wickford and its Old Houses*. By 1959 Wickford Village had been designated as a historic district.

The naval bases closings in 1973 had a great effect on the commercial establishments in the area, including Wickford Village. As the number of residents in North Kingstown declined the economy became more dependent on tourist dollars (Fanning and Scanlon 1995). Today Wickford Village can be characterized as a boutique area which depends greatly on tourism dollars (Map #5). While the village still provides services to the residents of the village and surrounding community, it is the tourist dollars which contribute to the “ongoing vitality of the commercial establishments” (Fanning and Scanlon 1995).

Demographic and Economic Characteristics

The boundaries of Wickford Village are not consistent with any one census tract in North Kingstown. Wickford is located within the Census tract 503.02 and represents approximately one half of the land area within this census tract (Map #6). The demographic data reported for the census tract will be used to provide a general picture of Wickford Village.



Map #5 Schematic Diagram of Wickford Village



Tract 503.02 is 2.4 square miles with Wickford Village representing about one half of this land area. In 1980 the total population for the census tract was 2,681 while in 1990 it was 2,914. This is approximately an 8.5% increase. In 1990 sixty five percent of the residents in the tract have lived there for more than five years indicating that the migration rates are fairly stable (Fanning and Scanlon 1995). The median age of the residents was 36.7. The average cost of rent was \$454/month while the median mortgage payment was \$1,063/month, with the household earning \$52,646 per year (Fanning and Scanlon 1995). There was however 4.9% of the population living at or below the poverty level. Renters on average earned \$25,275 while homeowners earned an average of \$68,990. Eighty nine percent of residents in the tract have a high school degree or higher educational attainment.

Land Use

Wickford Village is a compact village center of mixed uses (Map #7). The boundaries of Wickford Village are well defined with Post Road to the West and Wickford Harbor to the east. The commercial core of the village is also well defined and surrounded by residential uses with a higher density than in most of the town. The residential uses surrounding the village are directly linked with the commercial center of the village. The following describes the uses, by type, in the village. Table 5 shows the types of uses in Wickford Village.

Table 5. Types and Number of Uses in Wickford Village Core, 1995

Types of Uses	Wickford Village
Accommodations	1
Antiques	2
Apparel	9
Art Galleries	5
Banks	2
Boats/Marinas	2
Books	2
Children's Apparel	1
Children's Toys	1
Crafts	1
Florists/Nurseries	4
Food/Beverage Service	6
Gifts	5
Herbs	1
Home Furnishings	9
Invitations/Stationary	1
Jewelry	3
Medical Office	4
Professional Services	8

Source: Information obtained from Wickford Village Association, 1995

Residential

Single family units are the prevailing form of residential development throughout Wickford Village. Multi-family housing does exist in the older historic areas along Main Street in the northwestern section of Wickford Village. Most of the residential lots are zoned village residential which is 10,000 square feet or less (Fanning and Scanlon 1995).

Commercial

The commercial core of Wickford is centered on along Brown Street. Commercial establishments line the east side while a mix of commercial and residential line the west side. These commercial and service uses include financial institutions,

bakeries, grocery market, restaurants, professional offices, and a variety of gift and boutique stores. Commercial establishments can also be found at the intersection of Brown and Main Streets with a marine facility located at the eastern end of Main Street. Commercial establishments on West Main Street include a post office, a gas station, dry cleaners, and a florist. Professional offices are located throughout Wickford Village.

Open Space and Recreational Facilities

Wickford Village has three large areas of open space, three small parks, a public wharf, and a public beach. Wilson Park, one of the largest areas of open space, is on the west end of West Main Street. The two other large areas of open space are the athletic fields at the Wickford Middle School and Wickford Elementary School.

Two of the small parks are located on Brown Street. Old Library Park is adjacent to the Town of North Kingstown administrative offices building. The second small park is Updike Park at the intersection of West Main, Main, and Brown Streets. The third park is located in front of the North Kingstown Town Hall.

The harbor area including the public beach, located in the southeast of Wickford, provides Wickford Village with a diverse use of activities. The harbor is also accessible by three points: the boat ramp at Wilson Park, the Town Wharf, and through the public parking lot on Brown Street (Fanning and Scanlon 1995). A proposed bike path which would extend down the west side of Narragansett Bay would expand recreational activities and the modes of transportation to the village. Table 6 shows the parks and areas identified and the recreational uses they contain.

Municipal and Educational

The diversity of the village is increased with the inclusion of municipal and educational facilities. There are three key municipal buildings within Wickford Village. These include the North Kingstown Town Hall, Town of North Kingstown administrative offices, and the North Kingstown Motor Pool Garage. The educational facilities in Wickford include the Wickford Elementary School, the Wickford Middle School, and the North Kingstown Public Library.

Table 6. Open Space and Recreational Areas in Wickford Village

Park or Recreational Area	Types of Uses
Wilson Park	Large playground, 2 basketball courts, 3 tennis courts, 4 soccer fields, boat ramp, bike path, volleyball courts, picnicking areas, open fields.
Wickford Middle School	Athletic fields
Wickford Elementary School	Athletic fields
Old Library Park	Passive recreation area
Town Hall Park	Passive recreation area
Harbor Area	Public beach, concert bandstand, senior center, playground, picnicking facilities.

Source: Fanning and Scanlon 1995

3.2 Wickford Village vs. Strip Commercial Developments

The following section will compare and contrast the different characteristics of a village core to a strip commercial development in general and more specifically in North Kingstown. Wickford Village will be compared to the commercial strip development along Post Road in North Kingstown.

Main Street

Wickford Village has a traditional Main Street and is a good example of traditional neighborhood development. A traditional Main Street is defined as the commercial, institutional, social and civic center of a town or area. A traditional neighborhood development can be defined as “a central point of good accessibility with a high diversity of activities” (Krohe 1992). Typically the main street of a town is the place where the community comes together to do its business. In many ways Main Streets function as “incubators of entrepreneurship” allowing independent merchants to operate businesses and services (Krohe 1992). What does separate the Wickford Village Core from a traditional Main Street is its historic character, boutique type stores and tourist clientele. Table 7 shows the physical attributes of a traditional neighborhood development. As the table shows, Wickford Village has all of the physical attributes of a traditional neighborhood development.

Table 7. Physical Attributes of a Traditional Neighborhood Development

Wickford Village	Physical Attributes
✓	Neighborhood varies in size, population, and density to accommodate localized conditions.
✓	Neighborhood is limited in size so that a majority of the population is located within a 5-minute walking distance of its center (1/4 mile). The needs of daily life are theoretically available within this area, including medical care, commercial and retail services, religious and cultural institutions.
✓	Neighborhood streets are laid out in grid or network basis, so that there are alternate routes available. Allows for smaller streets and slower traffic. On-street parking and adjacent trees, sidewalks and buildings. Streets are suitable for pedestrians, vehicles and bicycles.
✓	Neighborhood streets are spatially defined by buildings which abut the sidewalk uninterrupted by parking lots, forming a street wall or facade.
✓	Buildings vary in function but are compatible in size and uses on their lots. Mix of houses, shops, restaurants, offices, apartments.
✓	Civic buildings (schools, meeting halls, theaters, churches, museums), often placed on squares or at street vistas. Serve as landmarks.
✓	Open space in a neighborhood development is in the form of specialized squares, greens, playgrounds, and parks.

Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995.

Strip Commercial Developments

This type of commercial development is characterized by various curb cuts, excessive signage, and large scale commercial services such as Wal-Mart. Commercial establishments usually have large lots with the buildings set very far back in order to

accommodate the vast parking they require. Most strip commercial developments are not connected to each other and/or surrounding residential areas in any way making it very difficult for pedestrian use. The width of the roads and scale of the developments usually encourages vehicle oriented use while discouraging pedestrian or bicycle use.. These strip developments are usually located at major highways and intersections or on the outskirts of town. These ‘big-box’ retail uses are designed to attract a regional market and are not intended strictly for neighborhood use. There is no mix of land uses within strip developments. Unlike the traditional neighborhood, center there is little or no vegetation, since most of the site must be paved to accommodate parking. Post Road in North Kingstown is a four and one half mile strip commercial development. The Rhode Island Department of Transportation currently has plans to widen Post Road to five lanes with a continuous center turn lane (Rhode Island Comprehensive Plan 1995). Currently this road is narrow in spots with an excessive number of uncurbed parking lots, and entrances to these lots. It is a major transportation route and one of the main entrances into Wickford Village.

The photographs on the following pages provide a view of the physical differences between Wickford Village core and Post Road. Photographs one through six show the main street characteristics of the Wickford Village Core while photographs six through 11 depict the typical strip commercial development design of Post Road.

There are many big box retail outlets located on this strip including T.J. Maxx, Marshalls, and a Super Stop and Shop. The scale of the Post Road Corridor, the uses

Wickford Village





Post Road Corridor





within the corridor, the access to the uses, the lack of vegetation and character are all very different than what exists in Wickford Village Core.

Wal-Mart and Wickford Village

In North Kingstown, the Wickford Junction Shopping Plaza could not locate along Post Road because of size restrictions within the North Kingstown zoning ordinance. Most of Post Road is zoned general business district which was created “to provide areas for intensive commercial activities that primarily depend upon a great volume of vehicular traffic and serve the daily shopping needs of the community” (North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995). The Planned Business District was created to:

“encourage the master planning of commercial development to assure compatibility with the purposes, objectives and intents of the comprehensive plan; to provide flexibility in the use and design of commercial property; to provide development that is appropriate for the site, the surrounding areas and the ability of the town to support such development” (North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995).

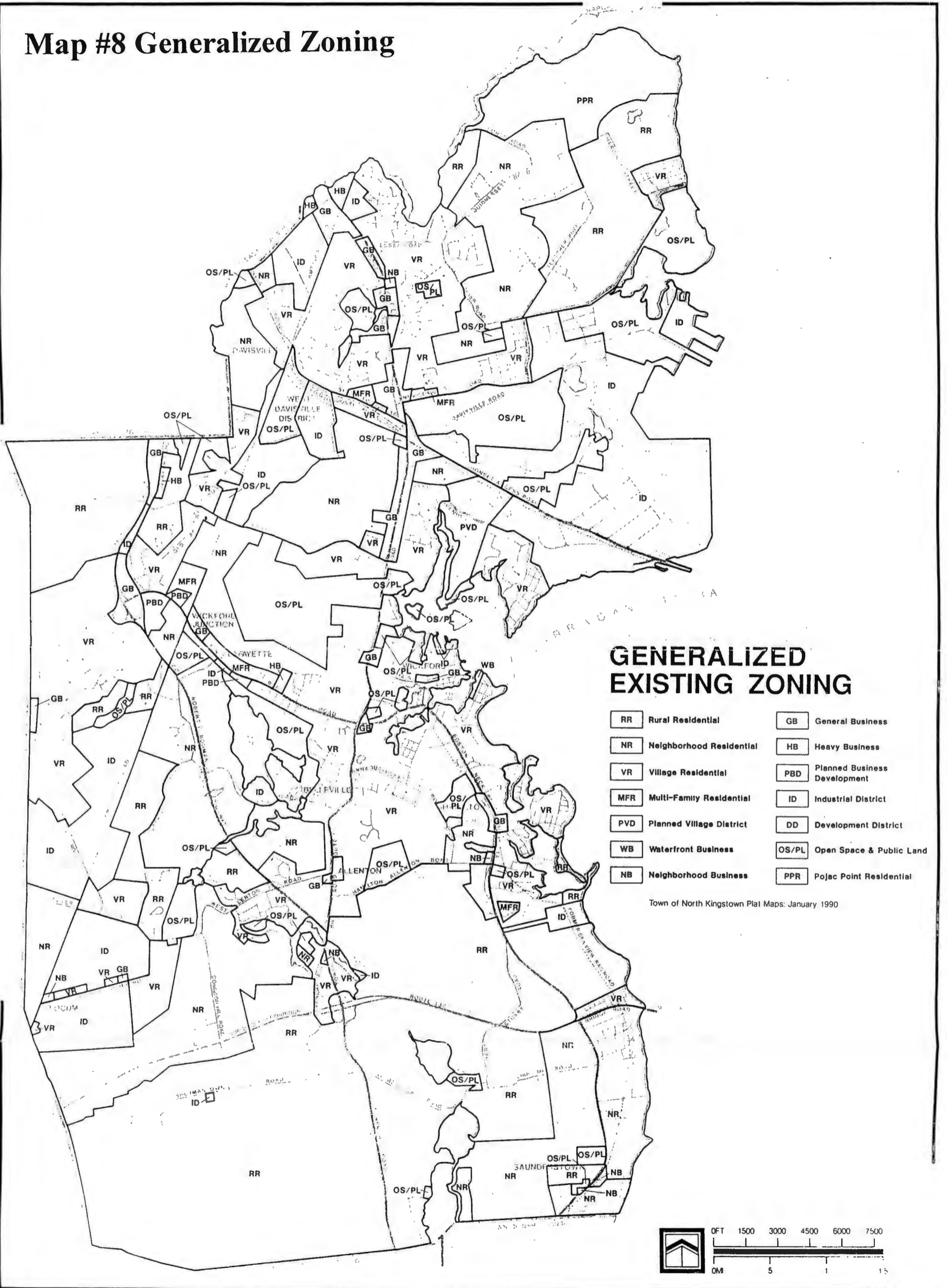
Although Wal-Mart was not able to locate in the General Business District because of the size restrictions, it was able to locate in the current Planned Business District site because at the time of approval, there were no maximum restrictions on the size of commercial structures within the district (Map #8, Map #9). Table 8 shows the restrictions in the General Business District compared to the Planned Business District.

Table 8. General Business District vs. Planned Business District Restrictions

	General Business District	Planned Business District
Minimum Requirements		
Size	20,000 square feet	5 acres
Width	200'	400'
% Covered	90%	80%
Maximum Requirements		
Building Stories	3	No Requirement
Building Height	35'	No Requirement
Maximum Building Footprint	50,000 square feet	No Requirement

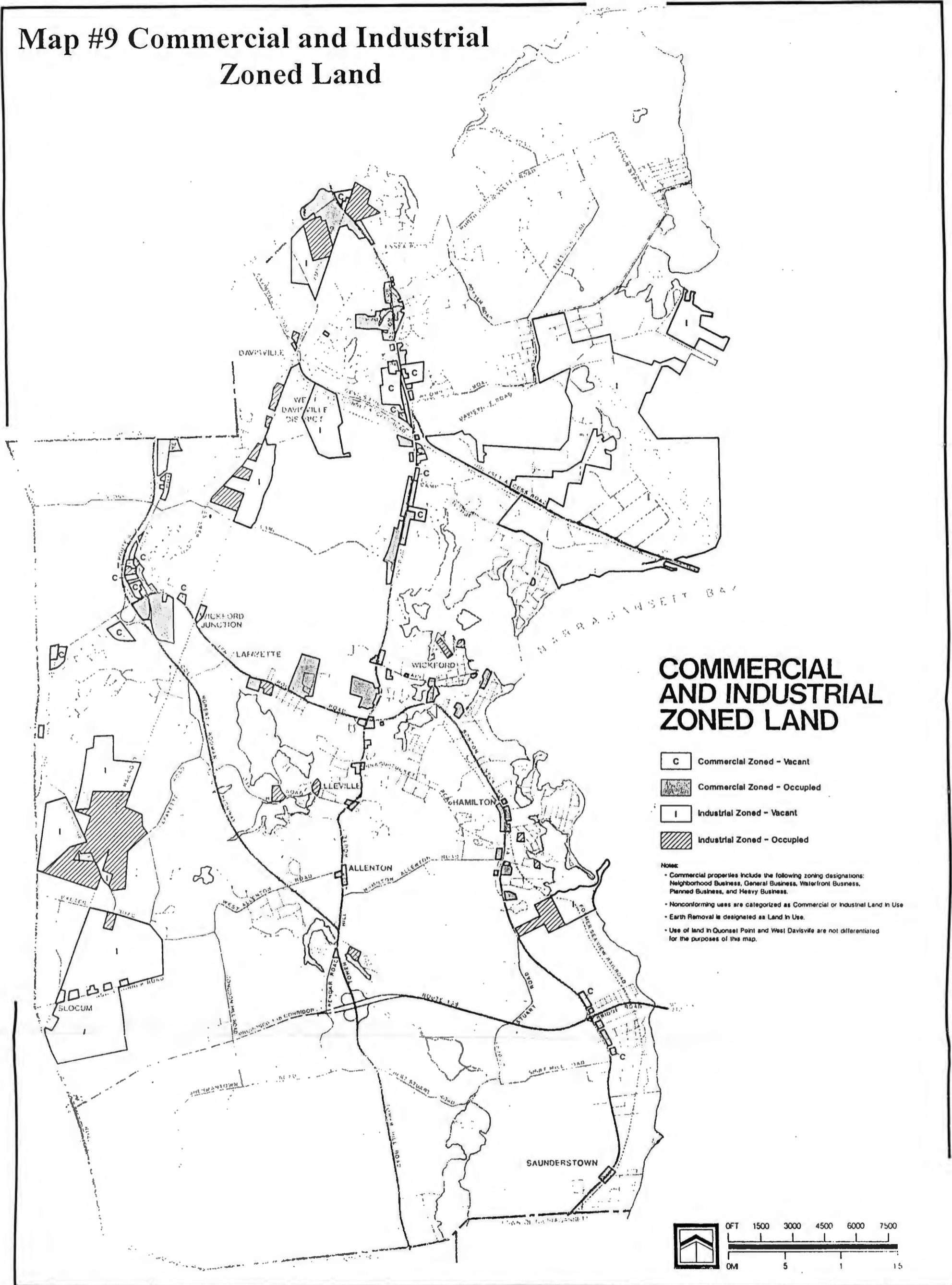
Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan, 1995

Map #8 Generalized Zoning



Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995

Map #9 Commercial and Industrial Zoned Land



Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995

It is within the strip development environment that Wal-Mart has focused many of its store locations. Wal-Mart is then often blamed for the demise of the Main Street because it locates away from the traditional downtown area. As in the zoning situation in North Kingstown, Wal-Mart may have no choice but to locate outside of the downtown area. It is this location of Wal-Mart, closer to Wickford Village with its unique character, and further away from compatible big box retail uses on Post Road that makes the relationship between Wal-Mart and Wickford Village different from the traditional relationship. It is the intention of this study to provide recommendations to preserve Wickford Village so that it may survive the nearby Wal-Mart.

Chapter Four

Strengths and Weaknesses of Wickford Village

As a compact and mixed use area, Wickford Village has many strengths and weaknesses that must be addressed when formulating a plan for coexistence. The strengths and weaknesses that are identified will be addressed within the plan for coexistence. The strengths and weaknesses identified in this chapter were determined through telephone interviews with Wickford Village businesses, interviews with public officials and observations of Wickford Village. A few of the characteristics that were identified in Wickford Village can be described as both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of Wickford Village and its core can be divided into the following areas: historic character, retail uses, marketing, clientele, and parking. The weaknesses of Wickford Village can be divided into the following: merchants attitudes towards Wal-Mart, perceptions of Wickford Village, parking, and the lack of public sanitary sewers.

4.1 Strengths of Wickford Village

Historic Character

One of the major strengths of Wickford Village is its historic character and village charm. Wickford Village maintains a unique character with a mix of municipal, residential, retail and financial uses amidst the historic homes and harbor. The historic character of Wickford Village is protected by its inclusion in the National Register of Historic Districts. Wickford Village is also protected by a historic zone. The historic

zone permits the local historic commission to review changes to buildings within the historic zone.

The historic character of Wickford is identified as a strength because it seems to be one of the major tourist draws. The unique character that has been preserved in Wickford Village and its mixed use-core is what separates it from other main streets and strip commercial corridors.

The location of Wickford Village along the harbor was also identified as a character strength. Although the town of North Kingstown has an extensive shoreline, many of the waterfront views have been blocked by poor roadway alignments, woodlands and private property. Wickford Village not only provides views to the harbor but public access. The harbor location of Wickford Village provides tourists and others the opportunity to access Wickford Village by boat via the harbor.

Mixed Use Core

One of the strengths identified through the business interviews was the village core itself. The strength is the diversity of uses including residential, institutional, commercial, municipal and open space. The type of compact mixed use core found in Wickford Village is an example of what neo-traditional planners are trying to replicate in many new communities. Table 9 is a list of the positive consequences that occur in a traditional development. The table shows that Wickford Village benefits from these consequences.

Table 9. Positive Consequences of a Traditional Neighborhood Development.

Wickford Village	Positive Consequences
✓	By bringing most of the activities of daily living into walking distance, everyone, but especially the elderly and the young, gain independence of movement.
✓	By reducing the number and length of automobile trips, traffic congestion is minimized, the expenses of road construction are limited, and air pollution and traffic congestion is minimized , the expenses of road construction are limited, and air pollution and traffic generated noise are reduced.
✓	By providing streets and squares of comfortable scale and defined spatial quality, residents walking in the neighborhood come to know each other and to watch over their collective security, thus creating “eyes on the street” and a sense of “defensible space” within their Neighborhood.
✓	By providing appropriate building concentrations at easy walking distances from public transit stops, public transit becomes a viable alternative means of circulation to the automobile.
✓	By providing a full range of housing types and work places, age and economic classes are integrated and the bonds of an authentic community are formed.

Source: North Kingstown Comprehensive Plan 1995.

Wickford Village has not been commercialized in the sense that there are currently no chain stores within Wickford Village. The retail uses in Wickford can be described as independently owned and operated boutique stores and services such as financial, institutional and office. The very diverse specialty stores carry a mix of merchandise featured from all over world, New England, and with some merchandise exclusive to Wickford Village (Table 5). Many of the merchants purposely do not carry merchandise that is carried by chain stores or even other stores within the village. This makes shopping in each store a unique experience.

The diversity of uses and services within Wickford Village are identified as a strength because it allows Wickford Village to be different from other shopping areas. Many of the items sold by the merchants can only be obtained in Wickford Village.

Cohesive Marketing

The Wickford Village Association currently has a membership of fifty to sixty business persons. The Association is dues driven based on gross income. The dues are used mainly for advertising the Village as a whole, and maintenance of the village core.

The Association is a definite strength for the Village because it brings the merchants together regularly to discuss marketing strategies for the village as a whole. Recently the Association has begun a series of television advertisements to inform those who may not be aware of where Wickford Village is and what it has to offer. The Association members have also agreed to a general clean-up of Wickford Village. Many of the members are repainting storefronts and cleaning the areas outside of their

establishment. They have also agreed that Wickford Village merchants need to remain focused on customer service, offering many services, such as gift wrapping and special ordering, for no charge.

Pedestrian Friendly Environment

Currently parking in Wickford Village is on the periphery of the village core yet still within walking distance to the village core. There are two private church parking lots on Main Street and a public parking lot at the Town Wharf. There is also parking at Wilson Park, Wickford Elementary School, and the town library. A limited number of on street spaces are also available. Map #10 shows the location of the parking and vehicle circulation within Wickford Village.

Many merchants agree that the apparent lack of parking in the Village Core is actually a strength for the village. The emphasis on pedestrian orientation encourages the pedestrian scale throughout the village. It also encourages patrons to walk throughout the entire village and not just sections of it. The limit on vehicle parking spaces decreases the number of cars increasing the safety of the pedestrians. The merchants believe the inclusion of additional parking spaces would take away from the historic charm and unique character they have worked so hard at preserving.

There are sidewalks throughout the village core making the area accessible to pedestrians. Map #11 shows the pedestrian circulation pattern in addition to the proposed bike trail and Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority (RIPTA) bus routes and stops. Boston Neck Road, West Main Street, and Brown Street all have sidewalks located on both sides of the road. Pedestrian amenities such as street furniture and trash

receptacles are located within the core where they can be accommodated by the width of the sidewalks.

Sewers

The Town of North Kingstown presently relies on Individual Sewage Disposal Systems (ISDS). A sewer advisory committee has been formed by the Town Council to investigate the needs for a sewerage system. Final recommendations have not yet been presented to the Town Council.

The lack of sewers in Wickford Village is perceived as a strength because it allows the town to inadvertently control the type of development that may locate in the Village Core. There are many types of retail and service use that would require sewer systems in order to locate in Wickford. It sets a limit, in addition to the historic zoning ordinance, on the type of establishment that locates in Wickford Village.

4.2 Weaknesses of Wickford Village

Willing to Change/Attitude towards Wal-Mart

Many of the merchants interviewed claim they are not worried by the location of Wal-Mart. Most of them are strongly against the location of Wal-Mart two miles outside of Wickford Village because they feel it harms the historic character of the village, not because Wal-Mart may effect their business. Some of the merchants interviewed admit that Wal-Mart has the potential to destroy their existing businesses however they are not willing to work with Wal-Mart under any conditions.

The North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce sponsored a free workshop series to Wickford Village Merchants when it was announced that Wal-Mart might locate in North

Legend

Paved Sidewalk



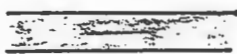
Unpaved Sidewalk



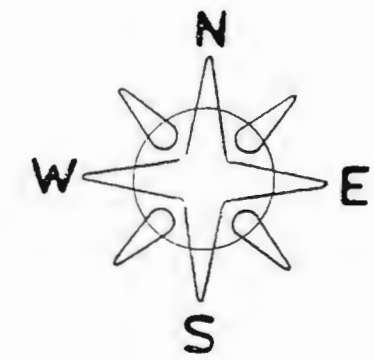
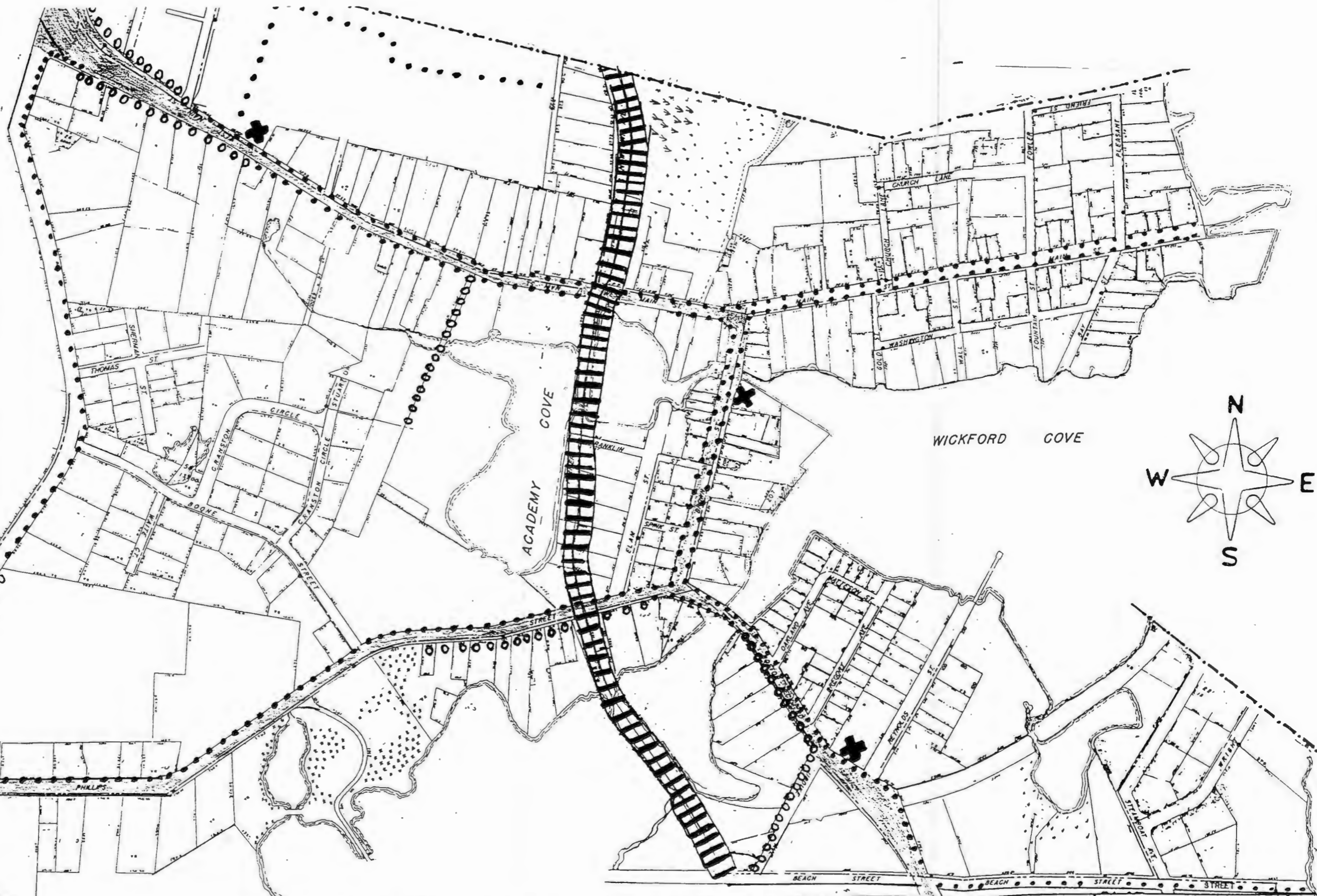
Proposed South
County Bike Trail



RIPTA Bus Route

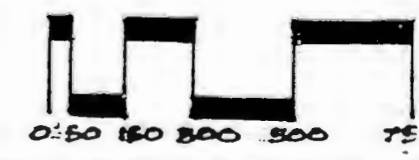


RIPTA Bus Stop



Wickford Village
North Kingstown, R.I.

Map #10 Pedestrian Circulation



Source: Fanning and Scanlon 1995

Legend

Major Collector



Principal Arterial



Minor Arterial

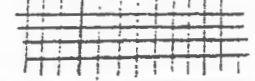


Minor Collector/
Local Street

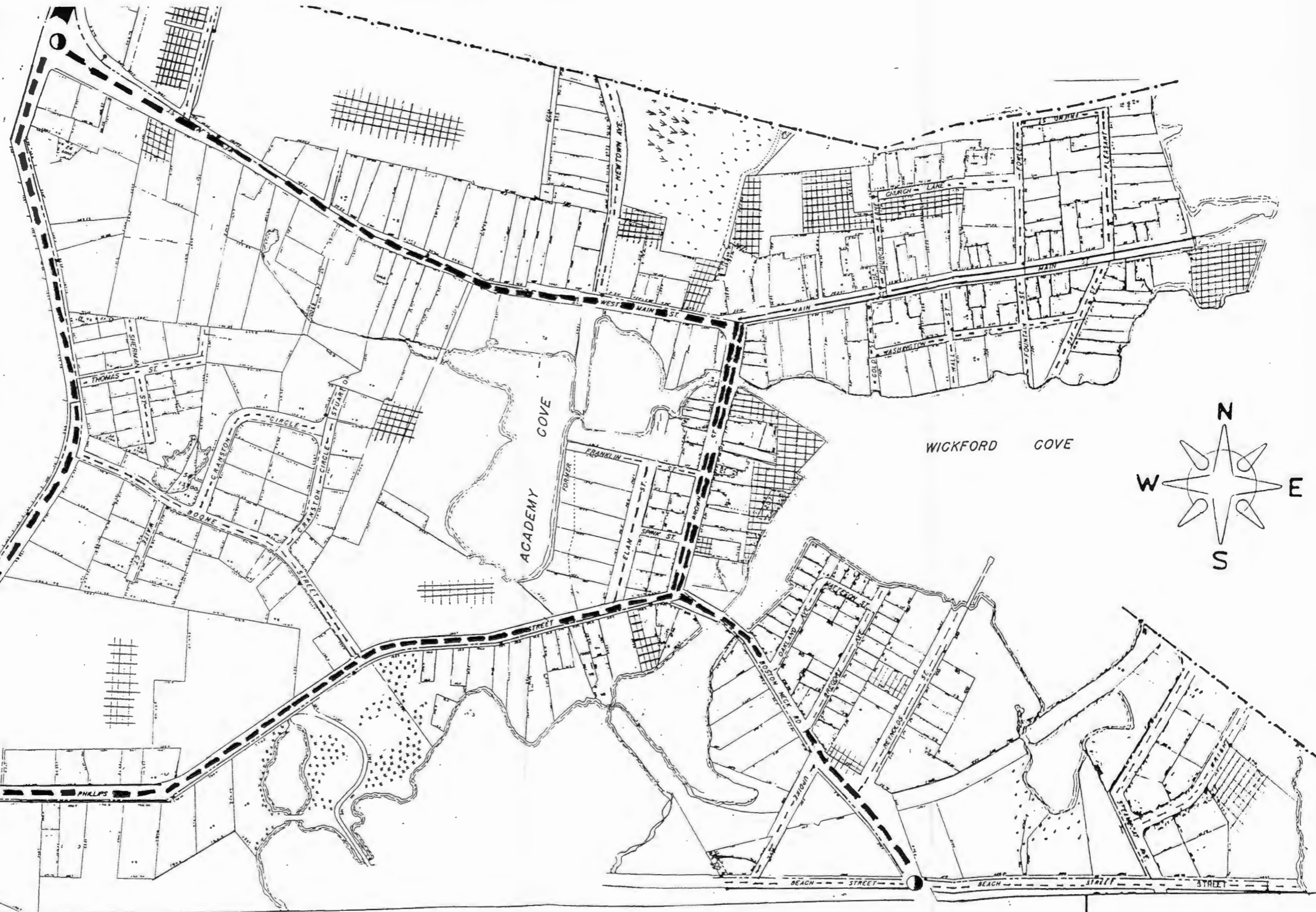


Double Lines
Indicates Street Parking

Public/Private
Parking Lots

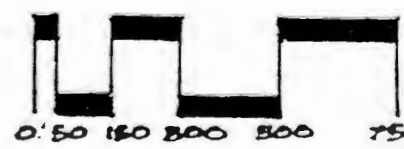


Traffic Light



Wickford Village
North Kingstown, R.I.

Map #11 Vehicle Circulation and Parking



source: Fanning and Scanlon 1995

Kingstown. The Chamber hired a consultant to run the five part workshop as an informational series on maintaining a marketing niche in the shadow of a big box retailer. The workshops were poorly attended. The Chamber of Commerce also brought in representatives from Wal-Mart to talk to merchants to discuss opportunities to work together. This session had better attendance but the merchants resisted any offers or ideas from Wal-Mart.

Overall the merchants are taking a reactive stance to the location of Wal-Mart based upon their perceptions of the retail store. Many of the merchants interviewed say they will wait to see what happens. This is a major weakness. If the businesses of Wickford Village wait to see the effects or ignore the effects of Wal-Mart they may find that it is too late to make the changes necessary to survive along side of Wal-Mart. They need to seriously investigate if Wal-Mart will have an effect on their business. The merchants of Wickford cannot ignore the impact of Wal-Mart simply because they are unhappy with its presence in North Kingstown. There is also a strong feeling among the merchants interviewed that they are not willing to work with Wal-Mart, even if it were to mean a peaceful coexistence between the two entities.

Perceptions of Wickford Village

Merchants identified that they think there is a prevailing perception held by surrounding residents that Wickford Village is too expensive and simply for tourists. Since tourism is a seasonal occurrence in Rhode Island it is a definite weakness if the merchants cannot draw surrounding residents to shop during non-tourist seasons. Many

merchants worry that Wickford Village has moved away from providing services that can be used by the surrounding communities and are concentrating too much on boutique and specialty retail stores that only attract tourist dollars.

Parking

While the lack of parking is considered as a strength to the village by some, there are many other merchants who believe it is one of the major weaknesses. They believe the lack of parking and even the perception of lack of parking discourages customers from coming to the village. Merchants believe the amount of parking is critical to how well their business does financially. The merchants who were interviewed were less concerned about pedestrian safety than they were about bringing people to the village.

Lack of Sewers

While the town may enjoy the additional control the lack of sewers in the village provides, almost all of the merchants cited the lack of sewers as a major weakness to the Village as a whole. Many merchants blamed the lack of sewers for limiting the growth of the village and contributing to the concentration of boutiques and away from certain services. The construction of a sewerage system would allow Wickford Village to provide additional services to tourists such as restaurants, and additional bathrooms.

The major strengths and weaknesses of Wickford Village and its core need to be addressed. The strengths of the Village identified by merchants and public officials needs to be encouraged to ensure that they will continue to be strengths of the Village. The weaknesses that have been identified by the merchants and public officials also need to be

addressed and made into positive attributes for the Village. The recommendations which addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the Village are the first step in making it stronger and more able to survive near Wal-Mart.

Chapter Five

Recommendations for Preserving Wickford Village

The recommendations that are presented in this chapter were determined from the strengths and weaknesses identified by the merchants of Wickford Village. It is very important that the Town of North Kingstown and the merchants of Wickford Village work to maintain and improve upon the strengths identified in Wickford Village by addressing the following recommendations. These recommendations were designed to maintain and improve upon the strengths identified while also addressing ways to turn the weaknesses identified into strengths. The recommendations are divided into physical/visual recommendations and economic recommendations.

Physical/Visual Recommendations

5.1 Protect the Historic Character of the Village

The first recommendation is for the Town of North Kingstown to ensure the historic character of Wickford Village is not harmed. This can be accomplished by assuring that the historic district, already in place, is actively maintained throughout Wickford Village particularly in the core of the village. North Kingstown should also follow through on the recommendation made in the Community Guide Plan to expand the historic district, however any expansion should not include Post Road. Instead, large retail uses should be encouraged to locate along Post Road, since there are similar uses that are already present along the commercial strip. Any parcels of land or buildings in

Wickford Village that are within the National Register Historic District, but not under the historic zone, should be included within the historic zone.

5.2 Maintain the Mixed Use Core of the Village

The Town should also maintain the “village planning and the traditional neighborhood” concept in the Village. The core of the village should be maintained as a diverse mixed-use area of residential, commercial, and institutional. The core of Wickford Village is what many neo-traditionalist planners are striving to recreate today: mixed use activity centers surrounded by compact residential development. Every effort should be made to encourage the business development within the core remain a mix of uses while also working to strengthen the links to the residential component of the village. The addition of new restaurants may work to improve the diversity and vitality of the village core, however the lack of sewers is a major impediment. Maintaining sidewalks and paths to surrounding residential areas will work to ensure the village core is connected to the residential areas.

The Town should ensure that businesses or residences that propose to locate in Wickford Village will support and encourage the mixed use concept and existing characteristics in the village core. North Kingstown should also ensure that the addition of new zoning and public policies in the town work to protect and preserve the diversity of the mixed use core. The Comprehensive Plan should be followed closely, particularly in Wickford Village.

5.3 Strengthen and Improve Waterfront Area

In addition to the historical core of the Village, Wickford Village has the unique opportunity to be located on the harbor. Consistent with the recommendations made by the URI Advanced Planning Studio in 1988, the Town should focus on expanding access, visibility, and aesthetics of this waterway to further enhance the village core. The harbor provides the Town with the opportunity to expand tourism and access to Wickford Village, while also protecting and improving the environmental quality of the harbor.

One way to expand the presence of the waterfront in Wickford Village is for the town to create waterfront walkways along the existing breakwalls. Expanding the visibility of the waterfront area will capitalize on this unique Main Street characteristic, expand the recreational areas, expand access to Wickford Village, increase the views in the village core, and further strengthen the mixed use component of the village.

5.4 Preserve Pedestrian Friendly Environment

The emphasis on pedestrian orientation in the village core is a strength that needs to be maintained and preserved. The high density, compact nature of the village makes it ideal for walking and biking. This means maintaining the narrow streets which ultimately slows traffic down through the core area, improving quality and providing upkeep for the sidewalk areas throughout the village. While the current sidewalk system provides pedestrian linkage, it is important to have sidewalks in newer residential areas to ensure that the entire village remains linked to the village core. Also, the existing crosswalks in the commercial area should be maintained to make it safer for pedestrians

to cross. Every effort should be made to discourage additional curb cuts throughout the area, and if possible reduce the number of existing curb cuts. The Town also needs to address the handicap accessibility within the village core.

5.5 Initiate Parking Strategies

Parking in Wickford Village was identified as both a strength and a weakness. The apparent lack of convenient parking bothered merchants while others were content with using peripheral parking areas because it maintained a pedestrian friendly environment. No additional parking should be added to the village core. The existing peripheral parking is adequate and the pedestrian friendly environment adds to the charm and historic character of Wickford.

There are certain times of the year, however, such as the Holiday season, where there is a shortage of parking. The Comprehensive Plan recognizes that to improve access to Wickford Village an additional satellite parking lot should be utilized. The Wal-mart parking lot provides a perfect opportunity to expand parking for Wickford Village. A shuttle bus, whether private or RIPTA, could be run from the Wal-Mart parking lot to Wickford Village at frequent intervals throughout the day. The shuttle bus concept would also allow Wickford Village to capitalize on the Commuter Rail Station which will be located at Wickford Junction Shopping Plaza. The rail station will allow persons located in the northern part of the state the opportunity to access Wickford Village without an automobile. This connection between the commuter rail station and Wickford Village may also increase year-round shopping. The availability of public

transportation may further reduce the perception of parking as a problem in North Kingstown. This recommendation, however, would require an agreement and cooperation between the Town, the merchants of Wickford Village and Wal-Mart.

Another recommendation which could be used alone or in conjunction with the concept of shared parking is the marking with signage of the existing peripheral parking as public parking for the village. Satellite lots need to be marked with unified signage to alert shoppers that those areas are used for public parking. The signage used for these lots should conform to the historic character and theme within the area. Currently the Merchant Association prints a map of Wickford Village delineating store locations. In addition to delineating the stores, the Association could also mark satellite parking areas on the map. The identification of the satellite parking areas could reduce the perception that there is a lack of parking in the village and encourage people to take advantage of the pedestrian orientation of the village.

5.6 Sewers

Sewers is a very controversial issue in Wickford Village. Sewers was also identified by merchants as both a strength and a weakness. Some merchants interviewed believed it was a strength because it was an additional control on the type of development that could locate in Wickford Village while other merchants believed it was a weakness because it limited the growth of the village and contributed to the concentration of boutiques. The Town's sewer advisory committee was formed during the comprehensive plan process, but has yet to present its final recommendations.

Based on the other strengths and weaknesses identified in this study, it is recommended that the availability of sewers would not be a weakness to Wickford Village. As for those who feel the lack of sewers is a strength because of the additional control on development, the expansion of the historic zoning area and the adjustments to the allowable maximum building size should protect the historic charm and pedestrian scale of the area. Enough control measures exist already that provide for extensive review of proposed projects in the village core.

The addition of sewers would allow for an increase in more diverse uses in the village core such as restaurant uses. This would provide another draw to the village shopping area and a step towards convincing persons in the surrounding areas that Wickford Village is not simply a boutique area for tourists. It would also address some concerns about the “odor” of the existing restaurants, caused by the lack of sewers. The addition of sewers would also have a positive impact on the water quality of Wickford Village Harbor.

Economic Recommendations

5.7 Maintain Strong Organizational Structure

It is very important that the merchants of Wickford Village maintain the strong organizational structure of the Wickford Village Merchants Association. All businesses in the village core should be urged to join the Merchants Association. The Merchants Association is responsible for the current television and print advertisements and has recently undertaken a general clean-up of the Village. It has given the merchants of

Wickford Village the opportunity to work together on advertising, and maintaining the aesthetics of the core. It allows the individual businesses to act as one entity. The Association needs to provide a forum for merchants to share ideas on how to compete effectively as a whole against Wal-Mart and other large retailers that threaten the commercial vitality of the village. The Association should gather and provide information on strategies that will allow individuals businesses as well as the entire village to stay competitive with Wal-Mart.

The Association should also work closer with the North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce has gathered extensive material including case studies from other communities and transcripts from consultant workshops, on how other historic areas such as Wickford have survived alongside Wal-Mart. The Association, in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce could sponsor lectures or workshops for the merchants on competing effectively and finding their niche in the market. The Chamber of Commerce is a valuable source of information and ideas and is willing to work closely with the Merchants Association in this area.

5.8 Marketing and Advertising

Another important recommendation for the economic preservation of Wickford Village is marketing and advertising. Currently, the Merchants Association is responsible for advertising. The strong print and television advertising of the village should continue. Both these mediums are effective at reaching local residents and attracting new clientele. Many of the stores maintain individual mailing lists to contact previous customers. This

practice should be encouraged by the Merchants Association and utilized by the association to send customers mailings not only concerning an individual store but the Village as a whole. Since Wickford Village is tucked away and not on a main thoroughfare it is important to remind people, through advertising, where Wickford Village is and what it has to offer.

The Merchants Association, through its advertising and marketing, needs to address the perception that Wickford Village is solely a seasonal tourist destination. Since this perception negatively affects the merchants in the non-tourist season, steps must be taken to correct this perception. The Association could address this in future advertising campaigns by promoting the retail stores and services that could be used by residents and tourists as a year-round destination.

5.9 Individual Business Plans and Strategies

The goal for all retail and service activities in the village is to make Wickford Village a tourist destination year-round, while also encouraging year-round use for the residents. In order to achieve this goal the individual merchants will have to become more creative and innovative especially when competing with the nearby Wal-Mart.

The common attitude among Wickford Village merchants is that Wal-Mart does not pose a threat, will not have an effect on their business, or is an entity that is best left ignored. Many of the merchants interviewed, do not believe Wal-Mart is a threat nor do they plan on taking a pro-active stand against Wal-Mart. Most of the merchants believe that because they are specialty store in a historic area that they will not be harmed by

Wal-Mart. Even if this proves to be true, Wickford Village merchants need to recognize their new neighbor as a possible commercial threat.

They need to be pro-active instead of re-active to the arrival of Wal-Mart. Merchants in other areas that have been reactive and waited to see what will happen have not been able to survive alongside of Wal-Mart because there was no game plan, no strategy for what to do if business slowed down.

A marketing professor from Umass-Dartmouth suggests merchants face the challenge of Wal-Mart head on by determining their own niche. In order to do so however the merchant needs to confront the commercial threat. Many of the stores that fail in the face of Wal-Mart are those who did not stay competitive and did not know enough about their competitor to begin to stay competitive.

Table 10 lists strategies and recommendations that merchants in Wickford Village should follow in order to stay competitive and encourage new and continued use of their stores. Even if Wal-Mart does not pose a commercial threat, these recommendations will help to make Wickford Village a year-round destination. While some of these recommendations are already being utilized, others should be given serious consideration by merchants.

These recommendations can be used by individual businesses or can be utilized by the Merchants Association to strengthen the entire village. When possible, it would be more effective for these recommendations to be utilized by the entire commercial center.

The types of stores and retail activities in the village are diverse and not all businesses will find themselves competing with Wal-Mart. Those types of stores in

Wickford Village that might compete with Wal-Mart include adult and children's apparel, bookstores, children's toys, florists, some food and beverage services, gift stores, home furnishings, stationary, and jewelry. These are the types of stores that should concentrate on the ten tips for competing effectively. These types of stores in addition to the other services and retail uses should concentrate on marketing themselves as both a year-round destination to tourists and year-round destination for residents.

Table 10. Tips for Competing Effectively

1. Know your competition; shop their store.
2. Advertise and promote your "niche."
3. Carry different brands and categories of products other than your competition.
4. Improve your customer service policies.
5. Find out who your customers are and cater to them.
6. Offer custom ordering.
7. Never try to compete head to head on pricing; stay within 15% price range.
8. Carry higher quality merchandise than your chain competitors.
9. Extend your hours of business.
10. Offer a full selection in the merchandise categories you carry.

Source: North Kingstown Chamber of Commerce

5.10 Conclusions

The location of Wal-Mart in North Kingstown will provide many challenges to Wickford Village. If the merchants of Wickford Village are willing to accept this challenge and prepare themselves, then they will have faced and won their first major battle. Wickford has many positive attributes and strengths that were identified in this study. These strengths are what make Wickford Village different and unique from other Main Streets or commercial strip areas. This may be why the Post Road Corridor, and not Wickford Village, is most effected by the location of Wal-Mart. While this reflects positively for Wickford Village it may have a negative effect on the Town of North Kingstown as a whole.

Wickford Village has the historic charm, tourism draw, and the strong mixed-use core that most planners, designers and developers are trying to recreate today. The Governor of Rhode Island, Lincoln Almond, has recently identified Wickford Village as an area the state should work to preserve and promote because it plays an important role in Rhode Island's year-round tourist economy. If Wickford Village concentrates on preserving and improving its strengths, while also addressing its weaknesses, it will survive and prosper based on these strengths. Wickford Village has a viable opportunity to rise above the shadow of Wal-Mart.

APPENDIX

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