

Strategic Direction

Vision, Mission, Goals,
Strategies & Outcomes



Aquidneck Land Trust

Strategic Direction: Vision, Mission, Goals, Strategies and Outcomes

Vision (long version)

Our challenge

Aquidneck Island, the largest island in Narragansett Bay, is a topaz and emerald gem in steel blue waters. It is also a place of contradictions, home to great wealth and pockets of poverty, facing threats to its community character and quality of life. Distinct community identities drive local decision-making, making regional land-use planning difficult at best. Our agricultural sector struggles with leadership succession and economic viability in the face of development pressures. Island ecology is threatened by human activity, invasive species, rising sea level, and a changing climate. Our drinking water reservoirs are impaired by pollutants. We face aging public infrastructure, surging development affecting the rural character of Middletown and Portsmouth, and inequitable access in some neighborhoods to the natural beauty of the island.

Our response

Aquidneck Land Trust is working toward a very different future twenty years from today, to protect what's best about this place and make it available to everyone who lives here. We bring a social lens to conservation, taking an inclusive approach through listening and working to address community needs. Through our conservation work, we seek to connect people to the land; protect the sources of this island's drinking water; ensure that food is as real, natural, and local as possible; and provide places for people of all ages and backgrounds to play, from field to sea. This means working with new and even unusual partners, and defining success in terms of the difference we make for the natural *and* human communities on this island.

Our future

Twenty years from today, clean rivers flow to clean beaches. Vibrant, healthy communities are connected to the beauty and bounty of Aquidneck Island. The heron's-eye view from the air over the island shows ribbons of green – verdant streambanks, bike paths, and walking trails – in a patchwork quilt of agricultural fields and forests. An island-wide network of public trails stitches the towns to the land with its farms and natural spaces, and to one another.

Twenty years from today, the land trust has carefully cultivated a stewardship ethic on Aquidneck Island. People here care about this place; we serve as a resource to help them understand the important role they play in stewardship of the island's land, waters, and biodiversity. Our conservation center serves as another aspect of Rhode Island's "lively experiment."

We are seen as a conservation leader, a go-to resource for public officials making land-use decisions, and a valuable steward of public infrastructure lands. We have brought islanders together to think about the *whole* island – not just their piece of it, but *all* of it.

We actively seek partners to help us fulfill this vision, so that people all across the island can share in the joy of living here, for generations to come.

Vision (short version)

Ribbons of green – verdant streambanks, bike paths, and walking trails – in a patchwork of thriving farms and forests of oak, beech, and maple. Clean rivers running wild, down to clean beaches. Aquidneck Land Trust works to protect what’s best about our island, and make it available to everyone. Listening intently, we strive to address community needs, and to ensure that vibrant, healthy communities are connected to the beauty and bounty of Aquidneck Island. We work to safeguard the sources of this island’s drinking water, and ensure that food is as real, natural, and local as possible. We provide places for people of all ages and backgrounds to play, from field to sea. In collaboration with current and new partners, we work for the lasting benefit of the natural *and* human communities on Aquidneck Island.

Mission

To preserve and steward Aquidneck Island’s open spaces for the lasting benefit of the community while connecting people with the land that defines the Island’s natural character.

Strategic priorities

Our land conservation work over the next five years addresses five strategic priorities (listed without respect to importance or urgency):

-  **Connection to nature.** *People protect what they love, and love what they know. All Aquidneck Islanders and visitors alike need opportunities to know nature through their own personal connections outdoors.*
-  **Clean drinking water.** *We live on top of our freshwater supply. We must do everything we can to safeguard it for all of us.*
-  **Sustainable Agriculture.** *The agricultural heritage is integral to the character of this island and should be preserved as a way of life.*
-  **Places to play.** *Access to outdoor recreation – and the physical, mental, and emotional health benefits of outdoor play – must be available to everyone. Recreation is and will be a vital part of a thriving island economy.*
-  **Climate resiliency.** *Living on an island, we’re already feeling the impact of sea-level rise, storm surges, and the difficulties of stormwater management. We all need adaptive and proactive responses.*

Crosscutting solutions

Each of our solutions achieves multiple strategic priorities (again, listed without respect to importance or urgency).

Connection
to nature

Clean
drinking
water

Sustainable
Agriculture

Places to
play

Climate
resiliency

We invest in...



Watershed protection

Aquidneck Island's most important forests, rivers, wetlands, and aquifers are conserved for a healthy, functioning watershed all the way to Narragansett Bay.



Parks, trails, and community gardens

People of all ages and backgrounds have an opportunity to experience the outdoors, right in their own back yard.



Reliable, sustainable agriculture and local food sources

A vital, sustainable agricultural economy provides islanders access to local food.



Community stewardship

Aquidneck Islanders have a strong ethic of stewardship for their land and waters, and see how land conservation connects to community health more broadly.



Sound land use policy and planning

Land use planning and practices on Aquidneck Island protect its rural character and conserve natural resources while advancing human and economic prosperity.

Aquidneck Land Trust

Strategic Direction: Vision, Mission, Goals, Strategies and Outcomes

Our investments in programs

Goal 1: Watershed protection

Aquidneck Island’s most important forests, rivers, wetlands, and aquifers are conserved for a healthy, functioning watershed all the way to Narragansett Bay.

What we’ll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Protect forests, wetlands, and riparian areas within our drinking water supply watersheds and leverage our conservation opportunities adjacent to other protected land.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 40% of land in the drinking supply watersheds is protected via conservation easement, building from the baseline of 28% in 2016. ■ Continuous corridors of riparian buffers are permanently protected along all of the drinking water streams and reservoirs providing natural habitat refuges and travel corridors for wildlife. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT has protected contiguous lands, including riparian buffer parcels, in several different watersheds to conserve critical drinking water supplies.
<p>b. Promote community best practices that reduce the flow of pollutants into reservoirs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All ALT-conserved farms will follow BMPs that help improve water quality. ■ Every landowner has a stewardship ethic to manage their property effectively for water quality. ■ There are no beach closures due to land-based bacteria and contaminants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT has implemented a set of accepted BMP requirements for conservation easements on farmland, and on a voluntary basis BMP recommendations for properties that, if installed, will create improvements in water quality. ■ Middletown Stormwater Utility is passed and fully implemented with appropriate green infrastructure and open space incentives incorporated.

Goal 2: Parks, trails, and community gardens

People of all ages and backgrounds have an opportunity to experience the outdoors, right in their own back yard

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Continue to maintain and enhance the Sakonnet Greenway Trail and Oakland Forest Trail.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Sakonnet Greenway Trail and Oakland Forest trails are model trail systems for signage, associated programming, and trail infrastructure. ■ Maintenance, upkeep, and programming of SGT/Oakland are self-sufficient with volunteers and minimal staffing. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT's trails are maintained by a committed and growing cadre of community volunteers, who participate and are trained through a strong Adopt-A-Trail Program and supported by a fully functioning tool-lending library.
<p>b. Create new trail systems to connect Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Center Island Greenway Trail exists and is well-used. ■ A multi-use bikeway exists on the western side of Aquidneck Island that connects the 3 towns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The beginning of the Center Island Greenway Trail is established at Spruce Acres Farm and plans for expansion have been mapped out. ■ Consensus among key leaders that rail-to-trail on the rail corridor is a good idea and the steps for achieving it have been set out in a plan.
<p>c. Create trailside parks and neighborhood pocket parks where possible to enhance recreational and educational opportunities and access to open space.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ We have a "String of Pearls" pocket park system in Newport. ■ Trailside parks and parklets adorn the SGT and future trails. ■ Park users and visitors represent the diversity of the Aquidneck Island community and have easy access to open space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least two (2) new parks, parklets, or community green spaces are established with an emphasis on underserved neighborhoods.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
Strategies d. Support a network of community gardens throughout Aquidneck Island.	Long term (by 2036) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Each adult or child that wants a community garden plot can have one accessible to them. 	Short term (by 2021) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spruce Acres serves as a blueprint and model of a successful community garden, and is the basis for other ALT-supported community gardens.
e. Increase connectivity of Newport with the harbor and coast.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A completely connected harbor walk exists and runs past Newport's coastal open spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A Harbor Walk Expansion Plan is completed and adopted by the Newport City Council.

Goal 3: Reliable, sustainable agriculture and local food sources

A vital, sustainable agricultural economy provides islanders access to local food.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Cultivate relationships with agricultural landowners in Middletown and Portsmouth so ALT can serve as a farm conservation resource.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is seen as a trusted partner and technical resource for farmers on the Island who want to conserve their farms. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least two (2) agricultural landowners or farm support organizations or agencies have come to ALT as a trusted resource on farm support topics other than land conservation.
<p>b. Protect active farmland and land with prime agricultural soils.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All major remaining farms and nurseries on the Island are protected via conservation easements with funding from a variety of partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Four (4) parcels with at least three acres of USDA prime farmland soils, of which two (2) are active farms, have been protected with conservation easements.
<p>c. Create a farm land lease program for new farmers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least 40% of all the prime soil farmland on the Island is conserved (Baseline - 35% of undeveloped prime soil is under conservation status as of 2016). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All of ALT fee-owned farmland that ALT has made available for lease is under active farming, and the organization has linked two new farmers with land within Newport County.

Goal 4: Community stewardship

Aquidneck Islanders have a strong ethic of stewardship for their land and waters, and see how land conservation connects to community health more broadly.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Connect key constituencies directly to the land through public outreach, educational programs, and stewardship efforts.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Universal recognition of ALT's mission. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is viewed as a "go-to" resource for its expertise on conservation issues. Its staff's knowledge is routinely sought by partner groups, teachers, decision-makers, and the general public.
<p>b. Launch the Conservation Center for site-based programming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is seen as a trusted partner in areas of the environment, health, transportation, recreation, and access to coastal lands and waters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Conservation Center offers programming to connect community members with conservation techniques they can use to help protect Aquidneck Island's important natural and agricultural lands and its waters.
<p>c. Connect conservation to other community needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Residents of the Island are well informed on local environmental issues and have a stewardship ethic for their own property and public lands. ■ ALT's Center for Conservation is a known destination to explore nature and learn about land conservation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is viewed by the general community as well as donors and other supporters as a good non-profit citizen that effectively collaborates with other organizations to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>c. Connect conservation to other community needs (continued).</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT's mission has reached the majority of Island residents via programming or indirectly through use of ALT trails or public lands. ■ Neighbors in the watershed reduce their impact through personal changes of behavior such as reduced pesticide use, increased stewardship activity participation, installation of rain barrels, native plant landscaping, etc. 	

Goal 5: Sound land use policy and planning

Land use planning and practices on Aquidneck Island protect its rural character and conserve natural resources while advancing human and economic prosperity.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Cultivate relationships with key policymakers so ALT can serve as a conservation resource.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is a recognized, trusted authority on land use policy issues. ■ Our partners and policymakers use our sound land use messages in public. ■ ALT has dedicated advocacy staff. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT develops close relationships with the majority of City Council members in all three municipalities, and with key city and town administrators. ALT is seen as a trusted advisor on conservation issues.
<p>b. Develop an advocacy plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ An advocacy plan exists and is widely used by ALT and partner organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Town Administrators and Town Councils are well educated on the conservation issues of the day and the importance of these issues to ALT's 1,200 members. This understanding is reflected in good conservation policy-making.
<p>c. Support public advocacy for land protection, clean water, and sound land use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conservation partners develop a joint agenda via annual Aquidneck Island summit on pressing environmental issues and develop complementary goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ On pertinent issues, ALT staff, board, and land trust members are engaged actively in policy work, mobilizing community support for good conservation decision-making. As a result, decision-makers seek the land trust's opinion and advice before introducing new policies.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>d. Promote financial and land use planning incentive that encourage agriculture.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is “go to” farm advocacy organization on Aquidneck Island. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Middletown passes a farm ordinance friendly to alternative farm use and special event permitting. ■ In part through ALT’s efforts, other pro-farm state and local acts, ordinances, and policies are passed.

Our internal investments

Goal 6: Effective team

Aquidneck Land Trust has the leadership and talent it needs for mission delivery.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Build a robust governance program that attracts, engages, and develops strong board leaders.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is considered a priority board to be aligned with. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT trustees are connected to mission, clear about the expectations of their service, and engaged in supporting the organization, as demonstrated by 100% board giving, committee service, and ambassadorial representation of ALT in the community.
<p>b. Attract and develop professional staff to support programming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT is adequately staffed for its size and programming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff rate their role and experience with ALT as good or very good.
<p>c. Cultivate a group of high-level advisors to connect the land trust to special resources and opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fully implemented conservation advocacy program for board members to participate in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Board of advisors is the go-to team for staff and board extending the support given by the board of trustees.
<p>d. Cultivate a cadre of committed volunteers to support program delivery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Board members are “ambassadors” who represent ALT, “advocates” who speak on behalf of the land trust’s policy positions, and/or “askers” who secure financial and other types of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Volunteers are providing 20 hours a week in programs and services for ALT.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>d. Cultivate a cadre of committed volunteers to support program delivery (continued).</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT has a large list of volunteers to call on who are always willing to help across a wide range of projects and events. 	

Goal 7: Sound organization

Aquidneck Land Trust has the infrastructure and systems needed to effectively support the mission and programs.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Develop a Conservation Center and home office.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have a highly visited center for conservation for residents to learn about land conservation and land stewardship via programming, trails, stewardship best practices, events, demonstration farm plots, community gardens, etc. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT opens its Conservation Center as a home for organizational programming and ALT's offices.
<p>b. Procure the necessary equipment to reflect growing land holdings and maintenance responsibilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stewardship department at ALT's Center for Conservation includes all necessary equipment and infrastructure to maintain properties and trails in-house. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Conservation Center is well-maintained.
<p>c. Ensure ALT is supported by a robust set of technology platforms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT has an up-to-date technology platform that is propelling its mission forward rather than slowing it down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT has an up-to-date technology platform that is propelling its mission forward rather than slowing it down.
<p>d. Monitor progress against our goals and manage adaptively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ As a learning organization, ALT continuously pivots and adapts in response to self-evaluation and progress against goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ As a learning organization, ALT develops its "strategic muscle" by regularly scanning its environment to understand new opportunities and challenges, and making course corrections as needed.

Goal 8: Financial sustainability

The Land Trust secures and manages the revenue required to support our work.

What we'll do....	We will have success when...	
<p>Strategies</p> <p>a. Enhance the land trust's relevance and visibility to broaden financial support and engage current and prospective supporters.</p>	<p>Long term (by 2036)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is a sustainable source of funding for general operations and land acquisition annually. 	<p>Short term (by 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Our integrated communications and fundraising plan has been fully executed with our Conservation Center fully incorporated.
<p>b. Expand the base of individual support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All board members and staff have a well-defined role in the fundraising plan and are well-trained in their role, resulting in measureable success in annual appeal and memberships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Green Island Society has secured at least two planned gifts. ■ With all of ALT's board and staff fully engaged in some aspect of annual fundraising, ALT enjoys a 2-3% increase in overall annual giving on average and a larger percentage of its revenue from individual gifts.
<p>c. Seek funding for nimble and flexible conservation work, used proactively and in response to opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 70% of our revenues come from individual gifts. ■ There is reduced reliance on Island foundations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT has sufficient funds to purchase and improve Spruce Acres and Little Creek Preserve, and a multi-year funding commitment for pipeline projects of \$500,000.
<p>d. Continue to provide careful financial stewardship of the resources entrusted to us.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is a \$5 million Opportunity Fund for acquisition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ALT lives comfortably within its means and has six months of operating reserves in the bank.