

# Scenic Aquidneck

## The Scenic Third Beach Project - Public Benefit Statement

The picturesque south coast of Middletown, Rhode Island has been known as “Paradise Valley” since the 18th century. The scenic vistas, unique geological formations, beaches and historic buildings make this area one of Rhode Island’s most special places. Protecting and enhancing the landscape and features of this area - renowned for its outstanding natural beauty, wealth of extraordinary historic properties and unique geological features -- are a top priority of the Scenic Aquidneck Coalition.

The Scenic Aquidneck Coalition is focused on enhancing and preserving the visual quality of Aquidneck Island’s natural and cultural resources. A collaboration of three nonprofit partners – The Preservation Society of Newport County, Preserve Rhode Island, and the Aquidneck Land Trust – the Coalition brings together resources to execute projects for the benefit of the island’s communities. The group is currently focused on The Scenic Third Beach Project: an effort that will bury utilities underground, remove 77 unsightly poles and restore the scenic landscape along a 1.2 mile stretch of Third Beach Road and Indian Avenue. This project was inspired by a similar utility undergrounding project completed through the efforts of the Scenic Aquidneck Coalition along Sachuest Point Road in Middletown in 2017.

The Scenic Third Beach Project will provide significant benefits to the public, including:

- 1. Public Views & Scenic Enhancement:** The project will afford ample opportunity for the public to appreciate the property’s scenic value as it takes place entirely within the public viewshed. Third Beach Road and Indian Avenue are both public roads of the town of Middletown, Rhode Island. They are well-traveled by the public, particularly as they provide convenient and beautiful access to the popular Second and Third beaches, the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Refuge at Sachuest Point, and the unusual geologic feature “Hanging Rock.” The project will also enhance the scenic views along public roads, as well as to and from the conserved land at the non-profit-owned Norman Bird Sanctuary (325 acres) and the town-owned Third Beach (10 acres). The existing utility poles impair these scenic views and their removal will improve the character of the landscape and scenic panorama.
- 2. Historic Landscape Enhancement:** The project will restore the historic landscape quality of Third Beach Road and Indian Avenue, with its concentration of historic properties, by removing utility poles. The existing utility poles are visual intrusions and unsightly elements that are out of character



with the surrounding historic resources and the utilities adversely affect the historic setting. The project area includes two National Register historic districts – the Stonybrook Estate and Smith-Gardiner-Norman districts, as well as several individual properties included in the state inventory of historic assets that have been determined eligible for listing.

3. **Scenic Roadway Enhancement:** The project will enhance the scenic quality of one (of only eight) roadways designated by Rhode Island Department of Transportation as a “scenic roadway”, attesting to the statewide significance of this scenic area. Indian Avenue and Third Beach Road are a part of the state-designated “Paradise Avenue and Associated Roads” scenic roadway network, recognized for “historic features, both manmade and natural, known for bordering trees of exceptional quality in terms of age and spread.” Removal of utility poles will enhance the scenic roadway corridor.
4. **Alignment with Open Space Priorities:** The Aquidneck Land Trust, a founding partner of the Scenic Aquidneck Coalition, has a 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. The Trust has identified “keeping scenic vistas and the charm and beauty of our Island” along with “maintaining the Island’s desirability as a place to live, work and visit” among the primary benefits for conserving open space. This project will enhance the scenic quality of conserved land used and enjoyed by the public at Third Beach and the Norman Bird Sanctuary.
5. **Coastal Resilience:** Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council encourages the ability of infrastructure to “bounce back” after hazardous events such as hurricanes, coastal storms and flooding. The ability to rebound reduces environmental and economic impacts. Resiliency prevents a short-term hazard from turning into long term community-wide disaster. Underground utilities are resilient compared to the overhead lines.
6. **Alignment with Town of Middletown Comprehensive Plan:** The project will advance several goals adopted by the Town of Middletown in its 2014 Comprehensive Community Plan (“Plan”). The Overall Vision of the Plan is: “to preserve its quality of life for all generations as a safe and friendly community with a distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources, a strong local government.” The project aligns with several specific goals in the Plan, including maintaining and preserving public beaches, restoring the historic landscape, reducing the town’s vulnerability to climate change impacts, and preserving the aesthetic quality and overall livability of the town.

