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# Final Report: Section 2. A Watershed Approach

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## SECTION 2

### A WATERSHED APPROACH

A comprehensive management approach is needed to provide the long-term framework for implementation of the watershed plan. The actions required to implement the watershed plan touch virtually everyone in the 43 member communities and cut across numerous subject areas and disciplines including water supply, wastewater, stormwater, economic development, and habitat protection. They address the interest of town officials, local citizens, the business community and environmental/stewardship groups. The watershed is the common ground that inexorably links the land, the open spaces, and the urbanized areas with the wetlands and the open waters associated with the Taunton River.

To be successful, the management approach must be sustainable. It must be designed as not only an ecological restoration and preservation tool but also as one that provides economic development. It must provide a long-term balance between the daily lives of residents and a complex ecosystem.

Restoration of the watershed will require infrastructure projects and lifestyle changes. Infrastructure improvements are expensive and they must be coordinated, prioritized, and incentivized in a manner that takes advantage of available funding opportunities and is coordinated with related projects to achieve economies of scale. Water supplies, wastewater systems, and stormwater drainage projects must be planned together – a concept referred to as integrated water management. Lifestyle and behavioral changes are difficult to achieve. Seemingly simple alternative practices such as proper pet waste disposal and limiting lawn irrigation can have dramatic cumulative benefits.

Land use development patterns play a critical role in the cost of providing infrastructure and resource protection. The implementation of smart growth, comprised of compact, village-center, clustered development with preserved open space buffers between them and protected wetlands, lakes and streams, will optimize both economic and ecologic benefits. Density bonuses can be provided to incentivize this development pattern by providing greater profitability to developers who choose these types of projects. Compact development that includes mixed uses translates into more units per area, greater equity values for that land, increased profitability to developers, more jobs, less reliance on the automobile to get from housing to jobs, more affordable infrastructure and a healthier community to live in. It can also relieve development pressures in other sensitive areas that are critical to resource protection.

A shift in land use patterns towards this more affordable, more profitable smart growth will require some level of local regulatory code reform. Many of the existing land use codes not only do not encourage this type of development, they frequently preclude it. Implementation of the watershed plan will require a comprehensive review and update of many of the local land use codes throughout the watershed. This requires a significant amount of training and education of local government officials and ultimately the public who will be required to support the necessary legislative changes at town meeting and city council meetings.