



WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER
WATERSHED COUNCIL



2025-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

wrwc.org



CHARTING THE COURSE FOR THE NEXT 25 YEARS

In 2001, the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council (WRWC) launched as a nonprofit. Today, we are honored to lead the WRWC. We are committed to continue to transform the Woonasquatucket River from an abused natural resource into a source of renewal, resilience, and connection, and we know that this organization and the natural resources we protect will one day be in the hands of a new generation. This strategic plan is our road map to identify strengths, accelerate momentum, and remain resilient.

As the WRWC approaches its 25th anniversary, we reflect on our substantial accomplishments and consider the path forward. With the steadfast support of partners, donors, and community members like you, we have revitalized the Woonasquatucket River, improved environmental conditions across the watershed, and created safety, sustainability, and joy for our neighbors.

We are buoyed by our success—and we know that the challenges ahead remain complex and multi-generational. We celebrate the substantial progress we have made—and the Woonasquatucket River still carries the scars of its industrial past. Pollution, toxins, and flooding continue to threaten the health and the well-being of the human, wildlife, and plant communities that live, work and play in and around the river.

This is why we are gratified to share this 2025-2029 WRWC Five-Year Strategic Plan. More than 100 voices—partners, supporters, critics, and friends—have helped shape this plan to guide WRWC into the future. This document outlines:

- Our history, vision, and values—the foundation of our work
- The urgent problems we are tackling—and why they matter
- Our goals and strategies—the ways we will advance our mission
- Ways you can join the movement—because real change takes all of us

Together, we will continue to expand, enhance, and activate a healthier, more accessible Greenway and river. We will continue to reduce damaging pollution and flooding. And we will create the conditions for more local leaders and advocates to serve as role models in their communities.

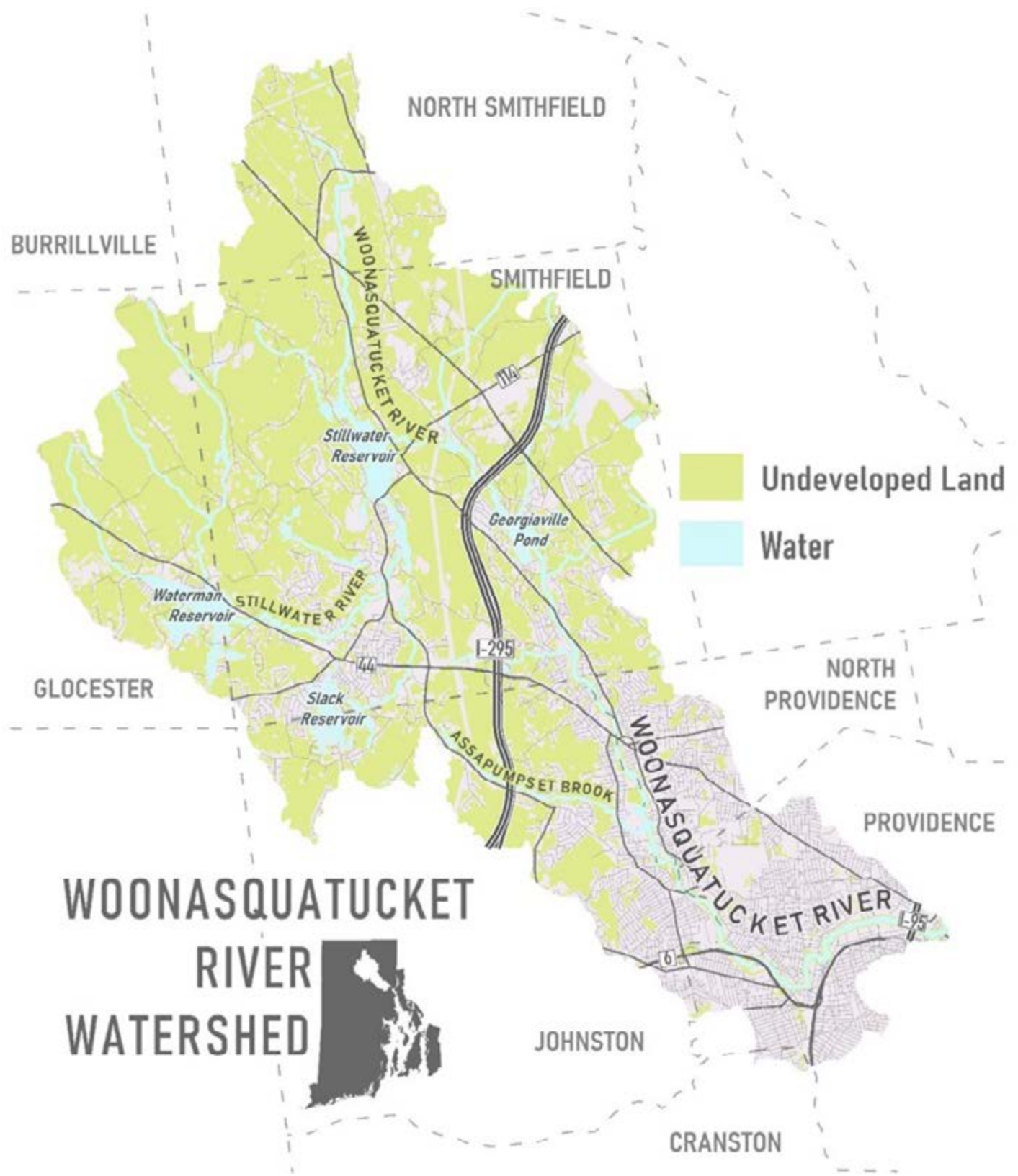
As you explore these pages, you'll find evidence of achievement, stories of progress and bold plans for the future. The work we have tasked ourselves with has never been easy. We are confident that this dynamic strategic plan will move us forward.

We invite you to stand with us and add your strengths to turn this vision into reality. The Woonasquatucket River is not just a body of water—it is a lifeline for our environment, our communities, and our future. We look forward to continuing this journey together.

Join us. Support us. Be part of the movement.

Laureen Ratti
President, Board of Directors

Alicia J. Lehrer
Executive Director



WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

MISSION

Create positive environmental, social, and economic change by revitalizing the Woonasquatucket River, its Greenway, and its communities.

VISION

A clean Woonasquatucket River and thriving Greenway for all to lead healthy lives.

VALUES

TENACIOUS INNOVATION

We overcome constraints with boldness, resourcefulness, and an entrepreneurial spirit, and we hope for a better future. We're scrappy, and we get things done.

COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP

We work toward establishing intergenerational habits of stewardship for our natural and human resources, elevating the community to continue our work.

HUMANS AND NATURE TOGETHER

We believe placemaking happens in the interconnection between humanity and nature. We have a holistic vision for community flourishing and sustainability.

ACCESSIBLE JOY

We share in the accessible and collective joy of creating and living in community among thriving natural resources.

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

As the 20th century began, Providence's Olneyville neighborhood thrived as a vibrant community and innovative industrial hub. By the end of the century, Olneyville was Providence's poorest neighborhood. Abandoned textile mills and other manufacturing sites had deteriorated into dangerous disrepair. Many residents left when industrial jobs disappeared. Those who stayed or arrived later struggled with poverty and isolation.

WRWC's founders responded to these urgent community needs by connecting with community residents and leaders to create the project that became the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council. People shared the ways that day-to-day life was hard. Few residents owned cars. People lacked safe routes to walk and bike to school, work, and other places. Crime was high. Children had no healthy places to play outside.

Abandoned, polluted, and obscured by heaps of rubble and overgrown weeds, the hidden Woonasquatucket River flowed through the neighborhood. Collaborating with dozens of local, federal, state, and city partners, we harnessed funding for multi-use trails to connect neighborhoods along the river. As the project expanded,

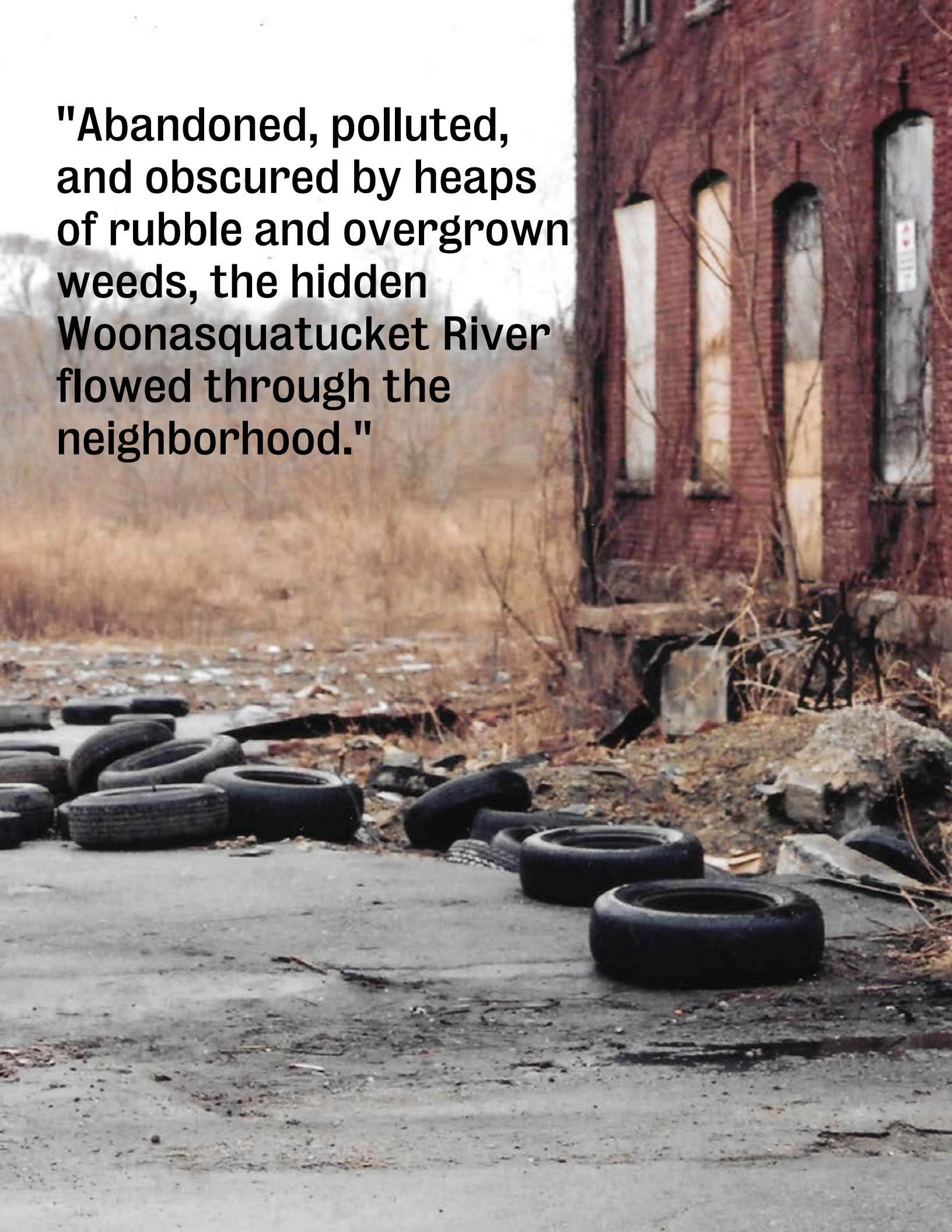
foundations, corporations, community-based organizations, and individuals invested more than \$40 million to create the Woonasquatucket River Greenway. Currently, the Greenway is 75+ acres of park spaces connected by seven miles of multi-use on- and off-road active transportation paths.

Today, our wide-ranging programs connect our wonderfully diverse communities and activate the Woonasquatucket River Greenway. Our River Rangers and Greenway team lead the charge on climate resilience and restoration, creating safe spaces along the river for our community leadership and workforce development initiatives, environmental and bicycling education programs, recreation opportunities, and community engagement at all levels.

Our work has catalyzed more than one billion dollars in economic development. Green spaces and the river itself have emerged, providing opportunities for the community to play, breathe, and find everyday joy. The Woonasquatucket River Greenway has become a lifeline for community members seeking fresh air, safe places for recreation, and connections with the natural world.



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TODAY'S URGENT CHALLENGES

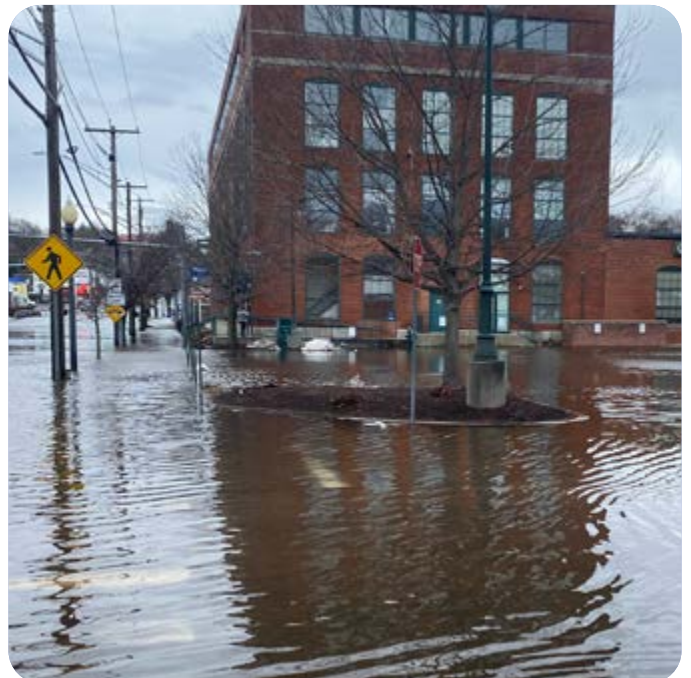
1. No Seat at the Table: Leadership, Community Voice, & Environmental Justice

The people most affected by climate change, pollution, and failing infrastructure—riverfront residents who live, work, and travel in the Woonasquatucket River watershed—are routinely left out of the decisions that shape their lives. Communities facing the worst public health disparities are shut out of environmental decisions. Historically, the people who are most adversely affected by climate and post-industrial effects do not have a seat at the environmental policy table. Without meaningful hands-on learning and leadership opportunities, residents do not have resources to advocate for change. When impacted communities aren't heard, inequities deepen. Without real representation, people remain vulnerable to worsening climate conditions, failing infrastructure, and environmental injustice. We have proven that when given the chance, people can improve conditions for their families and communities.



2. Going Under? Flooding, Pollution & Climate Change

Decades of industrial pollution have left much of the Woonasquatucket River toxic, and we are still paying the price. At the Centredale Manor Superfund site, chemical manufacturers dumped dioxin into the river, contaminating the river bottom and banks for miles. During severe storms, outdated sewer and stormwater pipe systems overflow, sending raw sewage into the river. Stronger storms in our changing climate are eroding stream banks, destroying habitats and damaging infrastructure along the entire length of the river. The Woonasquatucket River should be a source of life—not a toxic flood zone. While our progress is amazing, we have a long way to go.



3. Inadequate Green Spaces = Poor Public Health

Though we have much more green space than we did 25 years ago, too many people along the Woonasquatucket River still lack access to safe outdoor spaces. Too few trees and too much pavement in urban neighborhoods along the Woonasquatucket make summers dangerous, and pollution and invasive plants threaten the few natural areas we have. Walking, biking, and gathering spaces are scarce, isolating people and worsening physical and mental health. People need clean, welcoming outdoor spaces, and the Woonasquatucket River Greenway has not yet expanded into all municipalities in the watershed. Currently, safe green spaces are too limited and that has worsened public health in our region.



WHERE WE ARE GOING

We imagine a resilient, healthy, and sustainable future for the Woonasquatucket River and its communities. We are building on decades of success to achieve goals that guide our efforts within the river's communities, watershed and Greenway.



COMMUNITY

By 2030, lift up 8,000 residents to be environment, justice, and climate role models in their communities.

We include opportunities for environmental awareness and advocacy in everything that we do. Our environmental education and community action programs reach young people and adults, tapping into local knowledge and offering support to create generations of effective advocates and leaders.

We work in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the Woonasquatucket River Watershed to offer high-quality and meaningful experience-based environmental education. In riverfront neighborhoods, we engage adult residents, sharing knowledge and building their capacity as leaders to advance awareness of and responses to urgent climate threats.

HOW WE GET THERE

Since 2020, we have offered the Nuevas Voces Community Action program. This nine-month long program for adults has graduated more than 75 riverfront residents who are doing amazing work as climate champions, including leading the Olneyville Resilience Hub, serving on the Providence School Board, and joining statewide transportation and recreation planning boards.



WATERSHED

By 2040, make all of the Woonasquatucket River clean, fishable, and swimmable, and minimize flooding disasters.

Unmanaged stormwater poses life- and property-threatening flooding risks to watershed communities, and industrial-era carcinogens pollute much of the Woonasquatucket River.

We collaborate on stormwater management and a watershed-wide flood mitigation plan. We partner to remove toxins and restore ecosystems mid-river at Centredale Manor. We assure that Greenway projects create river access and help prevent stormwater and pollution from flowing into the river.

HOW WE GET THERE

Near Manton Pond in Johnston, we have created a bioswale and a retention pond. We have removed pavement and restored the dangerously eroding streambank. We have added plants, trees, and more to slow stormwater and absorb pollutants. These measures demonstrate the ways that we can leverage funds and partnerships to create a safer and cleaner Woonasquatucket River.



GREENWAY

By 2040, ensure 80,000 people are within a 10-minute walk of a safe, welcoming, and activated multi-use trail and natural area connecting North Smithfield and Providence.

The Woonasquatucket River runs through remarkably distinct towns and cities and connects rural northern Rhode Island with densely populated Providence. All of these communities face similar challenges, including limited access to accessible, safe outdoor spaces.

We collaborate with every municipality within the Woonasquatucket River watershed to build support and identify resources for Greenway expansion.

HOW WE GET THERE

In 2025, after many years of work and partnership, the Promenade-Kinsley Woonasquatucket River Greenway section will open. This highly anticipated linear park will connect downtown Providence with Olneyville and Johnston. This connection offers park spaces, restored habitats, protected off-road paths, and more amenities.

GETTING IT DONE

To achieve these three strategic goals, the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council is committed to building our momentum, growing our capacity, generating more impact, and sustaining our work for generations to come. To establish momentum for this strategic plan, we have developed a set of five connected actions.



Make Progress on
Strategic Goals

Recruit, Train,
and Retain the
Best Staff and
Board

Increase Use of
the Greenway
and River

Influence
State and
Local Policy
and Increase
Funding

Strengthen
Partnerships
and Coalitions

5 INTERCONNECTED ACTIONS



MAKE PROGRESS ON STRATEGIC GOALS

Expand and enhance the Woonasquatucket Greenway; reduce pollution into and flooding related to the Woonasquatucket River; and build a resilient network of community leaders, advocates, students, and friends.



INCREASE USE OF THE GREENWAY AND RIVER

Connect more people to the outdoors, the river, and one another through the possibilities of an activated, engaging Woonasquatucket Greenway.



STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS

Be at the forefront of strong, multicultural partnerships and coalitions that work to restore our environment and revitalize our communities.



INFLUENCE STATE AND LOCAL POLICY AND INCREASE FUNDING

Update state and municipal policies to address environmental and community development challenges, and increase eligibility for municipal, state, and national funding opportunities.



RECRUIT, TRAIN, AND RETAIN THE BEST STAFF AND BOARD

Increase the capacity through competitive compensation, growth opportunities for staff and board members, and shared joy.

STAY CONNECTED

GET INVOLVED

Thousands of people have made our work possible as volunteers, donors, and partners. And now, more than ever, we need you (and many people like you) to join us to build local leadership, restore the environment, and get people outside. Connect with us, and we will connect you to the critical work of revitalizing the Woonasquatucket River and Greenway.



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attend an event

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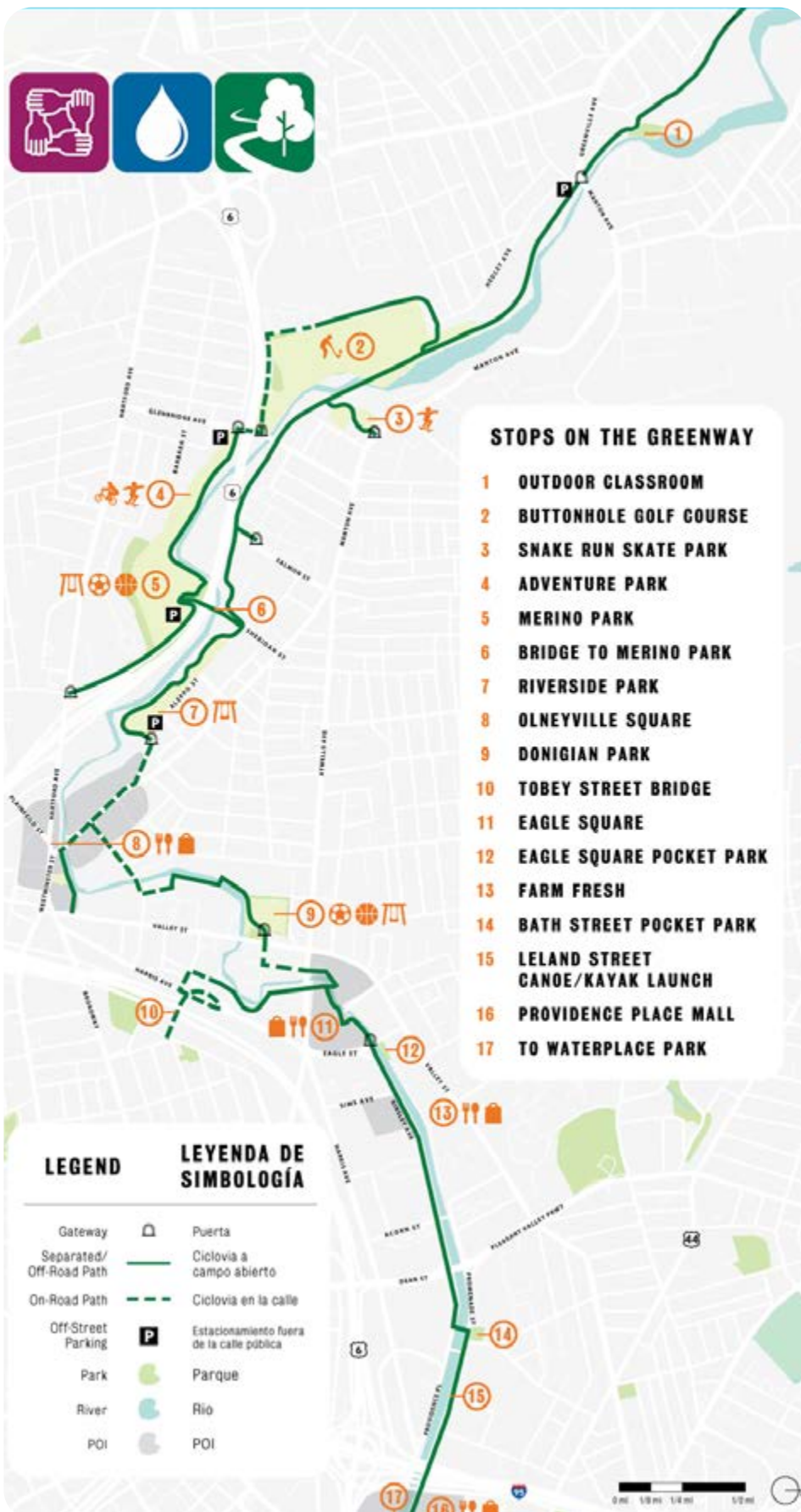
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