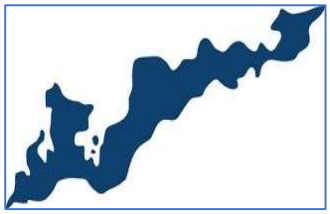
FISHERS ISLAND

Photo Credit: Vincent Scarano, Kindred Spirit, Patrick Comins, LoopNet, Henry L. Ferguson Museum

Community Resilience Building

Summary of Findings

JUNE 2025



Fishers Island, New York
Community Resilience Building
Summary of Findings

Overview

The need for municipalities, regional planning organizations, academic institutions, corporations, states, and federal agencies to increase resilience to extreme weather events and a changing climate is strikingly evident amongst communities across the state of New York. Relatively recent events such as Super Storm Sandy, severe winter storms (2013 & 2015), the COVID-19 pandemic, and Tropical Storm Irene have reinforced this urgency and compelled leading communities like Fishers Island to proactively collaborate on planning and mitigating risks. Ultimately, this type of leadership is to be commended because it will reinforce the strengths and reduce the vulnerability of people, infrastructure, and ecosystems, and serve as a model for other communities in New York, the Mid-Atlantic, and the nation.

Recently, the community of Fishers Island signed on with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to complete a Community Resilience Building process. The process included community-driven steps designed to assess current hazards and climate change impacts and to generate prioritized actions to improve resilience and sustainability. In June 2025, Fishers Island's Core Team helped organize a Community Resilience Building workshop facilitated by TNC. The underlying directive of this effort was the engagement with and between community members to define strengths and vulnerabilities and the development of agreed-upon, priority resilience actions for Fishers Island.

The Fishers Island Community Resilience Building workshop's central objectives were to:

- Define top local, natural, and climate-related hazards of concern.
- Identify existing and future strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Identify and prioritize actions for Fishers Island.
- Identify opportunities to collaboratively advance actions to increase resilience in accordance with residents and organizations from across the Island, and beyond.

Fishers Island employed an "anywhere at any scale" community-driven process called Community Resilience Building (CRB) (www.CommunityResilienceBuilding.org). The CRB's tools, reports, other relevant planning documents, and local maps were integrated into the workshop process to provide support for decisions and visualization around shared issues and existing priorities across Fisher Island, as well as the Town of Southold. The Suffolk County Jurisdictional Annex for the Town of Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020) and the Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020) were particularly instructive as references. Using the CRB process, the participants produced the findings presented in this summary report. This Summary of Findings includes an overview of the top hazards, current concerns and challenges, existing strengths, and proposed actions to improve Fishers Island's resilience to hazards and climate change today, and in the future.

The Summary of Findings transcribed in this report, like any that concern the evolving nature of risk assessment and associated action, is shared for comments, corrections, and updates from workshop attendees and other stakeholders alike. The leadership displayed by Fishers Island and the Town of Southold on community resilience building will benefit from the continuous participation of all those concerned.

Summary of Findings

Top Hazards and Vulnerable Areas for the Community

Prior to the CRB Workshop, the Fishers Island/Southold CRB Core Team identified the top hazards for the Island. The hazards of greatest concern included major storms and hurricanes that bring high winds, flooding, and storm surge, as well as drought and ongoing sea level rise. Additional hazards highlighted by participants during the CRB workshop included extreme temperatures (i.e., heat waves, and cold snaps), wildfires, and major winter storms such as Nor'easters and blizzards during the fall and spring months. These hazards have direct and increasing impacts on the infrastructure, environment, and residents of Fishers Island. These effects are seen more specifically in transportation, utility systems (drinking water supply), threats to property insurance coverage, shoreline and natural buffers, open space, social support services, emergency management, and other assets on Fishers Island.

Current Concerns and Challenges Presented by Hazards

Fishers Island has several concerns and faces multiple challenges related to the impacts of natural hazards and climate change. In the last few decades, Fishers Island and the Town of Southold have experienced a series of highly disruptive and damaging weather events including a tornado (2018), high wind events (2017 & 2018), high surf and coastal erosion caused by a tropical storm (2017), and a severe winter storm (2017), among many other similar types of hazards. Impacts from many of these extreme weather events have included many downed trees and damage to homes, along with flooding in low lying areas coupled with coastal erosion and wind damage on Fishers Island. Winter storms with large snowfalls have further impacted year-round residents. The magnitude and intensity of these events across the region have increased awareness of natural hazards and climate change, while motivating communities such as Fisher Island to proactively improve their overall resilience.

This series of extreme weather events demonstrates that the impacts from hazards are diverse. On Fishers Island, this ranges from flooding of critical infrastructure, roads, and low-lying areas; localized flooding from stormwater runoff during intense storms and heavy precipitation events in the Ferry Terminal area; coastal erosion due to storm surge and associated high winds; and home and property damage from trees, wind, snow, and ice. Longer periods of elevated heat, particularly in July and August, have raised concerns about vulnerable segments of the Island's population as well as increased fire risk. Short-term summer droughts are coinciding with increases in demand on Island infrastructure as seasonal residents arrive. The combination of these issues presents a challenge to preparedness and mitigation priorities and requires comprehensive yet tailored actions for various locations and/or areas on Fishers Island.

The CRB workshop participants were generally in agreement that Fishers Island is experiencing more intense and frequent storm events, associated flooding, high winds, storm surges, short-term seasonal droughts, as well as heat waves. Additionally, there was a general concern about the increasing challenges of being prepared for the worst-case scenarios (e.g., major thunderstorms and hurricanes (Cat-3 or above)) particularly in the late summer and in the fall/winter months when more intense storms coincide with colder weather (i.e., snow/ice storms, Nor'easters, blizzards). The impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic was raised by workshop participants as well.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges

As in any community, Fishers Island is not uniformly vulnerable to hazards and climate change. Certain locations, assets, and populations have been and will be affected to a greater degree than others. Workshop participants identified the following items as their community's key areas of concern and challenges across several broad categories.

Municipal Functions, Operations, & Growth:

- Remoteness of the Island is a challenge when trying to get materials, parts, and supplies from Connecticut as well as repairs completed that may require several trips back and forth from the mainland. Costs of goods and services are typically higher than on the mainland due to scheduling logistics and time spent on ferries.
- Aging population of year-round residents with a limited number of new and younger residents in recent decades which is having an impact on the level of volunteerism for critical services such as the Fire Department ("island living is not for everyone").
- Due to the low year-round population, the same individuals tend to wear many hats keeping different organizations and institutions running, which can lead to being overcommitment and burnout.
- Lack of housing creates stress and anxiety amongst existing residents when their housing needs change and poses challenges to organizations when recruiting staff both for seasonal and year-round positions.
- The COVID-19 pandemic tightened the housing market on the Island further as rentals were purchased by single owners and no longer available for workforce rentals.
- Lack of housing and high cost of living and construction costs ($1000 per square foot), as well as the lack of services and amenities, combined with the narrow band of available jobs on the Island remain significant deterrents to new residents settling on the Island.
- General lack of awareness amongst seasonal residents of the support provided to Fishers Island from the encompassing town of Southold.
- Seasonal residents used to come and stay on the Island for a full month but now it is closer to one or two weeks.
- Predominately seasonal nature of residents that are reluctant to engage on key issues and challenges for the Island ("need to get the seasonal folks more involved").
- Seasonal residents have a pattern of disengaging from issues when not on Fishers Island in the off-season.
- Pattern of time and community engagement efforts being dedicated to a specific project only to have a final decision thwarted by a vocal minority late in the process.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Homeowners insurance is being canceled on Fishers Island in an aggressive fashion with approximately 4% of policy holders being dropped annually. In other cases, premiums are escalating for private residences on the Island.
- Homeowners insurance companies no longer offer new wind damage coverage for Fishers Island. This requires residents to self-insure their properties and/or households are opting out of wind coverage to save money and taking on the risk themselves.
- While Southold Town is experiencing growing concerns about the impact of short-term rental, this is not yet an issue on Fishers Island where rentals tend to be for longer time periods.
- Business insurance is rising, adding an additional cost coupled with the challenges of a seasonal, summer-driven economy on Fishers Island.
- Unsatisfactory internet connectivity, despite the utilities effort to upgrade, has many residents moving to satellite derived sources of connectivity.
- Insurance companies no longer offer new wind damage coverage for Fishers Island which requires residents to self-insure their properties.
- Limited capacity to rebuild after major disasters with only a few contractors on the Island. Concerns about what takes precedent in the rebuild ("School fighting to get priority over someone's home") and clarity on the decision-making process.
- Small groups of people hold immense institutional knowledge with uncertainty around how that information will be adequately passed along.
- Governmental complications stem from physical proximity to Connecticut, but governance tied to the state of New York. For example, emergency management sometimes requires multi-state coordination.
- No formal island-based authority to make decisions.
- Food is brought from off-island with one grocery store on the Island.
- Lack of industry and limited economic opportunities, which reduces the potential for a more robust, economically diverse community.

Emergency Management & Preparedness:

- Isolation presents difficulties for evacuation from the Island during emergencies.
- Skeletal crew of emergency responders (firefighters, EMTs, medical staff, etc.) where the inability of just one to access the Island before disasters can render critical systems ineffective, placing residents and supportive services in peril.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Access to the Island by additional emergency management professionals is difficult and time-consuming during periods of high seas and wind. Approximate time to the Island during calm weather is forty minutes.
- Fast boats and helicopters that can quickly access the Island become difficult to deploy during severe weather with high seas and winds.
- Current medical care capacity on the Island is unequipped for a mass causality scenario due to a major natural disaster.
- Low year-round populations levels impact levels of volunteerism in terms of recruitment and retention which is a concern because emergency services on the Island are volunteer based.
- Coastal erosion and accelerating risks from sea level rise are critical issues on Fishers Island and across Southold.
- Coastal erosion is a threat on the Block Island side of Fishers Island. In one location a home has had to be moved to avoid calamity.
- The Airport and Ferry Terminal are both situated within recognized flood zones despite being the mainstay for access and egress for the Island.
- A 1980s era submarine cable connects Fishers Island to Groton. Electricity primarily flows from Groton to Fishers Island. However, the back-up diesel generators on Fishers Island do send electricity back to Connecticut when needed. There is also a second 1960s era cable that may provide some redundancy. Electrical power across the submarine cable is often preemptively cut before major storms such as hurricanes.
- Vulnerability of structures in low-lying areas and on exposed bluffs where there is nothing stopping the wind.
- Sea level rise presents concerns for properties along the coastline due to ongoing and in some locations accelerating erosion of bluffs and slopes that protect homes.
- Nearby threats from the mainland (i.e., Milestone Nuclear Power Plant).
- Communications challenges during major storm events amongst the community on the Island and between the Island and the mainland.
- Delays in post-disaster recovery due to the need to mobilize off-island personnel and resources particularly when there is extensive damage to water and/or electrical infrastructure ("just as troubling as worrying about what is going to happen before a storm").
- Water concerns focus on the impacts of drought and reduced amount of water for drinking and fire suppression versus the threat posed by wildfire.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Aging water infrastructure system results in a hydrant system with a one-truck capacity and lower water pressure in key locations (near Fishers Island School) which puts homes and property at risk in the event of intense single and/or multiple structure fires.
- Concerns that a massive storm surge and excessive wind issue from a major hurricane would utterly overwhelm the current utility systems on the Island resulting in significantly long timelines for repairs and replacement.

Roads, Road Networks, & Transportation Systems (Ferry & Airport):

- Road paving projects need to meet state of New York specifications which are more stringent than Connecticut specifications. This increases the cost of coordinating getting materials and contractors from New York who need to charter a ferry to complete paving work ("logistical challenges are immense").
- Necessity to follow New York prevailing wages is a significant challenge for infrastructure related contractual work.
- Copious amount of legal requirements and contract review needs associated with the airport management and operations which requires time and cost to satisfy appropriately.
- Coastal erosion off West Harbor has undermined a seawall and other local infrastructure.
- Fishers Island is critically dependent for transportation of people and materials via two ferries that travel back and forth from the Island and New London, Connecticut. The two ferries serving Fishers Island are approaching the end of their life cycle with one nearing fifty-years-old and the other approaching forty years.
- Concerns regarding the impact of rising tides and storm surge is and will have on the Fishers Island Ferry Terminal, dock, and associated parking lots. Terminal is in a flood zone, sinkholes have appeared in the parking lots, flooding of parking lots during rain events, and tides are getting under seawalls and eroding areas around the facility. The New London Ferry Terminal is also experiencing higher tides that flood out the parking lot.
- Airport lighting needs to be replaced every 10 years due to corrosion from salt water (last replaced in 2016).

Stormwater System, Waste Systems, & Drinking Water Supply:

- Utilities and continuity of operations are a recognized concern given the increased intensity and magnitude of storms in the last few decades.

Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges (cont'd)

- Drinking water supply is groundwater and privately owned by Fishers Island Utility Company with no water supply connection from Connecticut.
- Water infrastructure pipes were installed in the 1920s (100 years old) and are beyond expected life cycles resulting in pipe breaks that can put much of the island out of water supply (recent pipe breaks on Christmas Eve). Replacement or upgrades to the water pipe system would require ongoing and significant capital expenses and construction time.
- Island is in a time of climate change and sea level rise with threats from salt-water intrusion and real dangers to potable water systems. The 1938 Hurricane (Long Island Express) compromised water systems on the Island which remains a cautionary tale amongst professional staff and long-term residents.
- Fishers Island Development Corporation via a preliminary study approximated the cost at $80M to upgrade several critical systems including submarine cable and water infrastructure island wide.
- Seasonal residents are often not aware of the day-to-day challenges and considerations that go into maintaining operations and services on the Island ("work is invisible to those that aren't here much"). Often projects are near completion without full community awareness.
- Cost of infrastructure repairs and maintenance has risen in the last decade and is outpacing the ability and willingness of the approximately 650 households on the utility system to cover the costs.
- Deferred maintenance on the drinking water infrastructure is a growing issue due to the age of the pipes and pumps.
- Concerns about the condition of the sewer district and associated infrastructure.
- Limited available housing results in many key infrastructure utility employees arriving by daily commuter boat.

Ecosystems, Shoreline, Wetlands, & Natural Buffers:

- Ongoing saltwater intrusion at the Middle Farms Flats near Middle Farms Pond is threatening freshwater habitat types on the Island.
- Steep topographic grade at coastline can prevent the upslope advancement of certain native plant species and habitats.
- Ecosystems predominated by eelgrass are sensitive to ongoing changes in ocean water temperatures and increased acidification.

Current Strengths and Assets

Just as certain locations, facilities, and populations on Fishers Island stand out as particularly vulnerable to the effects of hazards and climate change, other features are notable assets for Fishers Island's resilience building. Workshop participants identified the following items as their community's key strengths and expressed interest in centering them as the core of future resilience building actions.

Municipal Functions, Operations, & Growth:

- Strong sense of interdependence and understanding of what it takes to keep the systems and services operational across the Island with recognition amongst the year-round residents of those that "make it all work".
- People care about Fishers Island and have a community passion and spirit for involvement.
- Fishers Island has a strong and intimate sense of community where residents truly love the Island ("everyone know everyone").
- Long history and track record (since original charter in 1600s) of solving problems autonomously on the Island with little expectation of help from outside ("a place apart and unto itself for 300+ years"). Challenges are often met by securing private funding from community members ("pass the hat").
- Healthy philanthropic activity on the Island results in the availability of resources that can be directed towards recognized vulnerabilities within the community that would otherwise not be available.
- Neighborly interaction with little to no animosity between year-round and seasonal residents.
- Most year-round and seasonal residents on Fishers Island are deeply invested and interested in the continued success of their community with ample participation in events and volunteer opportunities.
- Island community has strong institutions with actively engaged residents.
- Self-reliance of Island residents has created a stable, self-sufficient, and sustainable community across many categories such as public health, public service, transportation, arts and culture, and education, among others.
- Majority of residents aligned on needs for the Island so able to move forward largely in unison on issues and problem solving.
- General respect amongst others from Southold ("mainland") for the sense of community and initiatives among year-round residents on Fishers Island.

Current Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Planning and zoning efforts across Southold have focused on maintaining the individual identity of each Hamlet, including Fishers Island, in response to the unique wants and needs.
- Island Community Board meets monthly and was a critical forum for coming together (online) and sharing information amongst residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Walsh Park, a non-profit organization that supports year-round housing on the Island, has been acquiring properties and currently manages well over 30 units of affordable housing options for residents.
- Increased law enforcement presence on the Island since late 2023 with two officers present seven days a week. Officers know the community and their needs and are now well respected by the residents.
- FishersIsland.net website is considered a community asset and resource for residents and visitors.
- Half of student body of Fishers Island School (pre-k through 12th grade) comes over from Connecticut each day, which helps to enhance diversity and brings the total number of students from thirty-five to approximately seventy.

Emergency Management & Preparedness:

- Camaraderie strengthened during emergencies such as during Tropical Storm Sandy and Irene continue well past crisis moments for this island community.
- Community-wide tenacity to ensure the well-being of all residents as evident by the pursuit of federal funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency after Tropical Storm Sandy and Irene.
- Secured funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to reinforce the airport runways with a seawall in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Sandy.
- Fishers Island School has just finished a renovation project and stands ready as an emergency shelter complete with back-up generator and space adequate to temporarily house the community in the event of a disaster.
- Fire Department and EMTs are recognized strengths and are always actively preparing for and responding to weather events on behalf of those they service.
- Medical office on the Island is an important asset, especially for the elderly and less mobile residents, given the challenges of traveling to the mainland for routine care.
- Mutual aid agreement in place as of 2025 with only one location (Groton, Connecticut) for fire and medical care.

Current Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Successful emergency evacuation drill (October 2024) with multiple agency representatives in partnership with the Ferry company. Previous evacuation drill was conducted in 2015.
- Suffolk County Fire Rescue has technology systems capable of sending out mass alerts to all Fishers Island residents in the event of critical emergencies.
- Professionals on the Island such as doctors, firefighters, EMTs, and utility workers are skilled and able to deal effectively with issues such as aging infrastructure issues (i.e., water line breaks) and limited resources at times. Often this requires a holistic approach to problem solving that involves collaboration across disciplines.

Roads, Road Networks, & Transportation Systems (Ferry & Airport):

- Highest staff levels for Southold Highway Department across all of the hamlets within Southold with three staff members for the ten miles of municipal roadways on Fishers Island). The responsiveness and level of service is therefore often greater than in other areas of Southold.
- Fishers Island is the only hamlet in Southold that has a dedicated line item for asphalt/paving contracts in the capital fund as well being able to "roll over" unspent funds every year.
- Dredging of the channel for the ferries coming in and out of Silver Eel Cove with dredge spoils placed to strengthen the berm around the Ferry Terminal. Berm has been planted and now serves as a small coastal park complete with a walking path as part of a coastal path connecting various areas of Fishers Island.
- Operational airport and ferry terminal represent the mainstays for getting everything and everybody on and off the Island.

Stormwater System, Waste Systems, & Drinking Water Supply:

- Fishers Island has its own four-person utility crew that is available to respond during emergencies in addition to ongoing and routine maintenance of these critical systems.

Ecosystems, Shoreline, Wetlands, & Natural Buffers:

- People on Fishers Island understand the need to protect and maintain intact ecosystems given the ecosystem services they provide (i.e., water filtration, storm surge buffering, etc.).
- Natural resources and ecosystems of the Island are recognized by residents and visitors as a strong asset, particularly the protected open space.

Current Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Fishers Island land conservation efforts that preserve open space as a critical long-term community asset.
- The Henry L. Ferguson Museum's Land Trust has nearly 400 acres, 14% of the Island, protected in its natural state forever. This includes land around Middle Farms Pond where drinking water is pumped for from the aquifer beneath Fishers Island.
- The Fishers Island Conservancy has restored and actively manages approximately 175 acres of grassland at the Parade Grounds, a low-lying area on the West End of the Island that includes a flood zone.
- The Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition is critically important for the monitoring, measuring, and mapping of sea grass beds around the coastal edges of Fishers Island, which comprise a quarter of the remaining ecologically healthy beds of eelgrass in Long Island Sound.
- Much of the Island community really cares about its environment and promoting resilience efforts that will help to protect the ecosystems over the long term. Seasonal residents are interested in preserving the Island's environment and give generous donations of private funds to continue that legacy of conservation and preservation.
- Community is conservation minded and receptive to best management practices that incorporate vegetated buffers into landscape designs as well as naturalized shoreline stabilization to help mitigate storm surge and promote increased water quality benefits through infiltration of runoff.
- Extensive natural buffers around the Island help to protect wetlands and coastal resources as well as protect the built environment within the community.
- Fishers Island is prized within the Long Island Sound estuary by the New York Heritage for its biodiversity including rare plant taxa and intact ecosystems such as the eelgrass beds that surround much of the Island.
- Residents are aware of the dangers of pesticides and lawn fertilizers to the Island's fragile lands and waters which includes drinking water from the aquifer.

Credit: Fishers Island Seagrass

Credit: Henry L. Ferguson Museum

Credit: Fishers Island Ferry District

Recommendations to Improve Resilience

A common theme among workshop participants was the need to continue community-based planning efforts focused on developing adaptive measures to reinforce Fishers Island's strengths and reduce vulnerability to extreme weather, climate change, and other common concerns raised. To that end, the workshop participants helped to identify several priority topics requiring more immediate and/or ongoing attention including:

- **Long-term vision and growth** (i.e., balanced and sustainable growth, volunteerism, Island specific governance, conservation and recreation, water quality, shoreline protection, available/affordable housing, and increased year-round residents);
- **Infrastructure improvements** (i.e., drinking water system, electrical system, sewer, roads, ferry and terminal, airport, internet, roads, and docks);
- **Quality of life improvements** (i.e., housing, affordability, recreation, conservation of open space, drinking water supply, sustainability, health & safety, economic prosperity, elderly, and transportation);
- **Emergency management** (i.e., communications, outreach, education, continuation of services, evacuation, vulnerable populations).

In direct response, the Community Resilience Building workshop participants developed the following actions and identified (but not ranked) them as priority or as additional actions to advance. Mitigation actions from the Suffolk County Jurisdictional Annex for the Town of Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020) are provided in Appendix A for cross-reference with actions presented herein. Maps provided during the CRB workshop, gathered from the Town of Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020), are provided in Appendix B.

Priority Actions

- Develop a priority list from the "master list" of infrastructure projects for Fishers Island and ensure they are integrated into Southold's capital improvement plan coupled with greater awareness around the budgetary line item maintained for highway projects on the Island.

Priority Actions (cont'd)

- Maintain sub-committee to discuss infrastructure issues and opportunities and develop a "master" list of project needs, priorities, and estimated costs and timelines for capital improvements.

- Work to increase awareness and involvement of seasonal residents in the discussion of island-wide needs for infrastructure upgrades, repairs, and maintenance (i.e., water supply and delivery) given the projected cost of $80M ($135k per household – approximately 650 utility paying customers/households on the Island).

- Identifying and developing consistent sources of funding for aging infrastructure upgrades through state and federal grants and other sources and second, educate the community on the necessities to move quickly on upgrading infrastructure as well as the inherent costs for upgrades.

- Develop and present a plan to address sewer district needs on Fisher Island and collaborate with town management in Southold in hopes of accessing funds set aside via a county level sales tax (1/8%). Consider linking sewer district needs on the Island to other complimentary needs such as affordable, workforce housing in smart growth areas to be more attractive for potential state and county-level funding.

- Design and implement projects to reduce the ongoing flooding issues at and around the Ferry Terminal including a stormwater management system to move runoff away from the parking area. Utilize green stormwater management techniques (bioswales, bioretention ponds/stripes, etc.), if feasible given the high groundwater table.

- Improve water system infrastructure on the Island to ensure emergency response needs are met such as the ability to fill multiple fire department water tankers anywhere on the Island without experiencing low water pressure.

- Secure additional mutual aid agreements to enhance capacity for emergency responses on the Island.

Priority Actions (cont'd)

- Review current plans and assess vulnerabilities including Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan, various coastal resilience plans, proposed utility upgrades, low-lying road flooding, and saltwater intrusion concerns and work towards developing individual and comprehensive responses to current and future conditions on Fishers Island.

- Combine all existing and planned resilience efforts in report format through the generation of a Fisher Island community resilience action plan to help with prioritization and potentially funding via recognized and well-respected organizations already supporting the Fishers Island community.

- Create a centralized and easily accessible repository for existing and future studies and plans for Fishers Island.

- Conduct scenario planning study of shoreline to assess risks based on different storm surge and precipitation events. Use results to better inform allowable building in various potential demarcated zones (i.e., A, B, C).

- Provide maps and results from scenario planning study to educate owners and builders of new structures of the risks associated with individual parcels.

- Gather and discuss approaches to increasing the number of year-round residents on Fishers Island including ways to increase affordability and availability of housing.

- Identify ways to expand housing opportunities for both seasonal employees and year-round residents.

Additional Actions

Municipal Functions, Operations, & Growth:

- Cross-reference actions generated through the Fisher Island Community Resilience Building process with mitigation actions (see Appendix A for list of mitigation actions) identified in the Suffolk County Jurisdictional Annex for the Town of Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (updated 2020). In addition, examine the Community Resilience Building Summary of Findings from other neighboring island communities including New Shoreham (Block Island) in Rhode Island as well as Nantucket and all six municipalities comprising Martha's Vinyard in Massachusetts.

- Explore the potential of creating a centralized and recognized decision-making body for Fishers Island to ensure clear communication and fair decisions are reached on current issues in a timely fashion.

- Work to strengthen Southold municipal code to help protect community assets including environmental assets.

- Engage elected officials on the county, state, and federal level to garner greater support for infrastructure upgrade funding needs on Fisher Island.

- Consider the particulars of assigning a 1% fee to rentals on Fishers Island to help defer the cost of repairs and maintenance of infrastructure. Additional fee would require state authorization to enable the town of Southold to institute for Fishers Island.

- Continue to maintain critical community facilities on the Island such as the Fishers Island School (also the shelter), grocery store, community center, library, churches, post office, fire department, and other key institutions.

- Develop and provide educational outreach and forums to discuss the issues of home insurance policy costs and dropping of policies across Fishers Island and perhaps across Southold as well ("join forces and share experiences so all are better informed").

- Bring together all the non-profit organizations (NGOs) operating on and for Fishers Island to see if there are ways to break down silos and develop synergies ("the Island will be stronger if we work together towards funding common goals").

Additional Actions (cont'd)

- Look for ways to increase the number of year-round residents in hopes of ensuring "back-ups" to fill critical needs.

- Explore alternatives and precedents for increasing year-round and seasonal workforce housing including a variety of multi-family building types in coordination with the new zoning updates.

Emergency Management & Preparedness:

- Explore the potential for establishing a committee to address emergency situations on Fishers Island in hopes of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of response and recovery efforts. Consider including emergency management professionals (fire, police, medical, EMTs, etc.) as well as key community members with the knowledge and understanding of how this island community operates and how residents think.

- Schedule and conduct more regular evacuation drills for Fishers Island with inclusion of law enforcement from Southold and emergency manager from Millstone Nuclear Power Plant to deepen coordination and collaboration in advance of events requiring evacuation.

- Ensure residents are aware of emergency measures associated with the Millstone Nuclear Power Plant (i.e., potassium iodine tablet distribution).

- Work to improve redundancy in emergency communications to residents via text alerts and other forms of communications to increase the extent and timeliness of critical information before, during and after emergencies.

- Develop a voluntary list of "hosts" for emergency responders and displaced residents in the event of a massive storm (i.e., Category 5 hurricane).

- Develop systematic approach to addressing coastal erosion on south side of Island, especially coordination between the various homeowners approaches to help ensure consistency of projects across multiple properties.

Additional Actions (cont'd)

- Look into status of list of vulnerable residents (elderly, disabled, etc.) needing additional assistance during emergency responses such as evacuation.

Roads, Road Networks, & Transportation Systems (Ferry & Airport):

- Replace key ramp on Fishers Island with a rise of 18" to accommodate higher tides via plans that are in place and about to go out to bid.

- Conduct assessment of low-lying roads across the Island as it relates to storm surge impacts to evacuation routes.

Stormwater System, Waste Systems, & Drinking Water Supply:

- Explore further approaches to reduce the structural challenges to funding upgrades to key systems on the Island that are privately owned (i.e., drinking water, electric/power, sewer (including the special sewer district in the Fort Wright area), phone/internet).

- Identify the potential for renewable energy generation on the Island to help create redundancy and back-up power including the possibility of a microgrid, solar arrays, among others in hopes of eventually becoming "grid independent".

- Continue a solar field assessment for Fisher Island as an eventual supplemental power source.

Ecosystems, Shoreline, Wetlands, & Natural Buffers:

- Continue to maintain and enhance natural buffers that help reduce impacts from storm surge and associated coastal erosion and therefore help to increase the overall resiliency of Fishers Island.

- Look for ways to increase the overall coastal resilience of the Island by exploring the possibilities of using living shorelines or other non-structural approaches to increasing shoreline stability and minimizing coastal erosion.

Additional Actions (cont'd)

- Explore managed retreat strategies for reducing impacts to the endangered bluff area on the Island.

- Continue to advance the beach profiling project being managed by the Fishers Island Conservancy in several sites to establish baselines and start generating data on the extent and rates of coastal erosion. Project will help to inform future sediment management options and approaches.

- Explore the potential for integrating citizen science beach erosion monitoring projects via apps such as "Coast Snap".

- Continue to support and advance the Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition efforts to improve management and preserve this critical ecological resource for the Island and Long Island Sound.

Credit: Wikipedia

CRB Workshop Participants: Department/Organization

Town of Southold – Office of the Town Supervisor
Town of Southold – Government Liaison Office
Town of Southold – Town Board
Town of Southold – Trustee
Town of Southold – Planning Department
Town of Southold – Planning Board
Town of Southold – Highway Department
Town of Southold – Police Department
Town of Southold – Office of Emergency Management
Fishers Island Emergency Management
Fishers Island Fire Department
Fishers Island Waste Management Commission
Fishers Island Ferry Commission
Fishers Island Union Free School
Fishers Island Utility Company
Fishers Island Community Center
Fishers Island Community Board
Fishers Island Zoning Advisory Committee
Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition
Fishers Island Conservancy
Fishers Island Recreational Path Foundation
Island Health Project
Henry L. Ferguson Museum
North Fork Civic Association
New York Sea Grant – Suffolk County Sustainable & Resilient Communities

Fishers Island – Southold CRB Core Project Team

Elizabeth McCance – H.L. Ferguson Museum & Land Trust President; Seagrass Coalition

Louisa Evans – Southold Town Justice and Fishers Island Town Board Representative

Al Krupski – Southold Town Supervisor

Kate Stevens – FI Waste Management Committee Chair; FI Zoning Advisory Committee Member

Gwynn Schroeder – Southold Government Liaison Officer

Pierce Rafferty – H.L. Ferguson Museum & Land Trust Director; Southold Planning Board

CRB Workshop Facilitation Team

The Nature Conservancy – Adam Whelchel, Ph.D. (Lead Facilitator)

The Nature Conservancy – Drew Goldsman (Small Group Facilitator)

The Nature Conservancy – Tim Clark (Small Group Facilitator)

The Nature Conservancy – Kai Lo Muscio (IT Manager)

The Nature Conservancy – Emily Hadzopulos (Scribe)

The Nature Conservancy – Melissa DeFrancesco (Scribe)

The Nature Conservancy – Eve Robinson (Scribe)

Recommended Citation

Fishers Island Community Resilience Building Process - Summary of Findings Report. (2025). Community Resilience Building Program. The Nature Conservancy. Fishers Island/Southold, New York.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Fisher Island and Southold leadership, staff, and community members for their willingness to embrace the process in hopes of a more resilient future for Fishers Island. This online Community Resilience Building process was made possible in large part through the dedicated contribution of the facilitation team members who skillfully conducted the Fishers Island Community Resilience Building process in close partnership with the Fishers Island and Southold Community Resilience Building Core Team.

Appendix A

Town of Southold

Mitigation Actions*

9.42 Town of Southold

This section presents the jurisdictional annex for the Town of Southold. It includes resources and information to assist public and private sectors to reduce losses from future hazard events. This annex is not guidance of what to do when a disaster occurs. Rather, this annex concentrates on actions that can be implemented prior to a disaster to reduce or eliminate damage to property and people. This annex includes a general overview of the municipality and who in the town participated in the planning process; an assessment of the Town of Southold's risk and vulnerability; the different capabilities utilized in the town; and an action plan that will be implemented to achieve a more resilient community.

9.42.1 Hazard Mitigation Planning Team

The following individuals have been identified as the Town of Southold's hazard mitigation plan primary and alternate points of contact.

Table 9.42-1. Hazard Mitigation Planning Team

Primary Point of Contact	Alternate Point of Contact
Name/Title: Lloyd Reisenberg, Office of Emergency Management Address: P.O. Box 1175 Southold, NY 11971 Phone Number: 631-765-1891 Email: lloyd.reisenberg@town.southold.ny.us	Name/Title: Chief M. Flatley, Chief/EMO Address: P.O. Box 911 Peconic, NY 11958 Phone Number: 631-765-2600 Email: mflatley@town.southold.ny.us
NFIP Floodplain Administrator	
Name/Title: Michael Verity, Chief Building Inspector Address: 53095 Route 25 Southold, NY 11971 Phone Number: 631-765-1802 Email: mike.verity@town.southold.ny.us	

9.42.2 Municipal Profile

The Town of Southold, site of the oldest English settlement in New York State, has a history going back to 1638 when a group of men landed from Antigua, one of the Leeward Islands, to set up a turpentine distillery, using as a natural resource, the trees of the great pine swamp that lay west of present day Greenport. Two years later another group of settlers arrived from the New Haven colony. That year, 1640, is generally considered to mark the beginning of the Town of Southold, although town records are missing for that early period until 1651.

Much of the original Town of Southold was part of the Aquebogue Purchase, acquired from the Indians in 1648-49. The area contained in that purchase was substantially that more fully outlined and described in Governor Andros' Patent, executed in 1676. That early town, part of the East Riding of Yorkshire (which became Suffolk County in 1683), stretched along the northern shore of Long Island from Wading River to Orient Point. In 1730, Shelter Island became a separate town, followed by Riverhead in 1792.

The Town of Southold is located at the eastern extreme of Long Island, at the end of the northern peninsula known as the North Fork. It is the eastern-most township on the North Fork and is bordered to the west by the Town of Riverhead and to the south by the Town of Shelter Island. The incorporated Village of Greenport lies within the Town of Southold. The entire Town, including Fishers, Plum and Robins islands, is approximately 54 square miles in size with approximately 163 linear miles of coastline.

It is long and narrow in shape, with the mainland extending 21 miles from the Riverhead town line east to Orient Point. Its greatest width is 5 miles, although generally the western portions of the mainland average 3 miles in width, while to the east of Hashamomuck Pond, the Town is never wider than 1.25 miles.

***Gathered from Suffolk County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan Update (2020) – Jurisdictional Annex – Section 9.42 Town of Southold.**

Table 9.42-15. Proposed Hazard Mitigation Initiatives

Project Number	Project Name	Goals Met	Hazard(s) to be Mitigated	Description of Problem and Solution	Critical Facility (Yes/No)	EHP Issues	Estimated Timeline	Lead Agency	Estimated Costs	Estimated Benefits	Potential Funding Sources	Priority	Mitigation Category	CRS Category
2020-Southold-001	Repetitive Loss Mitigation	1, 2	Flood, Severe Storm	**Problem**: Frequent flooding events have resulted in damages to residential properties. These properties have been repetitively flooded as documented by paid NFIP claims. **Solution**: Conduct outreach to 30 flood-prone property owners, including RL/SRL property owners and provide information on mitigation alternatives. After preferred mitigation measures are identified, collect required property-owner information and develop a FEMA grant application and BCA to obtain funding to implement acquisition/purchase/moving/elevating residential homes in the flood prone areas that experience frequent flooding (high risk areas).	No	None	3 years	NFIP Floodplain Administrator, supported by homeowners	$3 Million	Eliminates flood damage to homes and residents, creates open space for the municipality increasing flood storage.	FEMA HMGP and FMA, local cost share by residents	High	SIP	PP
2020-Southold-002	Replenishment of Erosion Prone Beaches	3, 4, 5	Coastal Erosion, Flood, Hurricane, Nor'Easter	**Problem**: Coastal erosion is an ongoing issue in the Town at locations such as County Route 48, the access point to Orient Beach State Park, and the Town's coastal bluffs. A study by the USACE has determined that the most appropriate mitigation action is beach replenishment.	No	Permitting	Within 5 years	Town Administration, USACE	High	Protection from erosion/flood	HMGP, USACE, Town budget	High	NSP	NR

Table 9.42-15. Proposed Hazard Mitigation Initiatives

Project Number	Project Name	Goals Met	Hazard(s) to be Mitigated	Description of Problem and Solution	Critical Facility (Yes/No)	EHP Issues	Estimated Timeline	Lead Agency	Estimated Costs	Estimated Benefits	Potential Funding Sources	Priority	Mitigation Category	CRS Category
				Solution: The Town will seek funding support to complete replenishment actions on Town owned beaches and advocate that the USACE conduct a comprehensive replenishment project by working with private shoreline owners.										
2020-Southold-003	Coastal Erosion Monitoring Program	1, 2, 3, 5	Coastal Erosion	**Problem**: Coastal erosion is an ongoing issue in the Town. **Solution**: The Town will participate in the County SWCD's proposed coastal erosion monitoring program to track shoreline retreat and volume loss to better inform mitigation strategy and planning decisions.	No	None	Within 1 year	Suffolk County SWCD, Town Administration	Staff time	Data collection to inform mitigation and planning decisions.	SWCD	High	LPR	PR
2020-Southold-004	Backup Power for Town Shelters	1, 2, 7	All Hazards	**Problem**: Mattituck School and Oysterponds School do not have backup power sources. Both are identified as potential sheltering locations. **Solution**: The Town will work with the school districts to purchase and install backup generators and necessary electrical hookups at each school.	Yes	None	Within 2 years	School districts, Town OEM, Engineer	$50,000	Continuity of operations and safe sheltering	FEMA HMGP and PDM, USDA Community Facilities Grant Program, Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) Program, School budget, Town budget	High	SIP	ES
2020-Southold-005	Communications Tower	1, 2, 7	All Hazards	**Problem**: The Communications Tower building on Route 25 is	Yes	None	Within 2 years	Town OEM, Engineer	$50,000	Continuity of operations	FEMA HMGP and PDM, USDA	High	SIP	ES

Table 9.42-15. Proposed Hazard Mitigation Initiatives

Project Number	Project Name	Goals Met	Hazard(s) to be Mitigated	Description of Problem and Solution	Critical Facility (Yes/No)	EHP Issues	Estimated Timeline	Lead Agency	Estimated Costs	Estimated Benefits	Potential Funding Sources	Priority	Mitigation Category	CRS Category
	Building Backup Power			responsible for communications for police, fire, and rescue operations. The building lacks a permanent backup power supply. **Solution**: The Town Engineer will research what size generator is necessary to supply backup power to the Communications Tower Building. The Town will then purchase and install backup generators and necessary electrical hookup at the Communications Tower Building.							Community Facilities Grant Program, Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) Program, School budget, Town budget			
2020-Southold-006	Stormwater Detention and Retention	1, 3, 4, 5	Flood, Severe Storm	**Problem:** Numerous areas of the Town require increased stormwater drainage. **Solution:** Investigate need, priorities and funding options for property acquisition at feasible points in critical watersheds to establish storm water detention / retention facilities for stormwater management. Implement / acquire priority properties as funding becomes available.	No	None	Within 5 years	Engineer	High	Increased stormwater drainage capacity	HMGP, BRIC, Town budget	High	SIP	SP
2020-Southold-007	Roadway Elevation	1, 2	Flooding, Hurrican e,	**Problem:** Low lying roadways can be inundated by floodwaters, restricting access and	No	None	Within 5 years	Planning, Engineer	High	Reduction in flooding	HMGP, BRIC, Town budget	High	SIP	PP

Table 9.42-15. Proposed Hazard Mitigation Initiatives

Project Number	Project Name	Goals Met	Hazard(s) to be Mitigated	Description of Problem and Solution	Critical Facility (Yes/No)	EHP Issues	Estimated Timeline	Lead Agency	Estimated Costs	Estimated Benefits	Potential Funding Sources	Priority	Mitigation Category	CRS Category
			Nor'Easter, Severe Storm	hindering emergency response. **Solution:** Investigate need, priorities, design and funding options to elevate Town roadways through identified floodplains. Implement priority projects as funding becomes available.										
2020-Southold-008	Underground Utilities	1, 2	Hurricane, Nor'Easter, Severe Storm, Severe Winter Storm	**Problem:** High winds and falling branches can result in falling utility lines and power failure. **Solution:** The Town will work with utility providers to relocate existing utilities underground.	No	None	Within 5 years	Administration, Utility providers	High	Reduction in power loss	Utility providers	High	SIP	PP
2020-Southold-009	Develop Recovery Ordinance	1, 7	All Hazards	**Problem:** The Town lacks a recovery ordinance. **Solution:** Create a recovery ordinance for Town Code.	No	None	Within 2 years	Planning, OEM	Staff time	Increased planning and preparedness	Town budget	High	LPR	ES
2020-Southold-010	Coastal Resilience Plan	3, 4, 5	Flood, Hurricane, Nor'Easter	**Problem:** The Town lacks a Coastal Resilience Plan. **Solution:** Prepare a coastal resilience plan for Southold Town to identify, plan and address (among other initiatives) vulnerable areas subject to repetitive loss from storm surge and/or flooding.	No	None	Within 2 years	Planning, OEM	Staff time	Increased planning and preparedness	Town budget	High	LPR	ES
2020-Southold-011	Post Disaster Recovery & Reconstruction Plan	1, 7	All Hazards	**Problem:** The Town lacks a Post Disaster Recovery & Reconstruction Plan. **Solution:** Complete a Post Disaster Recovery &	No	None	Within 2 years	Planning, OEM	Staff time	Increased planning and preparedness	Town budget	Medium	LPR	ES

Table 9.42-15. Proposed Hazard Mitigation Initiatives

Project Number	Project Name	Goals Met	Hazard(s) to be Mitigated	Description of Problem and Solution	Critical Facility (Yes/No)	EHP Issues	Estimated Timeline	Lead Agency	Estimated Costs	Estimated Benefits	Potential Funding Sources	Priority	Mitigation Category	CRS Category
				Reconstruction Plan that would include: Debris and pollution (HAZMAT) control and removal.										
2020-Southold-012	Critical Facilities Outreach	1, 6	Flood	**Problem:** The Town has numerous critical facilities that are located in the 100-year floodplain. These facilities are not owned by the Town. **Solution:** The Town FPA will conduct outreach to facility managers to discuss flood risk and potential mitigation actions.	Yes	None	Within 6 months	FPA	Staff time	Critical facility managers aware of flood risk and potential mitigation actions.	Town budget	High	EAP	PI

Notes:
Not all acronyms and abbreviations defined below are included in the table.

Acronyms and Abbreviations:

CAV	*Community Assistance Visit*
CRS	*Community Rating System*
DPW	*Department of Public Works*
EHP	*Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation*
FEMA	*Federal Emergency Management Agency*
FPA	*Floodplain Administrator*
HMA	*Hazard Mitigation Assistance*
N/A	*Not applicable*
NFIP	*National Flood Insurance Program*
OEM	*Office of Emergency Management*

Potential FEMA HMA Funding Sources:

FMA	*Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Program*
HMGP	*Hazard Mitigation Grant Program*
PDM	*Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program*

Timeline:
The time required for completion of the project upon implementation

Cost:
The estimated cost for implementation.

Benefits:
A description of the estimated benefits, either quantitative and/or qualitative.

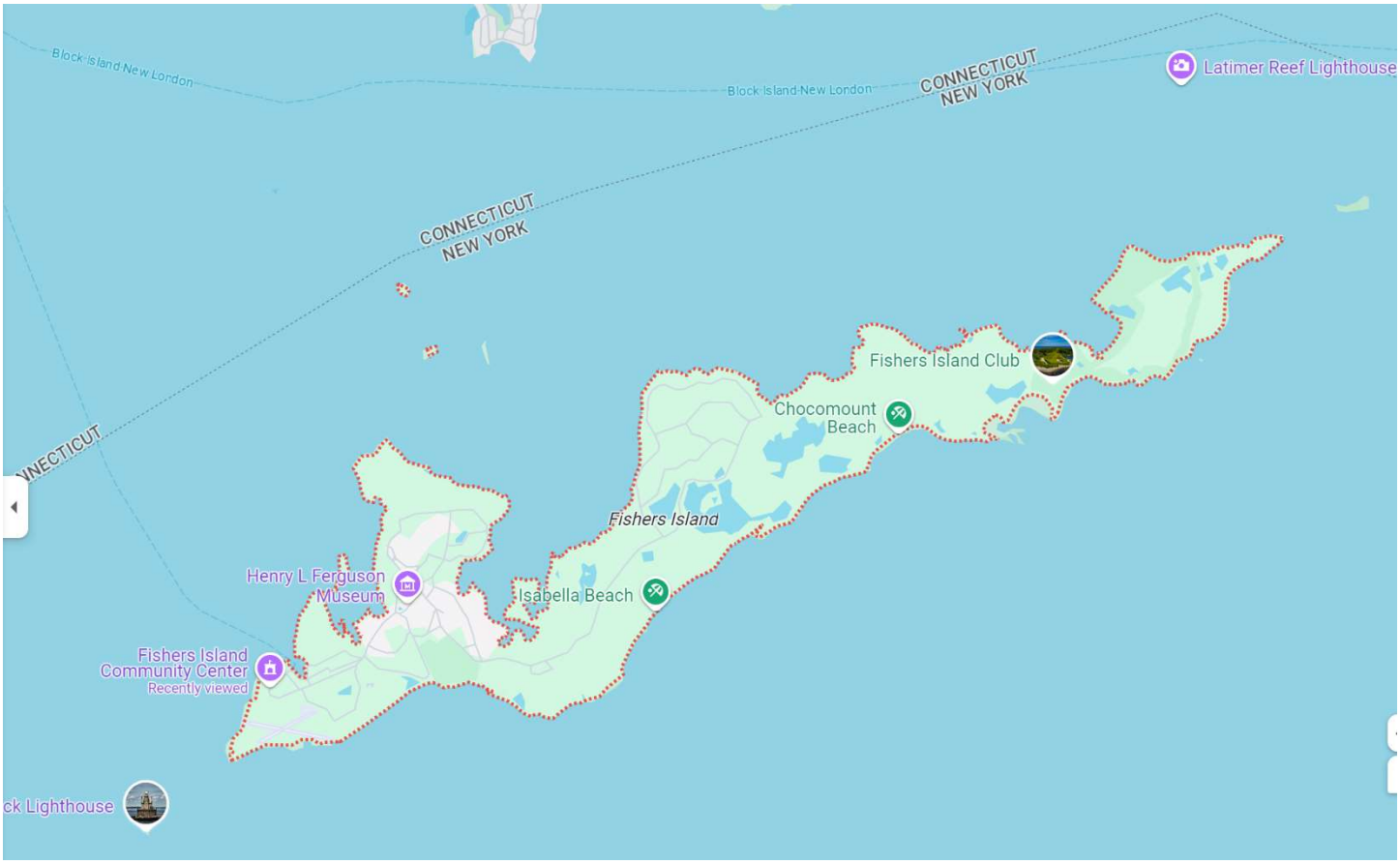
Critical Facility:
Yes *Critical Facility located in 1% floodplain*

Appendix B

Fishers Island - Southold
Map Resource Packet*
Used During
Community Resilience Building Workshop

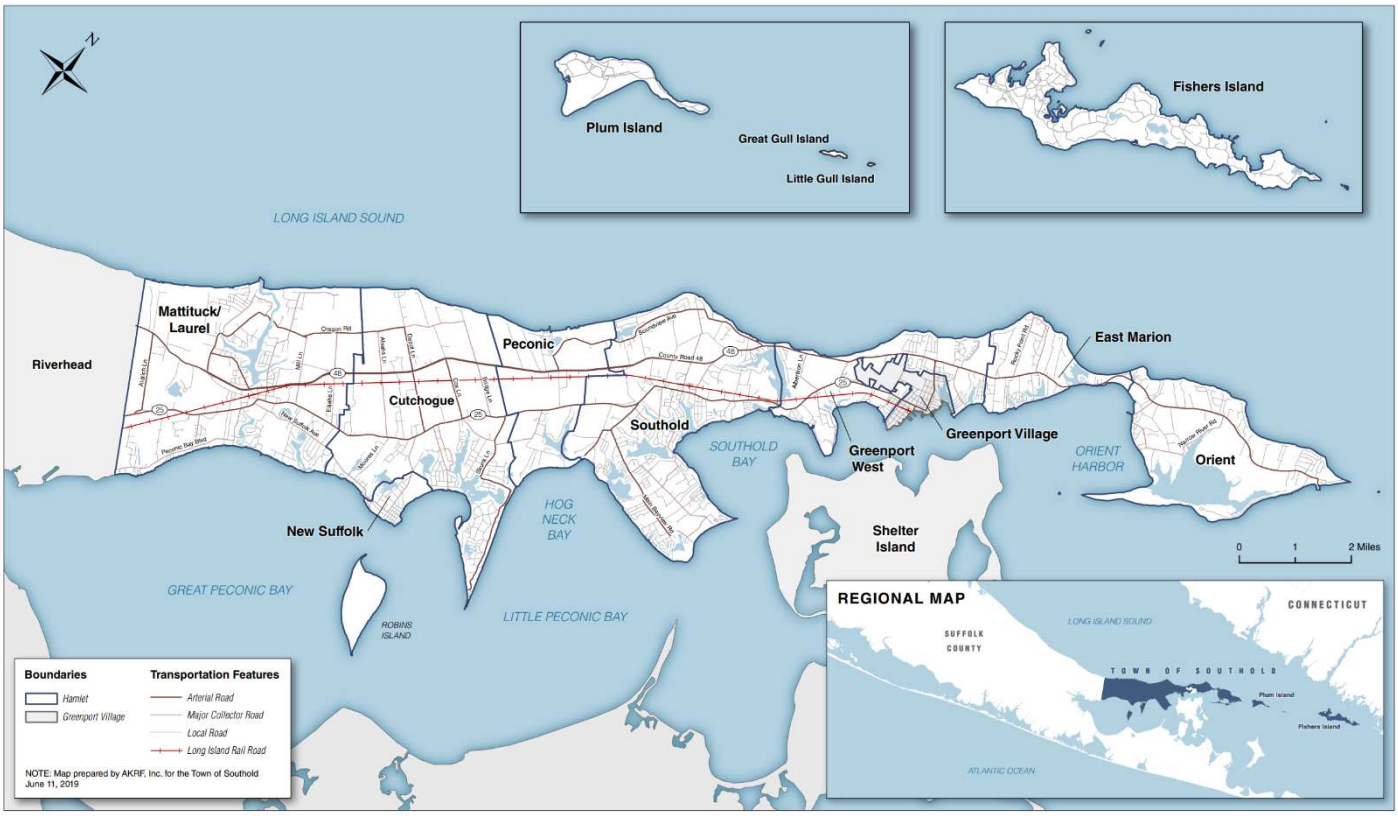
***Gathered from the Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020) and the Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020). Additional resources were gathered from the Long Island Sound Study and Goggle Maps.**

Source: Google Maps



Source: Google Maps

Figure 1.1 Southold Town Map with Hamlets



Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

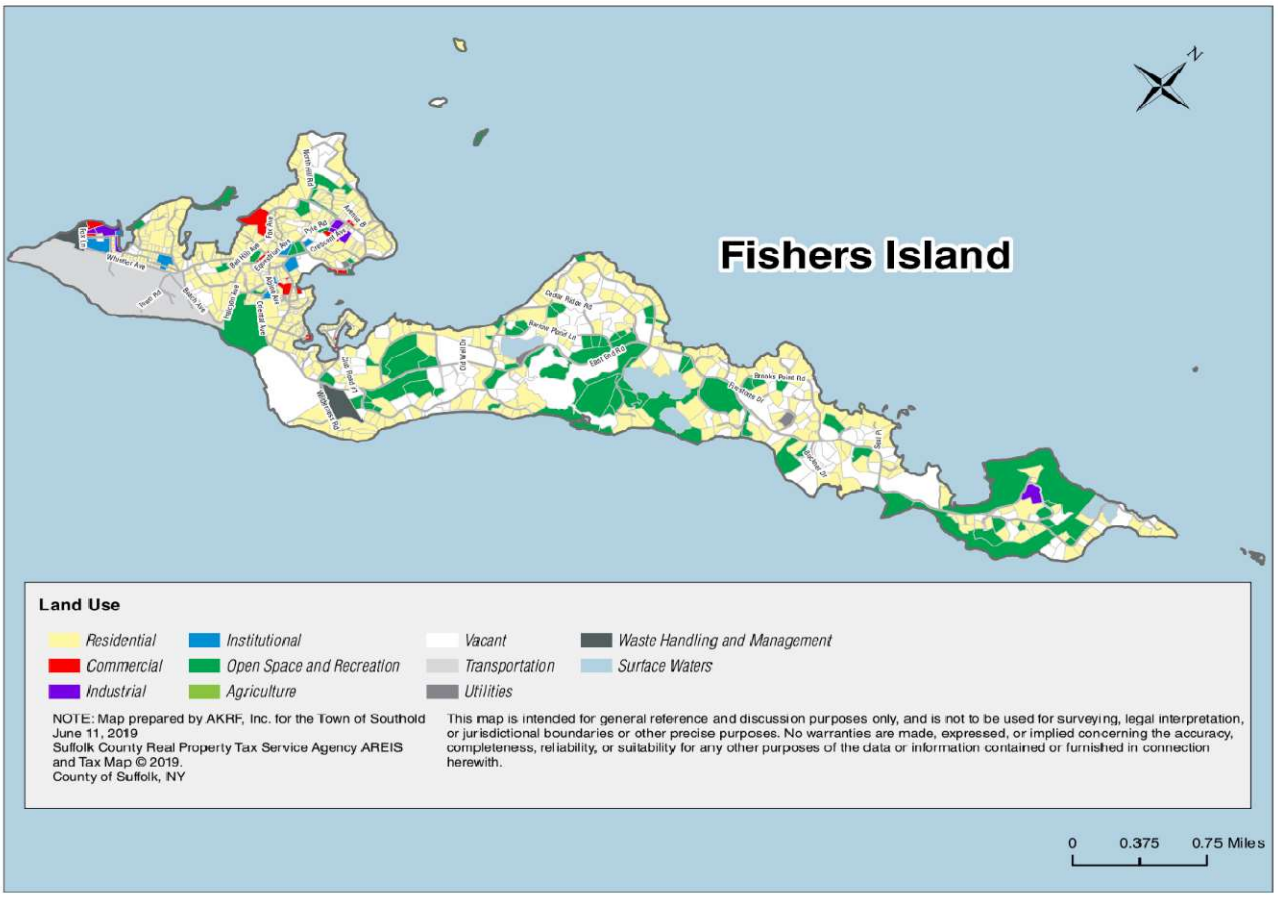


Figure 3.10 Fishers Island Land Use Map

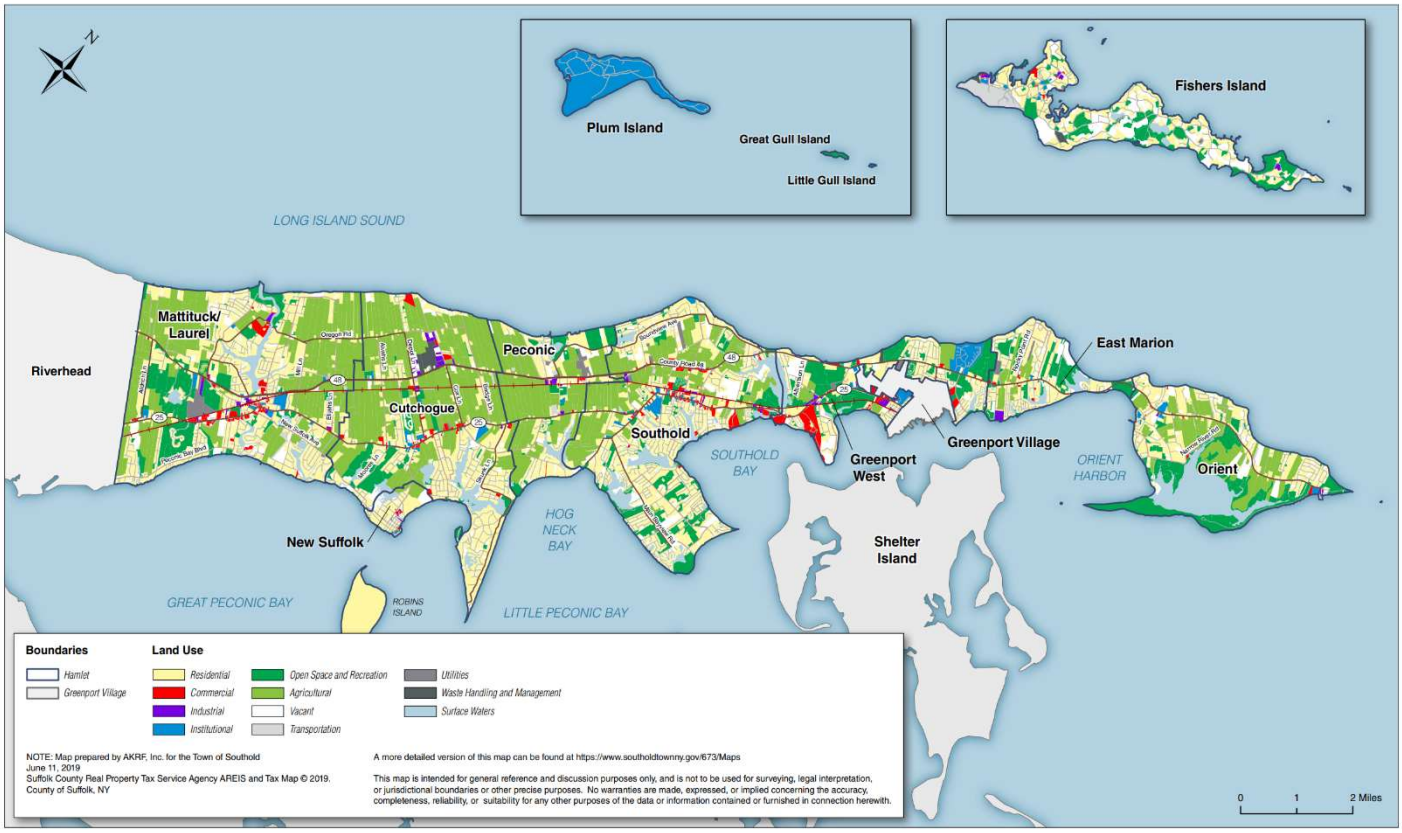
A complete list of land uses and corresponding acres and percentages on Fishers Island are in **Table 3.6**.

Table 3.6 **Fishers Island Land Use**

Land Use	Acres	%
Residential	940	36.3
Vacant	669	25.9
Recreation & Open Space	471	18.2
Transportation	329	12.7
Institutional	95	3.7
Waste Handling & Mgt	28	1.1
Industrial	24	0.9
Commercial	22	0.9
Utilities	7	0.3
Total Acres	**2,586**	

Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 3.24 Southold Town Land Use Map



Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

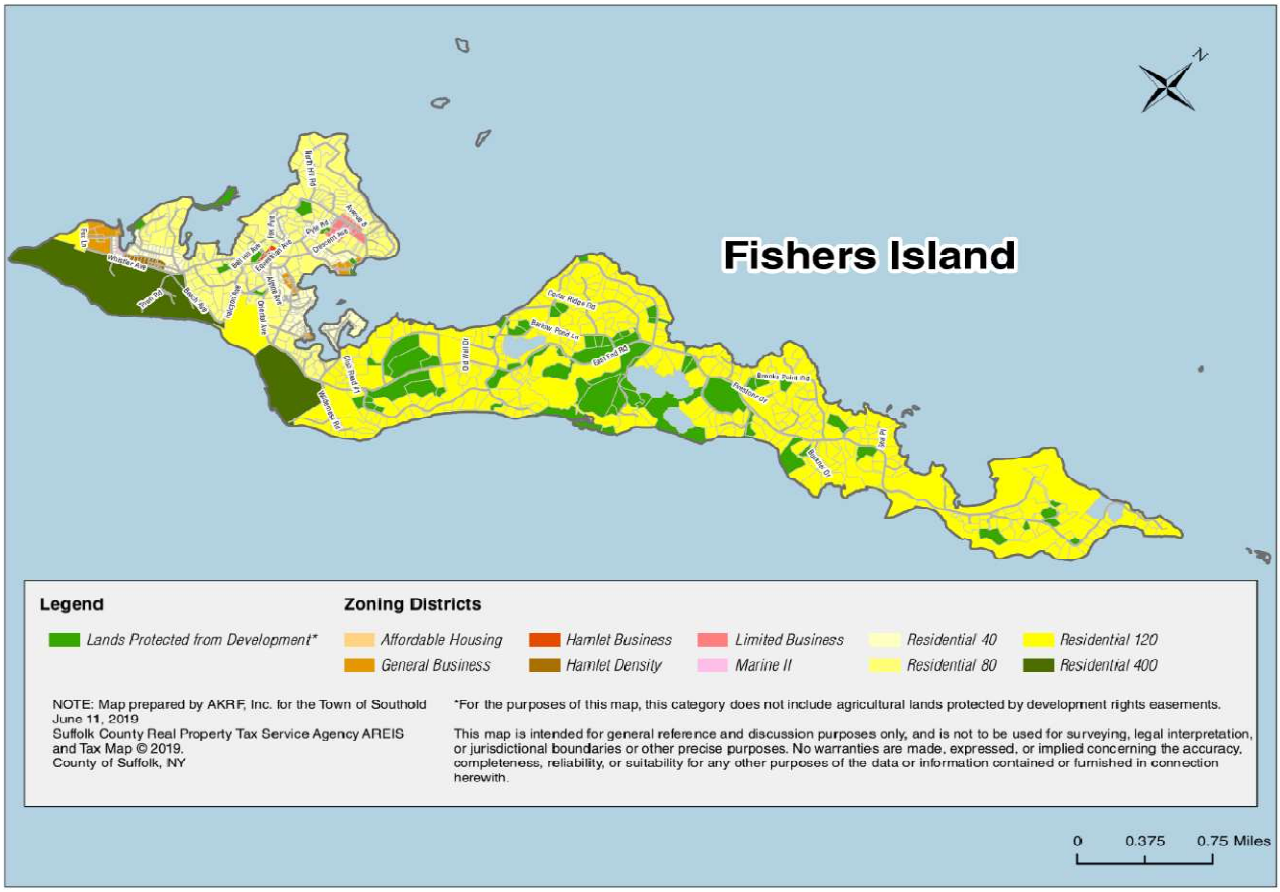
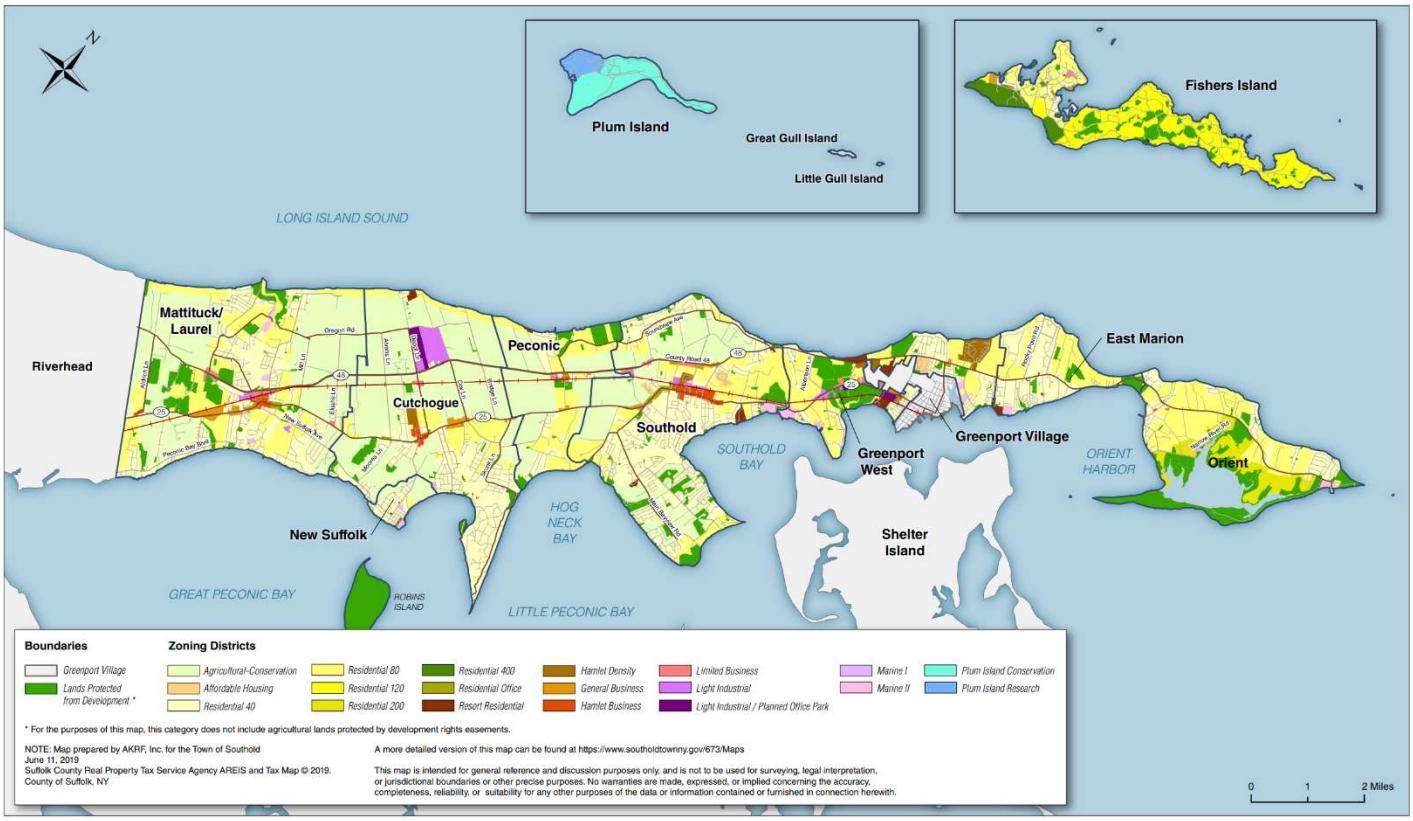


Figure 3.11 Fishers Island Zoning Map

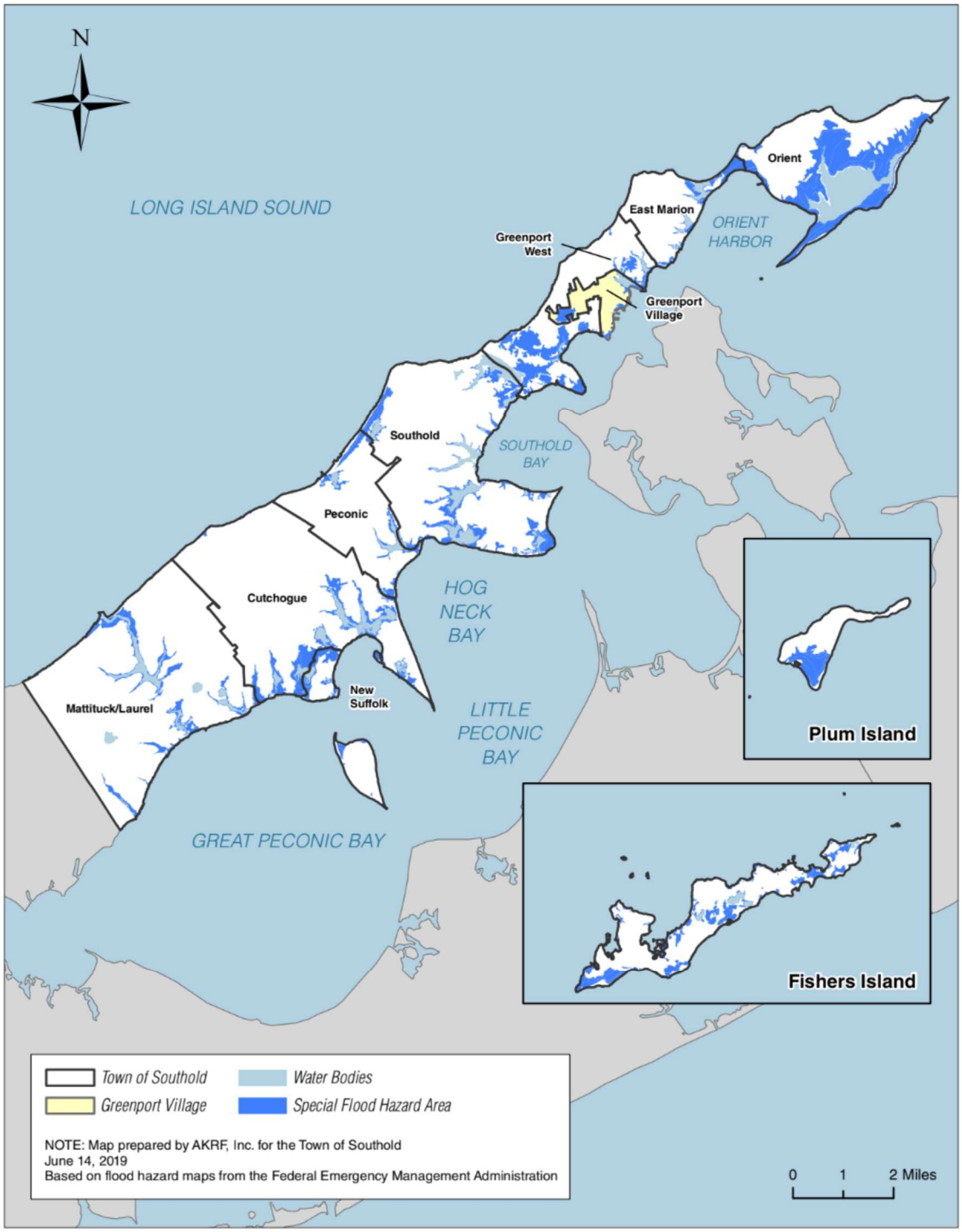
Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 3.25 Southold Town Zoning Map



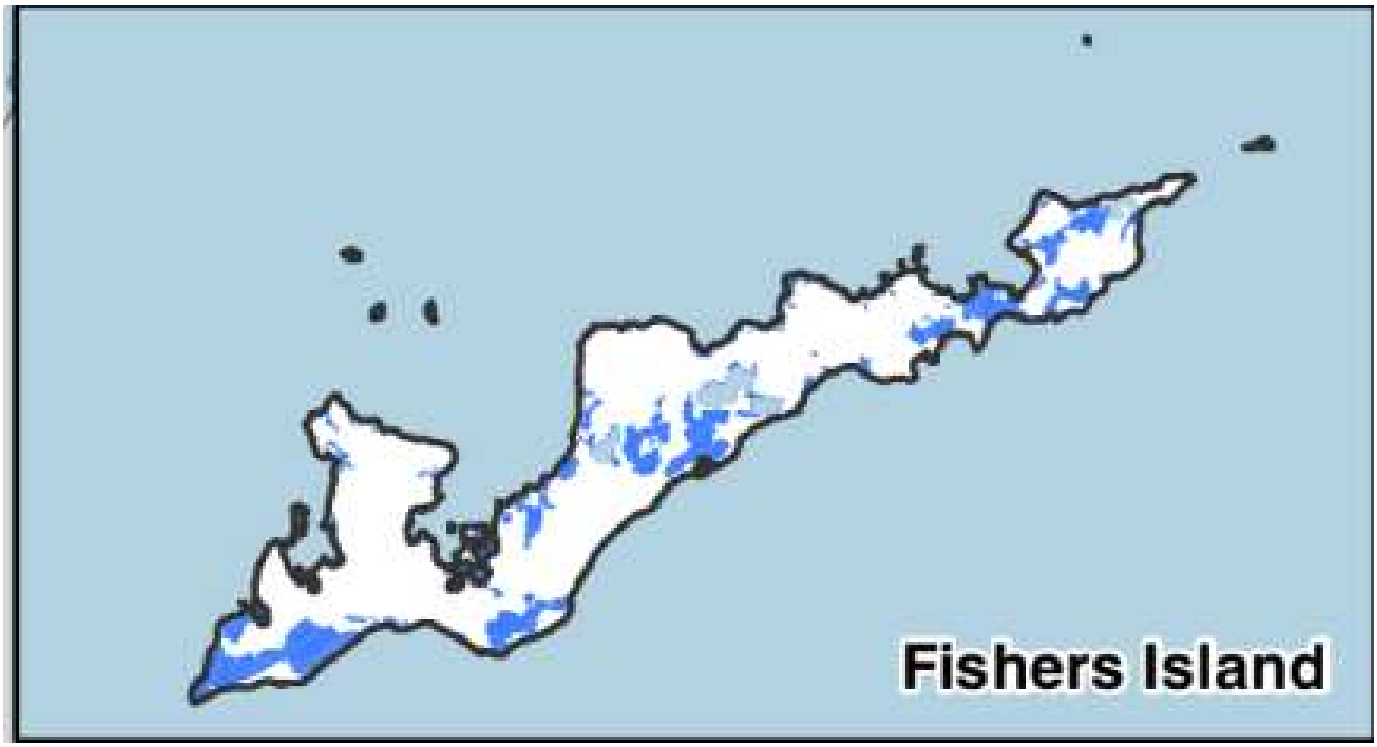
Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 12.1 **Special Flood Hazard Area for Southold Town**



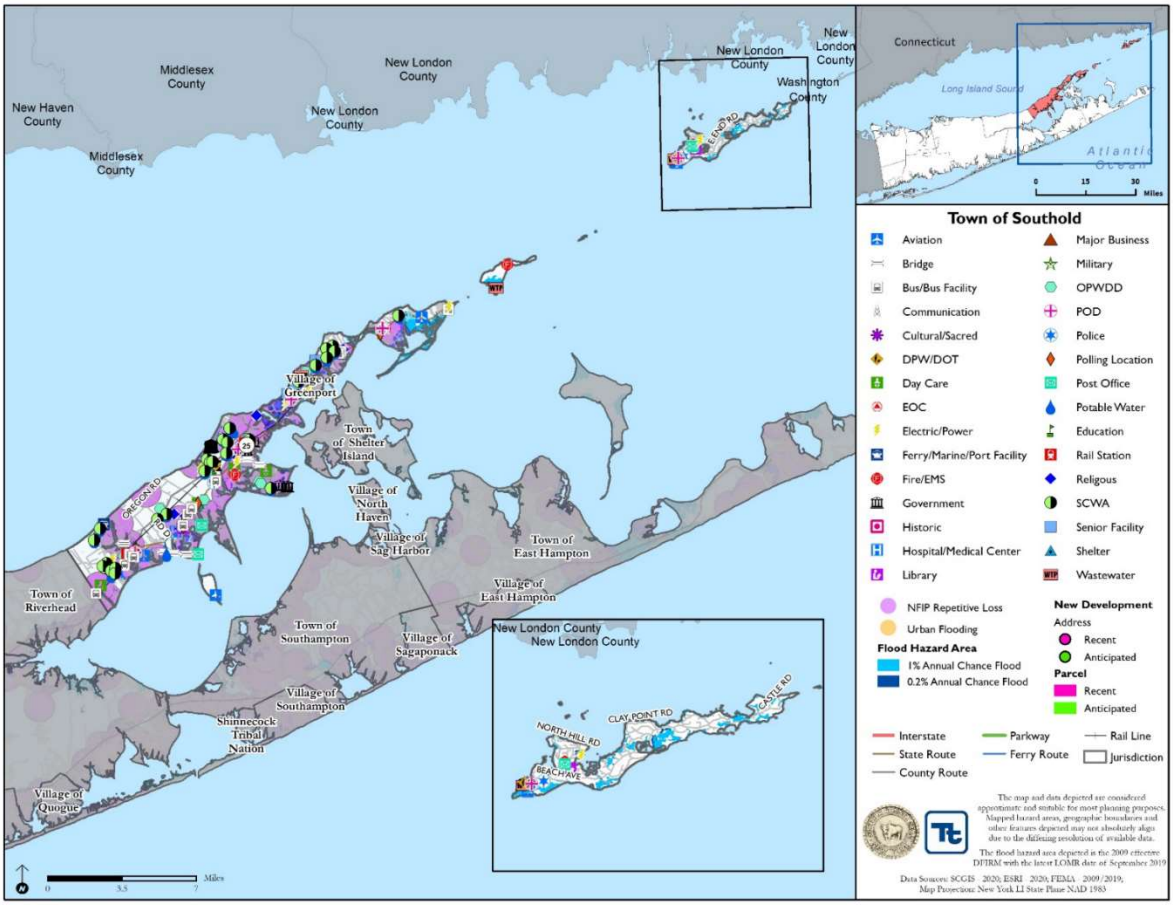
Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Source: Enfield Master Plan (2022)



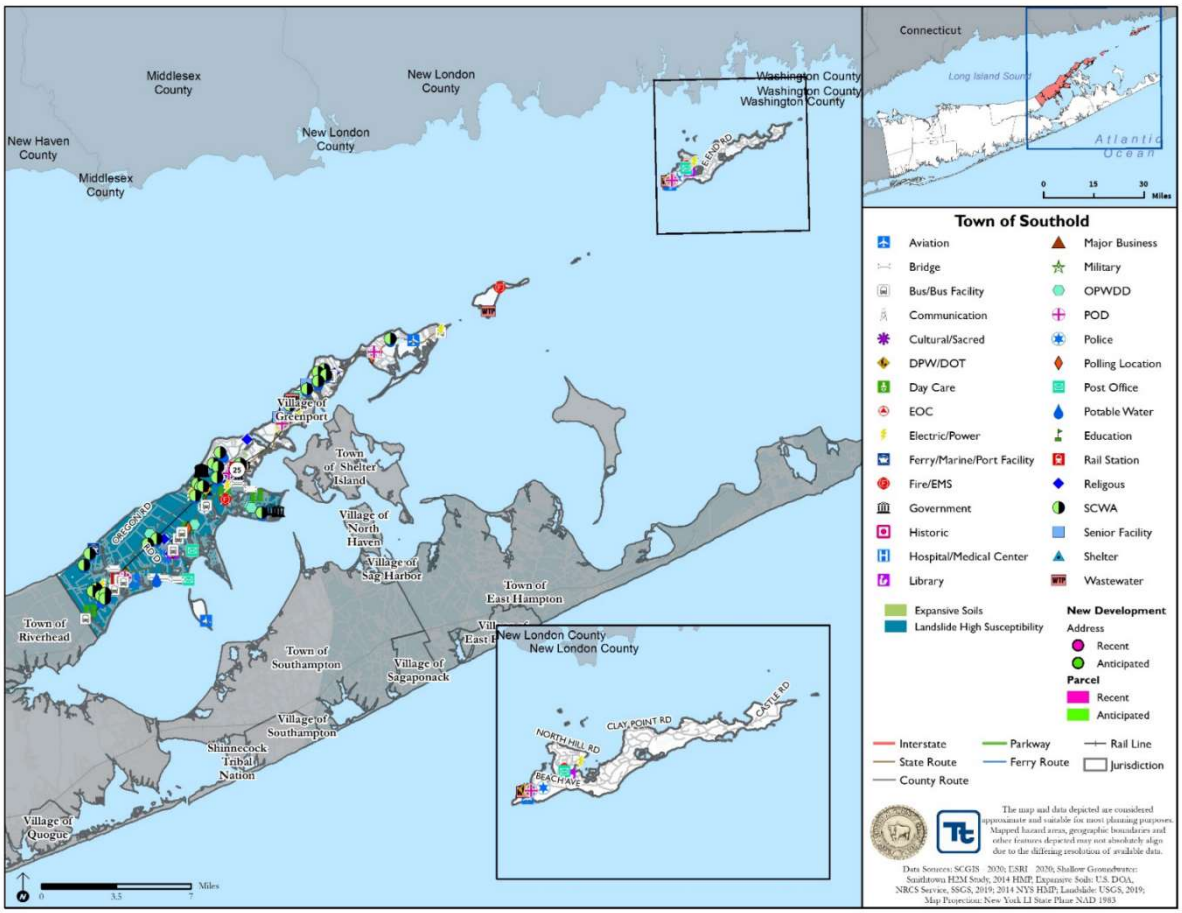
Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 9.42-1. Town of Southold Hazard Area Extent and Location Map



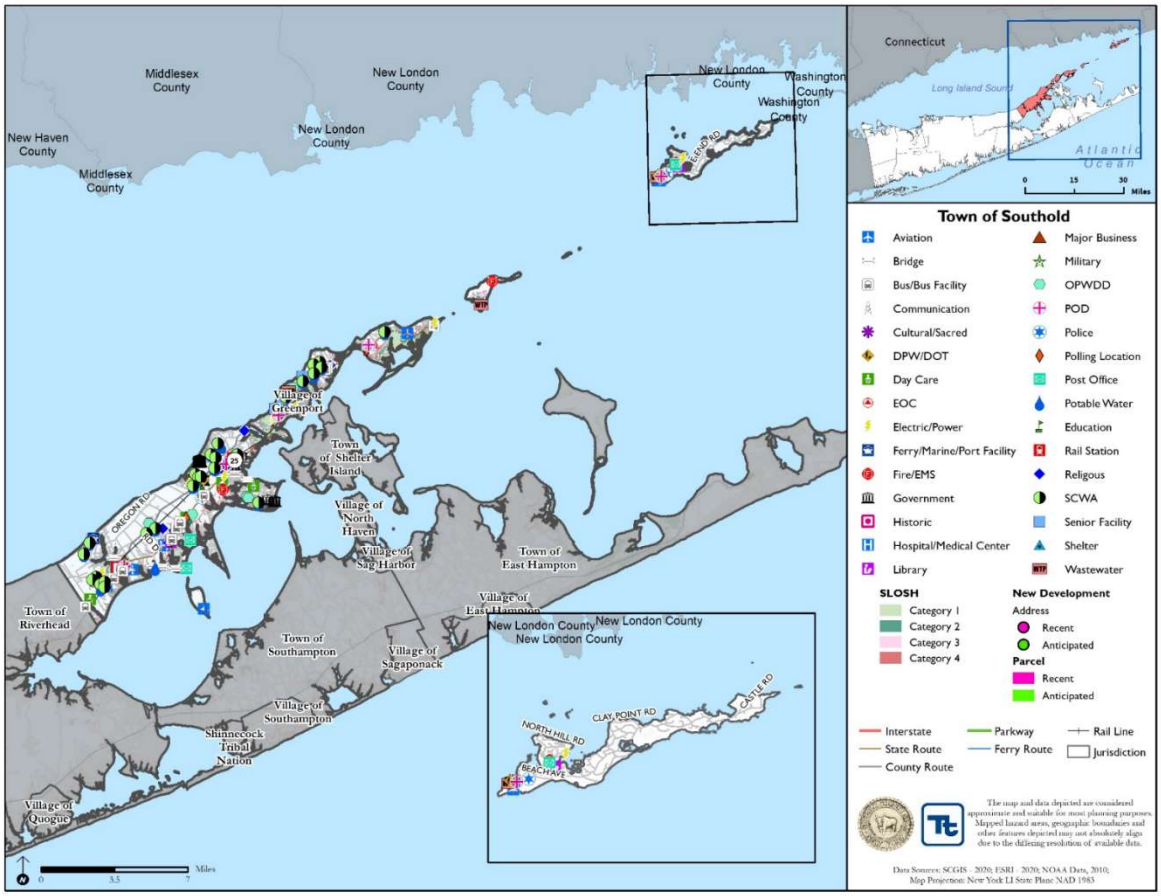
Source: Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)

Figure 9.42-2. Town of Southold Hazard Area Extent and Location Map 2



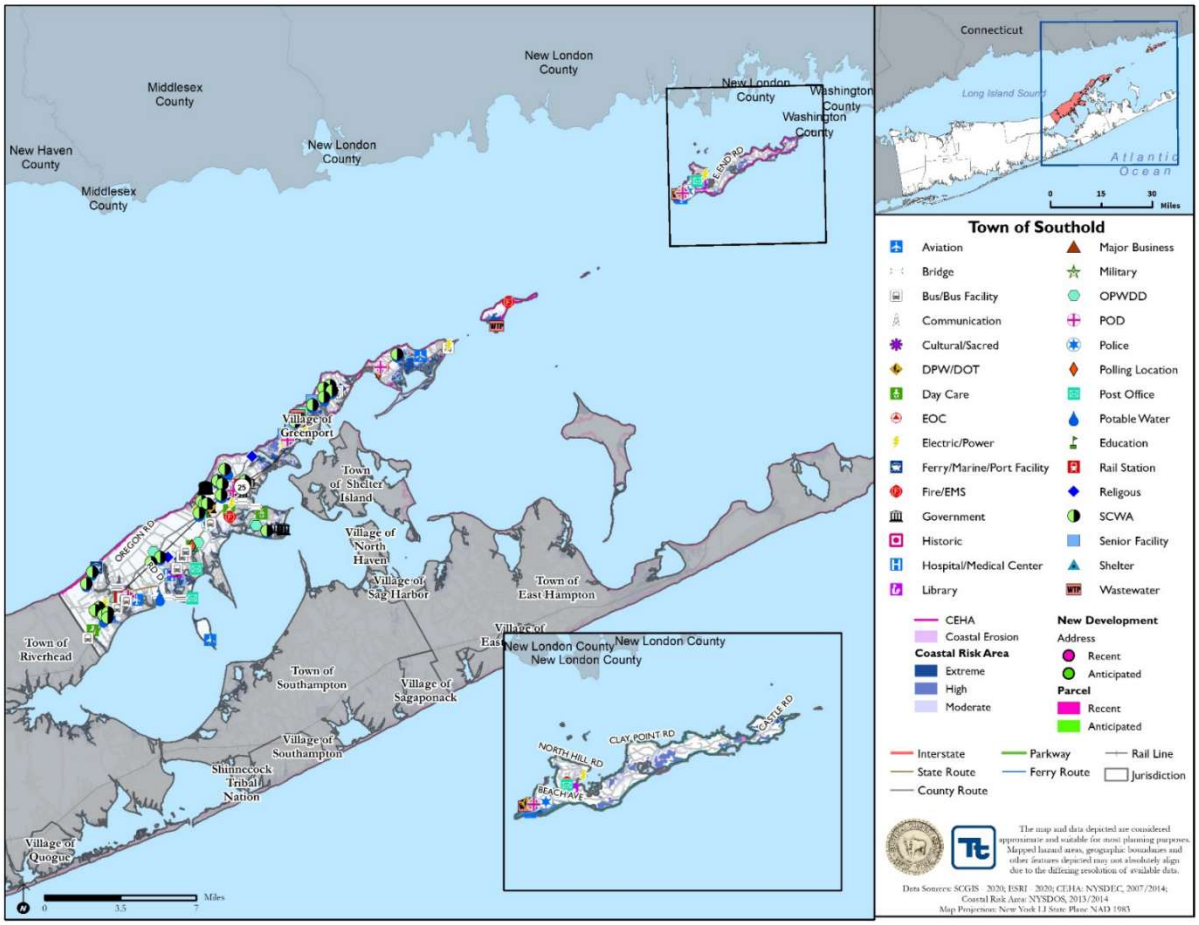
Source: Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)

Figure 9.42-3. Town of Southold Hazard Area Extent and Location Map 3



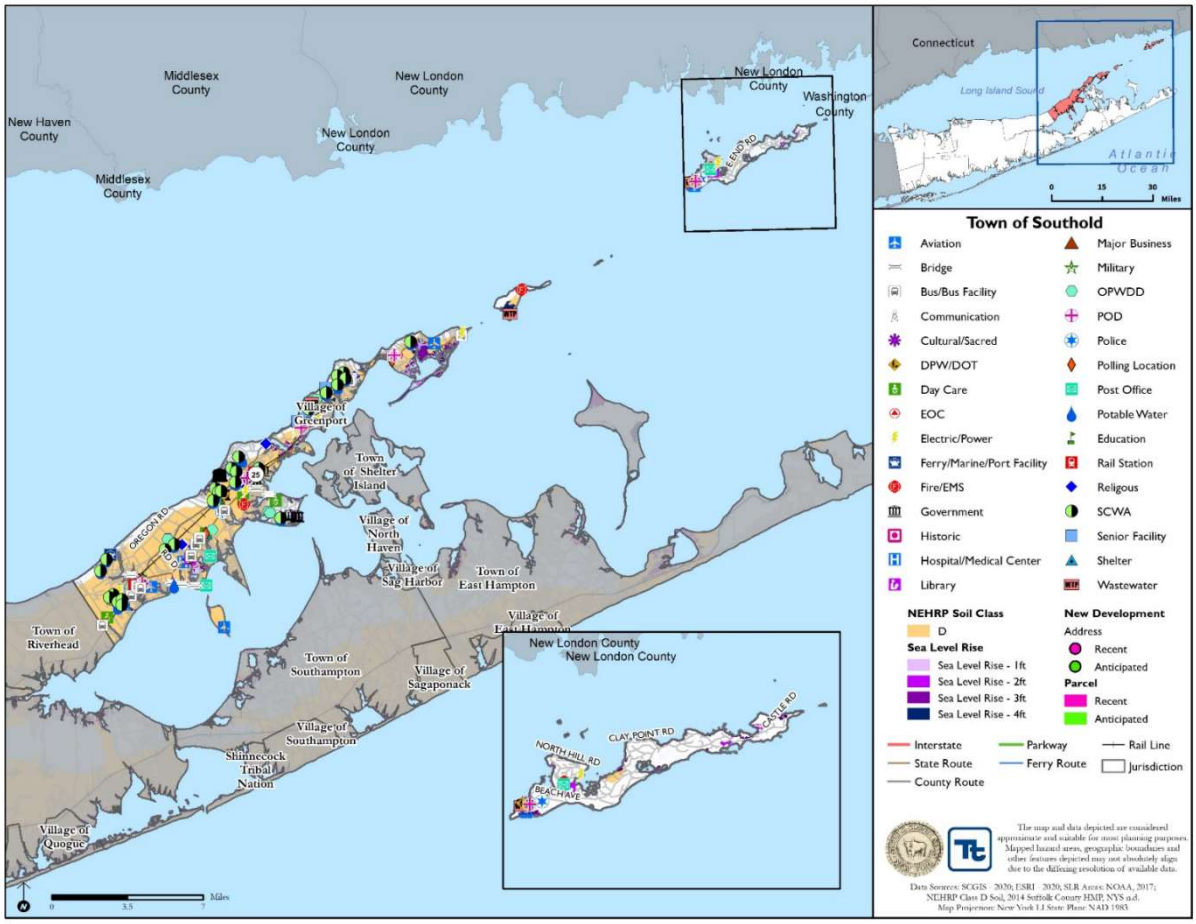
Source: Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)

Figure 9.42-4. Town of Southold Hazard Area Extent and Location Map 4



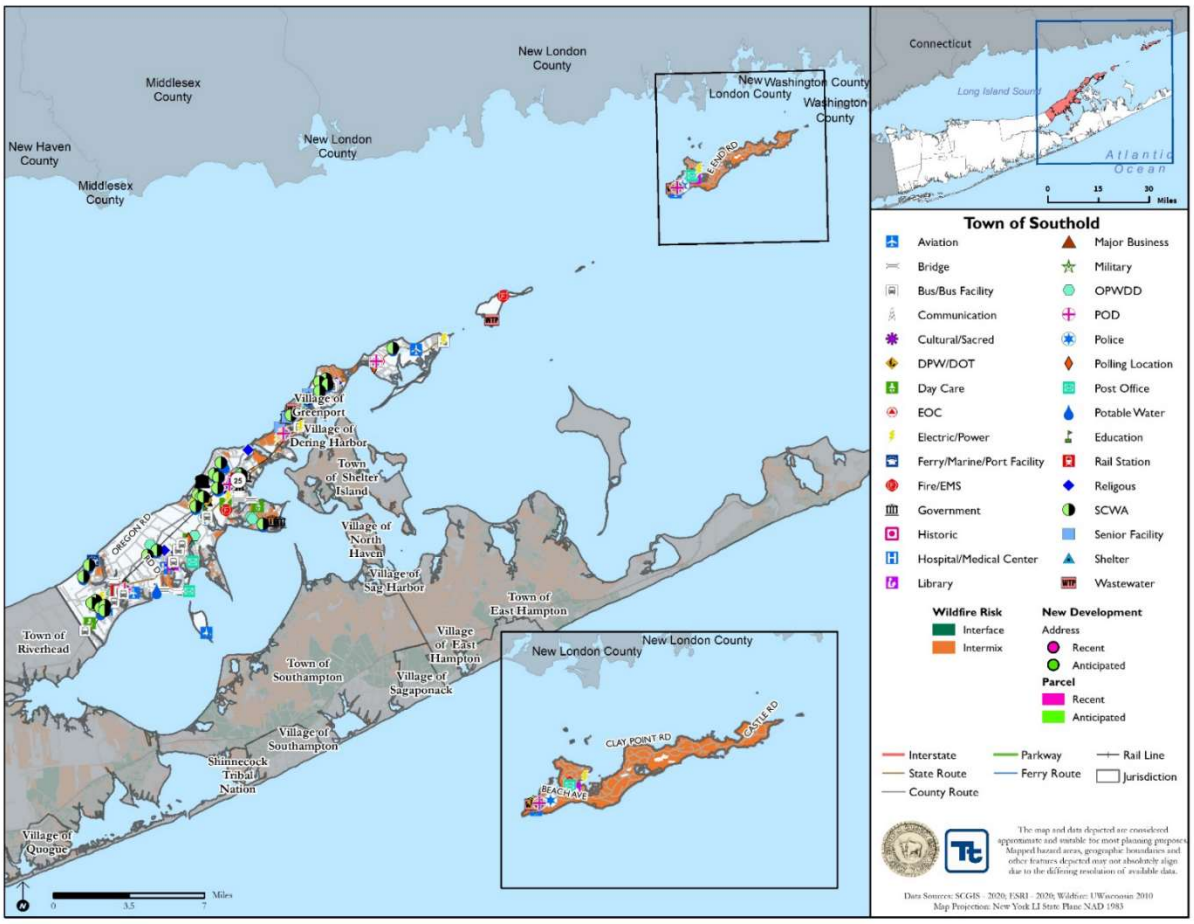
Source: Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)

Figure 9.42-5. Town of Southold Hazard Area Extent and Location Map 5



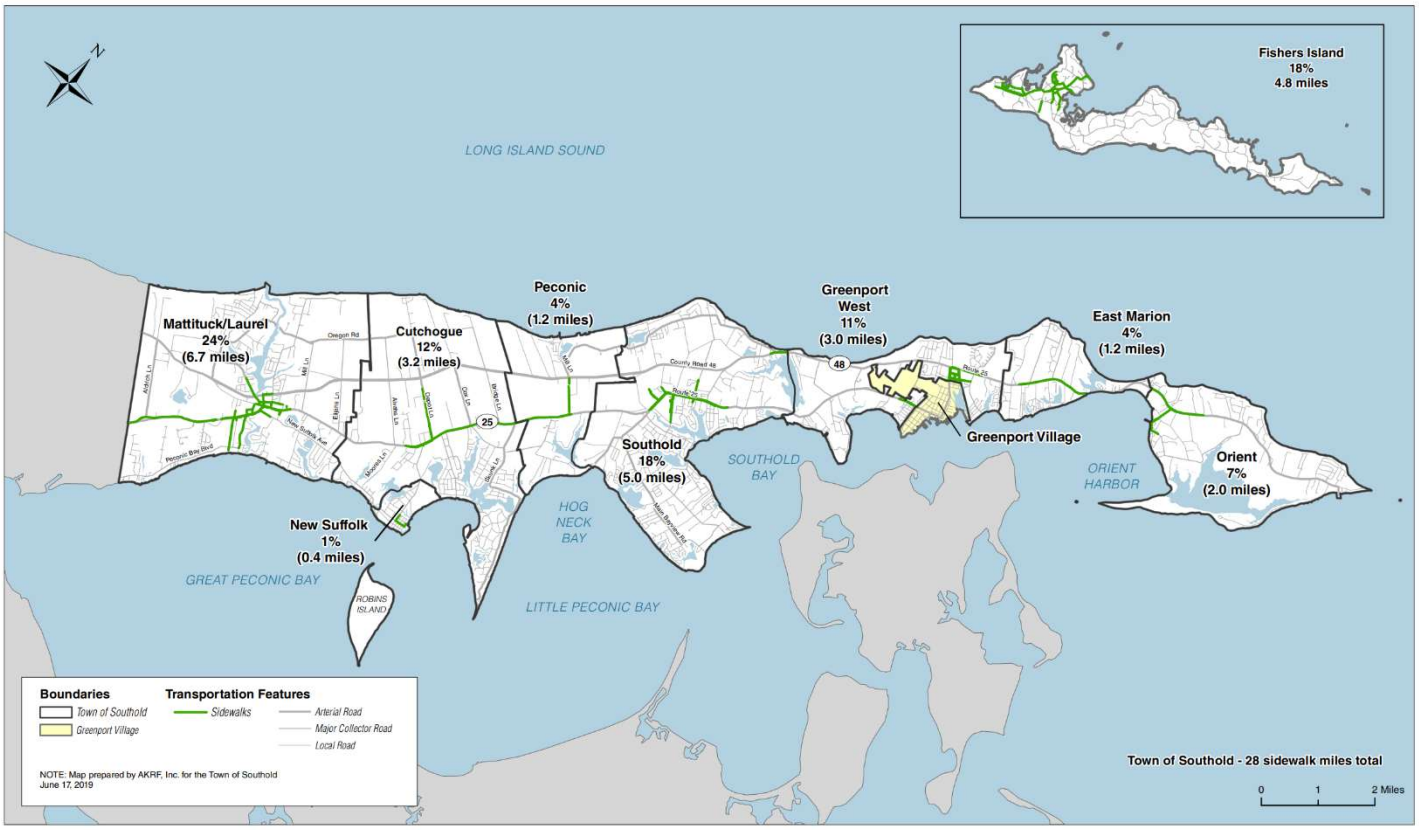
Source: Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)

Figure 9.42-6. Town of Southold Hazard Area Extent and Location Map 6



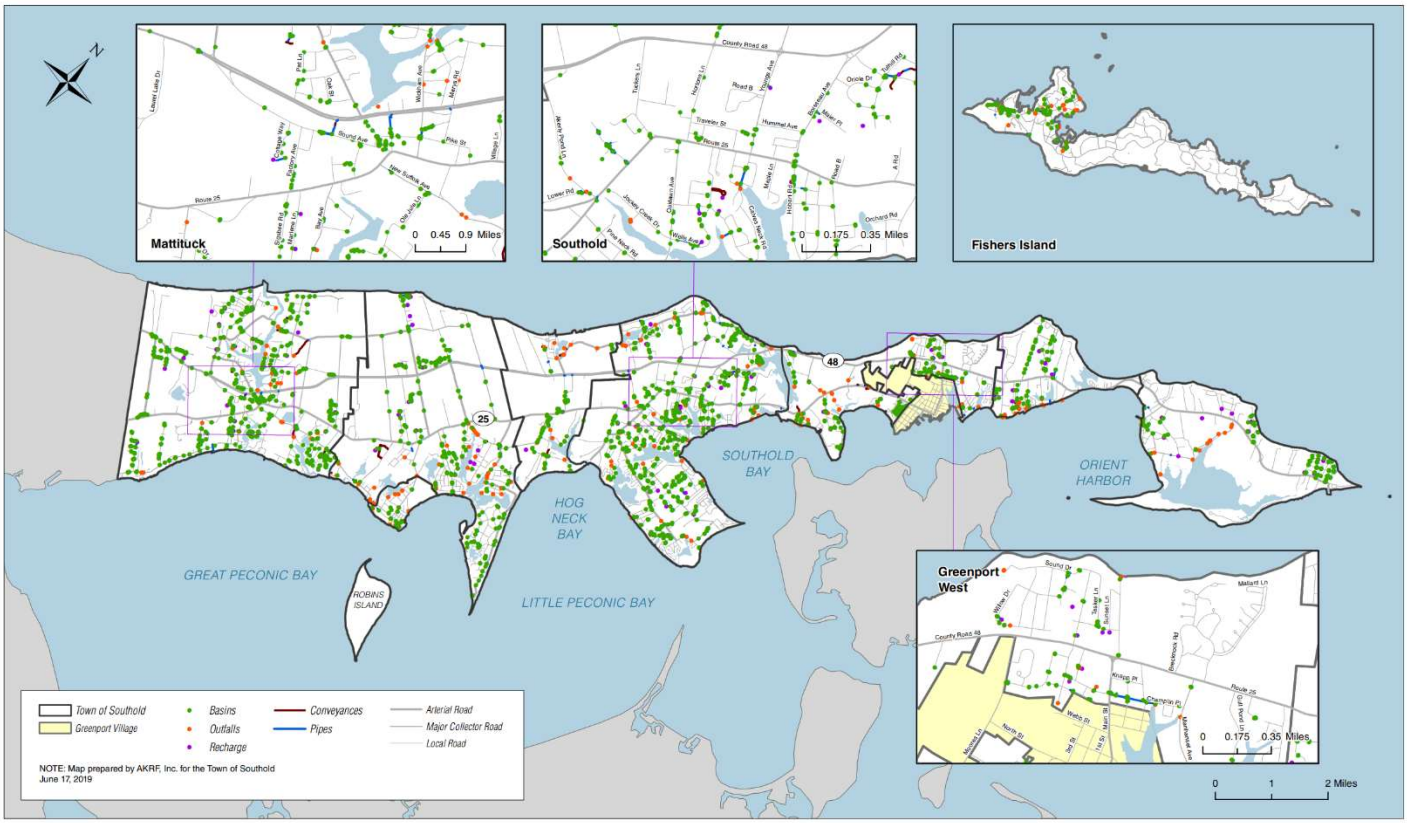
Source: Southold Hazard Mitigation Plan (2020)

Figure 4.2 Percent of Sidewalk Miles in the Town of Southold by Hamlet



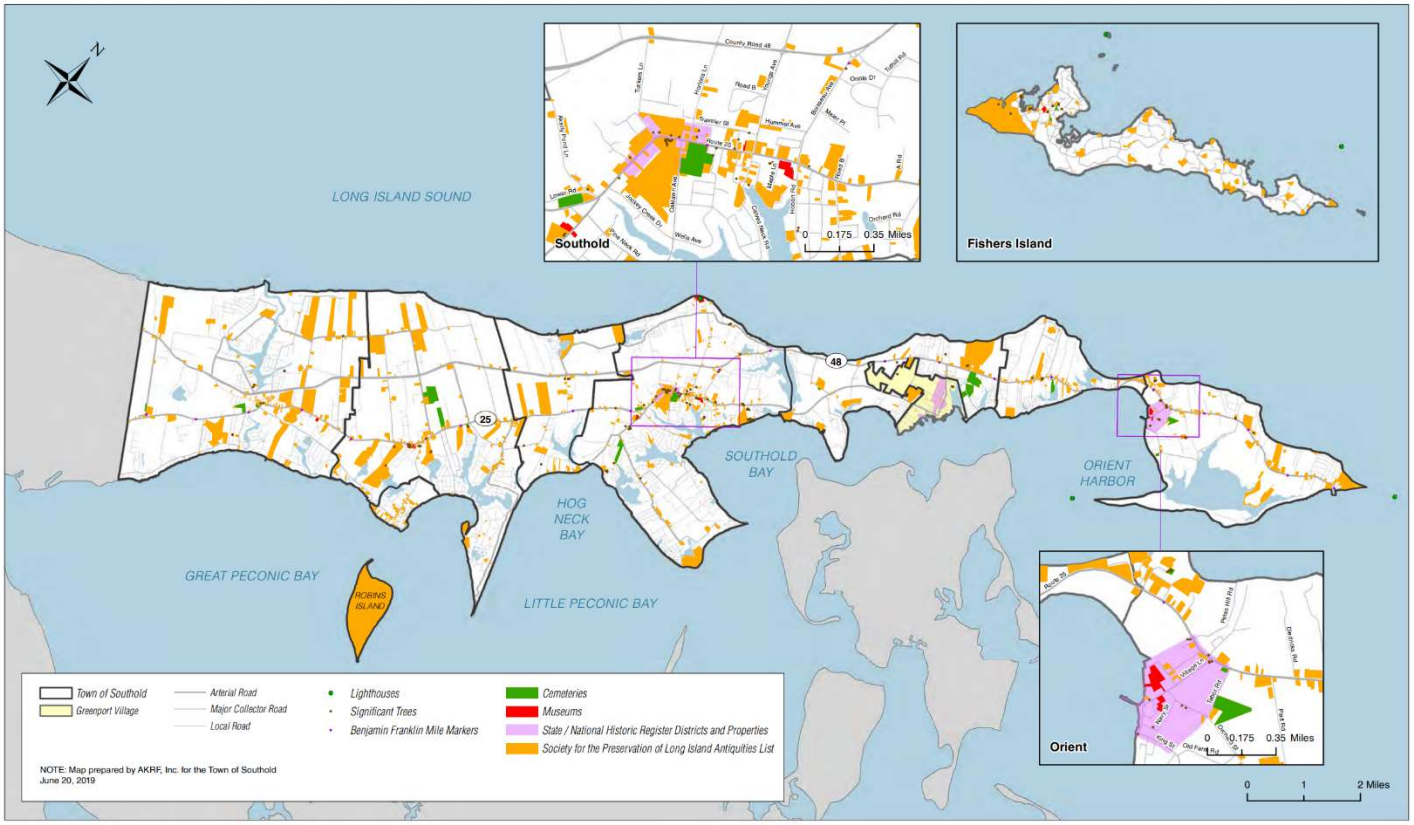
Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 4.9 Stormwater Infrastructure in the Town of Southold



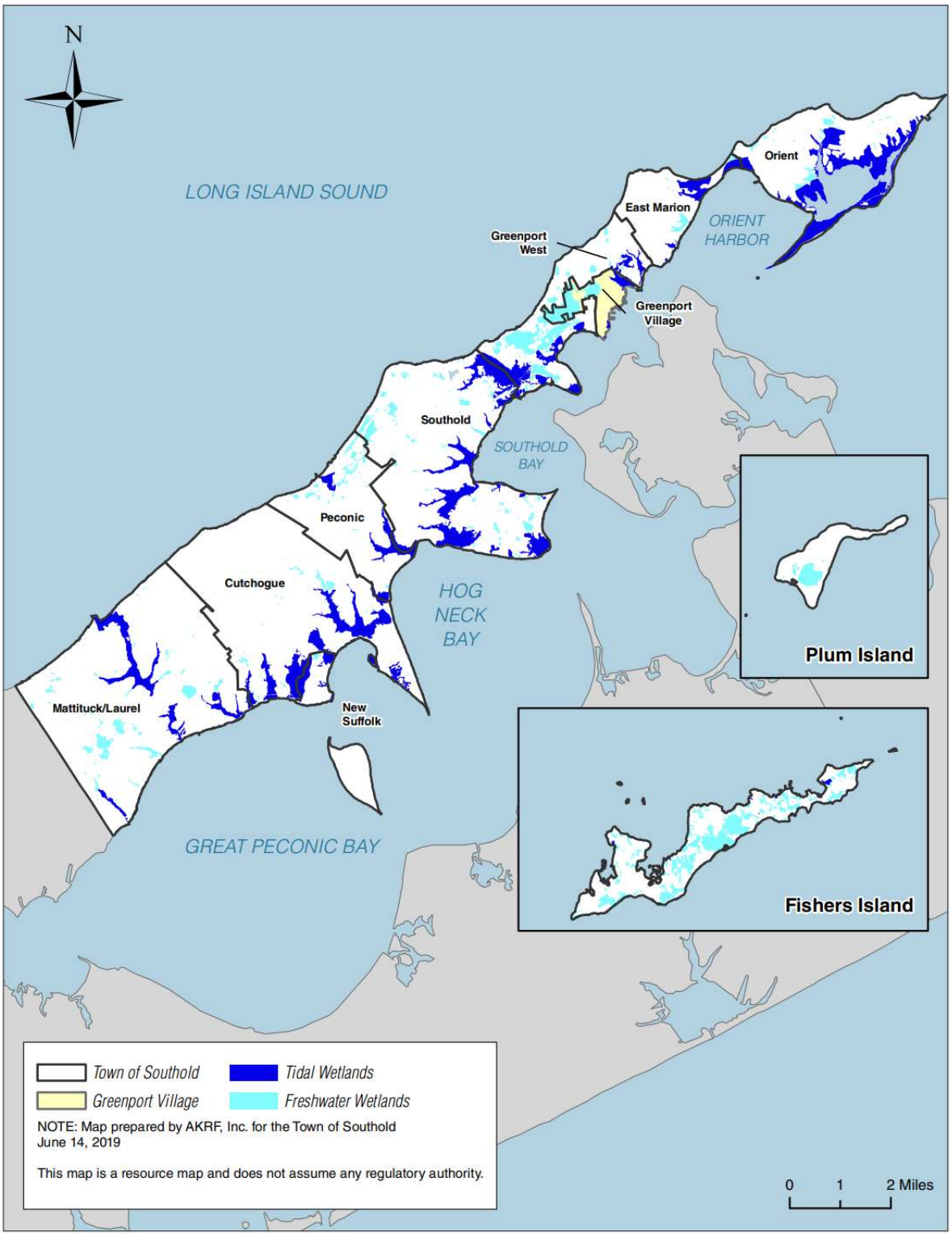
Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 5.1 Cultural Resources Map



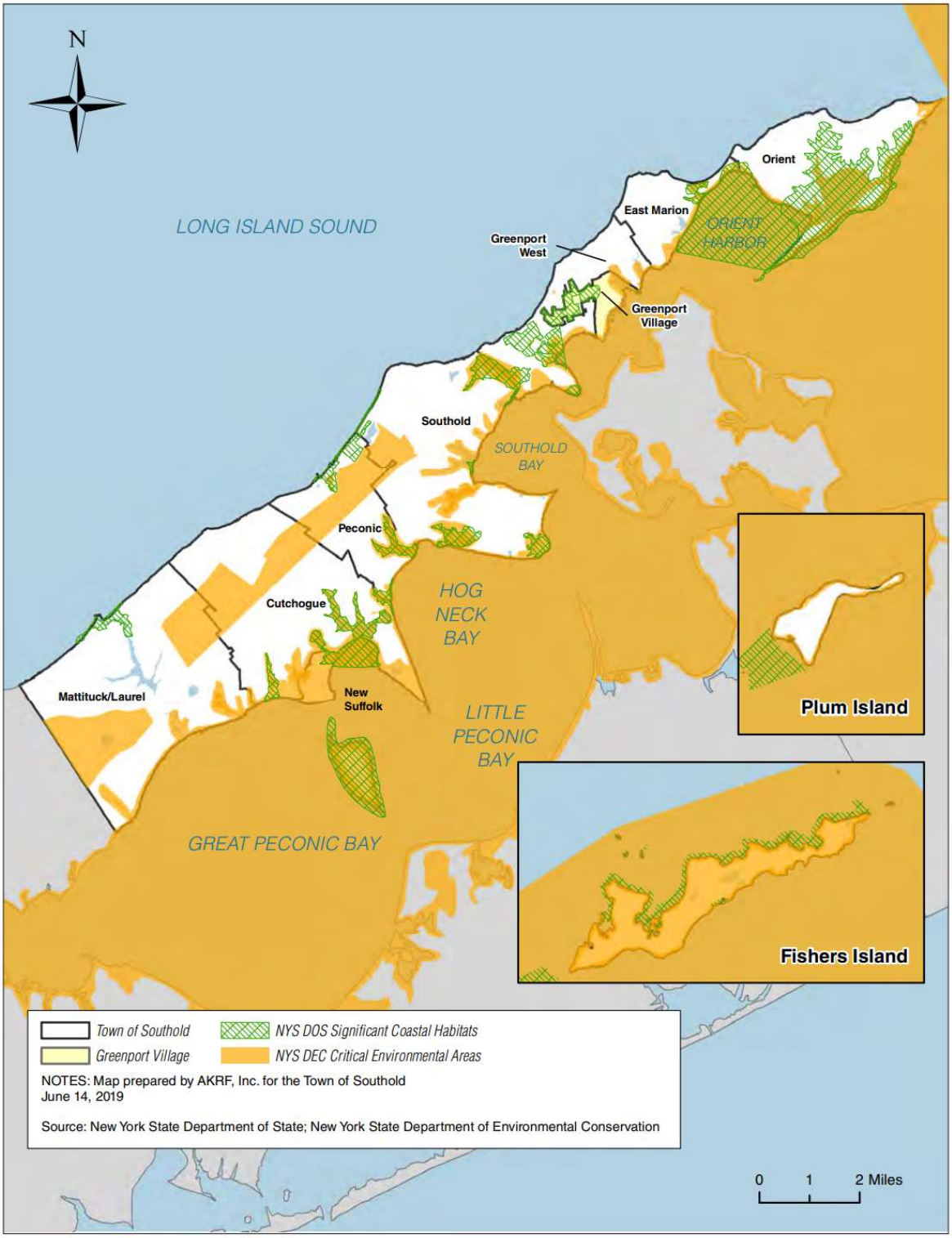
Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 6.4 **Southold Town: Tidal and Freshwater Wetlands**



Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Figure 6.5 **NYSDOS Significant Coastal Habitats and NYSDEC Critical Environmental Areas**



Source: Southold Town Comprehensive Plan (2020)

Source: Long Island Sound Study – Stewardship Atlas

www.CommunityResilienceBuilding.org