



**GOVERNOR'S GROWTH
PLANNING COUNCIL**
Annual Report 2001

June 2001



Dear Governor Almond,

This document fulfills your request for the newly appointed Growth Planning Council to report back to you on its work and recommendations to enhance sustainable development in Rhode Island. We are pleased to report that in its first year the Council has completed its initial tasks and coalesced into a group that represents a variety of interests to foster both economic growth and environmental protection.

Recognizing that our state's quality of life is one of its strongest economic development assets, the first year has been devoted to the assessment of various growth patterns and the role the State plays in impacting those patterns. Studies document that if Rhode Island continues to grow as it has in the past we not only threaten our valued sense of place but we will also incur substantial financial liabilities.

Rather than propose new initiatives, we began by evaluating existing state programs and their contributions to sprawl. The Council's recommendations to strengthen those programs follow in this report and are detailed in an addendum. We are pleased to report that we found a solid foundation in state government upon which to build a more effective growth management program.

With your support we look forward to the establishment of a Planning Institute that will increase local capacity in growth management by making available the latest tools and contemporary planning practices. Additionally, we will be looking to develop workable ways to decrease reliance on property taxes as it relates to growth management. A study performed this year by the Council underscores the importance of property tax reform and is also attached as an addendum. Without meaningful change, local governments are limited by financial necessity to allow for, and indeed encourage, growth to provide revenue in the short run even if it is not sustainable over time.

We have also established a subcommittee to analyze the obstacles and identify ways to provide infrastructure for compact development in rural areas. This effort will encourage patterns of development that maintain open space, community character, and a healthy economy in our rural communities.

We also look forward to further engaging Rhode Islanders in a dialogue that prioritizes public investment and regulatory streamlining in a manner that supports sustainable growth. We anticipate an open dialogue on strategic investments that will lead to the identification of new and existing areas that can sustain future development in keeping with the principles set out in your Executive Order. This effort will enhance the State's efforts in fulfilling its obligations to efficiently and effectively make public investments and manage taxpayers' resources, while respecting the tradition of local government authority over land use decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with a team of leaders from within government and the private sector to develop a better vision for the future of our state.

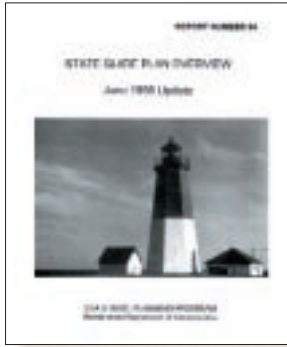


Handwritten signature of Jan Reitsma in black ink.

Jan Reitsma, Director
RI Department of Environmental Management

Handwritten signature of Tom Schumpert in black ink.

Tom Schumpert, Executive Director
RI Economic Development Corporation



This is a collection of plans and policies adopted since the 1960's to centralize and integrate long-range planning.



This study estimates the potential costs of suburban sprawl and urban decay in the state.



This article reviews the state planning programs.

WHERE IS RHODE ISLAND HEADED?

Executive Order 00-2

The Council shall:
Examine the economic, environmental and social impacts of Rhode Island's current development patterns

Land use changes over the last four decades have been dramatic. During this period, Rhode Islanders have developed land at a rate nine times our population growth. Since 1961, we have developed more land than in the previous 325 years of settlement. If current trends continue, Rhode Island will be one big suburb and our cities and villages will lose their place as centers of culture and commerce – according to a report by Grow

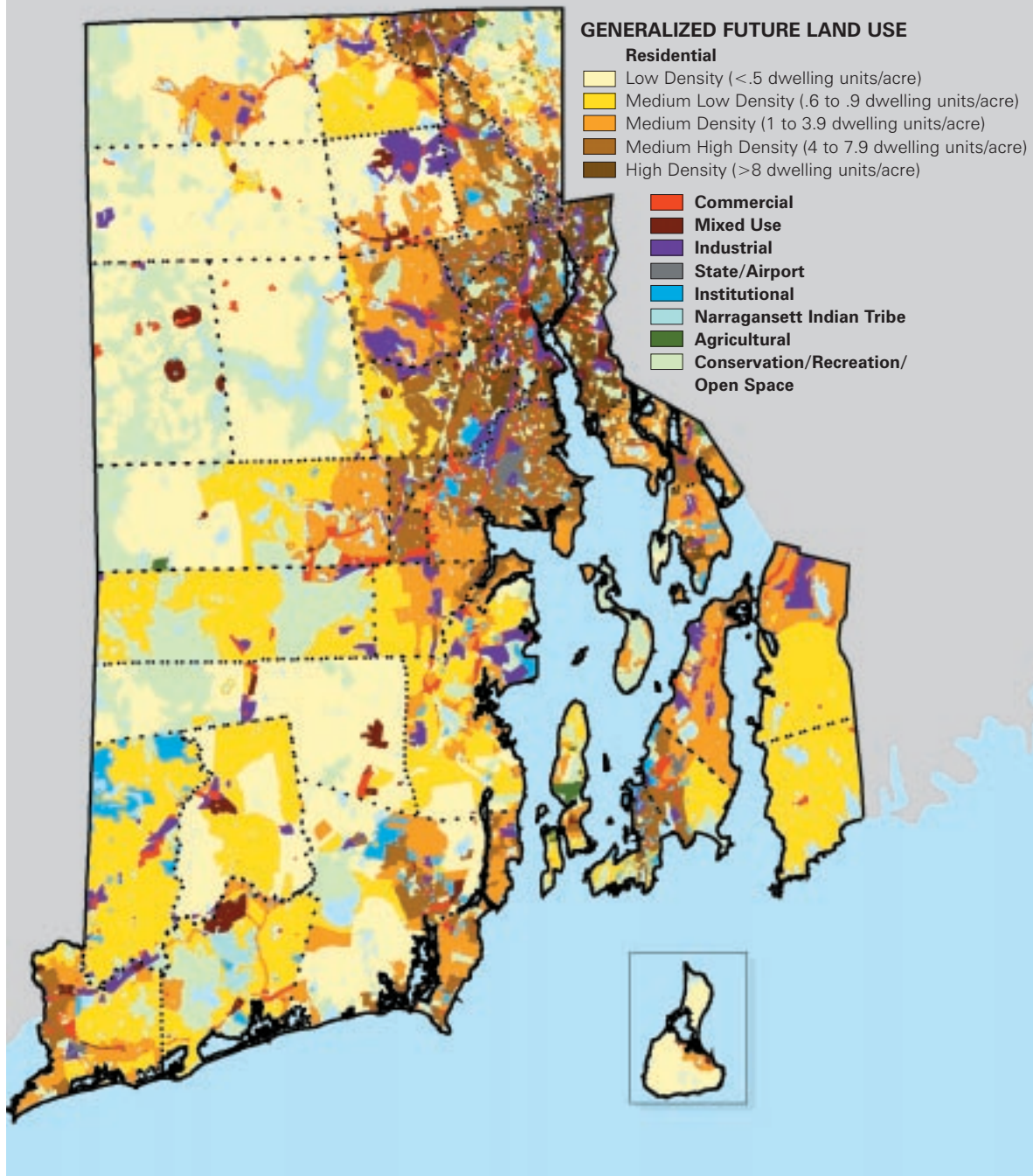
Smart Rhode Island. Already our five most densely populated cities have nearly 11,000 vacant lots and much higher property taxes than many of their suburban and rural neighbors.

The costs attributed to suburban sprawl and urban decay are substantial. Twenty more years of sprawl development will cost Rhode Island taxpayers almost \$1.5 billion according to the same report. Decaying urban neighborhoods, abandoned factories, strip development, and the transformation of farms and forestland to residential use are, however, causing Rhode Islanders to examine what kind of a place we want Rhode Island to be and to plan for a future that protects our sense of place, quality of life, and economic progress.

Suburban sprawl and urban decay have many causes -- notably the rise in automobile use -- but a host of government programs has played a role in creating and reinforcing these trends. The current property tax system encourages development in suburban and rural areas. The federal government has subsidized highway development along with the new housing that followed these highways to commuter suburbs.

Rhode Islanders are in a position to evaluate the economic, social, environmental, and spiritual costs of suburban sprawl and urban decay. The Growth Planning Council has found growing sentiment for the idea of sustainability — growth that respects our natural and built environment, rejects “quick fixes” for rising municipal costs, and recognizes that we can only sustain growth over time through stronger planning and wiser land use.

CURRENTLY PLANNED LAND USE



KIP BERGSTROM,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ECONOMIC POLICY COUNCIL



Without a balanced, integrated [land planning] vision, the very forces that sustain our economy could destroy the character of the places Rhode Islanders love. Conversely, growth informed by good land use policy and inspired design can breathe new life into cities, towns, and rural areas statewide while financing critical investments in environmental and community assets."

From: "A Rhode Island Economic Strategy: 10 Ways to Succeed Without Losing Our Soul"

This map is a generalized composite of the 39 Rhode Island community land use maps.
STATEWIDE PLANNING PROGRAM 2001

STATE PROGRAMS THAT IMPACT LAND DEVELOPMENT

ADMINISTRATION, DEPARTMENT OF (DOA)

- State Properties (siting of state offices and public buildings) – *policy, financing*
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program – *financing*
- Local Comprehensive Plans – *policy, facilitation*
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy – *policy, facilitation*

COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

- Permits - *regulation*

DOT & DOA

- Transportation Improvement Program
- (Non-Interstate Highway Program, Bicycle-Pedestrian Program; Enhancements Program; Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality Program; Transit Program) - *policy, facilitation, financing*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (EDC)

- Enterprise Zone Program – *policy, financing*
- Certificates of Critical Economic Concern – *regulation, facilitation*
- Mill Buildings Revitalization – *financing*
- Industrial Facilities Corporation
- Industrial Recreational Building Authority – *financing*

EDC & DEM

- Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund – *financing*

WHAT DOES THE STATE DO?

Executive Order 00-2

The Council shall: Inventory all existing State programs, policies and expenditures to evaluate their effect on sustainable development and the preservation and enhancement of environmental quality and resources;

In undertaking this task, the Council was mindful of the numerous state activities that are not very significant in terms of their ability to affect sustainable development. Instead, the Council opted to examine those programs that are perceived to influence growth and for which there appears to be opportunity to readily refocus that influence.

Twenty one programs, listed in the border, formed the basis for this inventory. Key staff in each agency were identified and they were asked to complete a program assessment prior to personal interviews. Summaries of

these assessments and the findings attached as addendum in *State Programs and Sustainable Development – Inventory and Analysis and Recommendations*.

In examining the programs selected, it became obvious that any analysis as to each program's impact on sustainable development and growth was, at best, subjective. As such, we looked to see what other states were doing in this area. Using those experiences as a benchmark, we found that Rhode Island has in place many of the basic programs and policies to implement a smart growth management approach. In some cases, such as targeting programs to downtowns or areas identified in local comprehensive plans, we have in place numerous mechanisms. Nevertheless, an examination of existing programs and how they can be improved is one of the first steps in this process but certainly not the last. The Growth Planning Council is anxious to broaden our approach to develop a sustainable development investment policy.

JOHN O'BRIEN,
CHIEF,
STATEWIDE PLANNING
PROGRAM



"Rhode Island has a national reputation as a leader in both state and local planning. The challenge is to use this solid foundation to build a public investment strategy that promotes sustainable growth. The Growth Planning Council represents the requisite stakeholders that can move us to the next phase by initiating the task of crafting such a strategy."

IMPACTING URBAN INVESTMENT



Permit fees can impact where a development takes place. Fee structure based on project cost discourage urban redevelopment when compared to "green field" development. The Coastal Resources Management Council, a state agency member of the Growth Planning Council, has recently restructured its fees in urban core communities to base them on staff review time not projected cost, to encourage reinvestment in our cities.

ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF (DOE)

- School Construction Aid – *policy, regulation, financing*

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, DEPARTMENT OF (DEM)

- Individual Sewer Disposal System (ISDS) program – *regulation*
- Open Space Grants, Recreation Development Grants, Recreational Greenways Grants – *financing*
- Clean Water Finance – *financing*
- Agricultural Lands Preservation Fund – *financing*

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

- Preservation of historic buildings, districts, and landscapes – *regulation, financing*

RHODE ISLAND HOUSING & MORTGAGE FINANCE CORPORATION (RIHMF)

- Single-family mortgage programs – *financing*
- Rental Production Program – *financing*

TRANSPORTATION, DEPARTMENT OF (DOT)

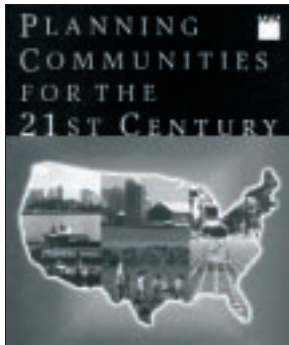
- Access Management Program – *regulation*

WATER RESOURCES BOARD (WRB)

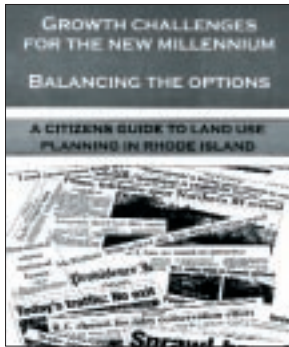
- Public water supply facilities – *regulation, financing, construction*



This guide helps citizens understand and participate in the land use planning process.



This report of the APA Growing Smart Project profiles Rhode Island, New Jersey, Maryland, Oregon, Tennessee and Washington.



This guidebook assists citizens in the process of updating land use plans.

WHAT CAN THE STATE DO BETTER?

Executive Order 00-2

The Council shall:
Recommend ways of encouraging growth in environmentally sound locations.

In completing the State Program Inventory, the Council is respectfully forwarding a series of recommendations for state programs, policies, and procedures as guided by some pragmatic principles.

- Make administrative changes before legislative changes.
- Presume that no additional funding is available.
- Do not create additional bureaucracy.
- Build on the existing local comprehensive planning process.

The recommendations are fully detailed in *State Programs and Sustainable Development – Inventory, Analysis and Recommendations* and can be grouped into three areas:

STATE INVESTMENT

Increase the focus of government investment in urban communities through greater use of:

- State Properties Committee leases, historic tax credits, and economic development finance programs;
- Enterprise Zone Program benefits; and
- Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program for building restoration.

TARGETED GROWTH

Target growth toward areas that can accommodate sustainable development by:

- Favoring the use of expedited permitting and reduced permit fees in targeted growth areas;
- Increasing the use of the Mill Revitalization Program and the Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund;
- Developing a compact development infrastructure plan; and
- Revising school siting guidelines to encourage infill and multi-use schools.

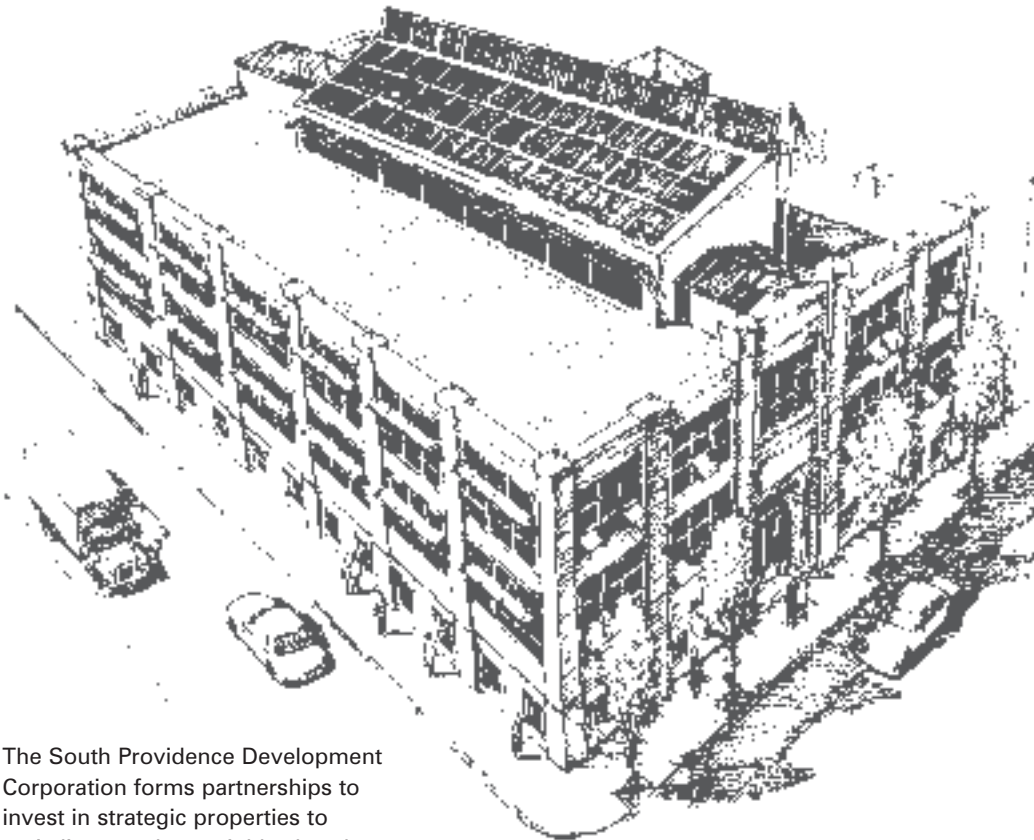
SUPPORT FOR LOCAL PLANNING PROCESSES

- Use state administered grants to provide incentives for proactive planning.
- Support local transportation corridor preservation initiatives.

RESTORING NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH STRATEGIC INVESTMENT



The Center to Advance Minority Participation in The Building Trades, Inc. restored this Victorian home at 570 Broad Street in Providence which had been vacant for 30 years and created office space for 9 minority-owned businesses.



The South Providence Development Corporation forms partnerships to invest in strategic properties to revitalize an urban neighborhood.



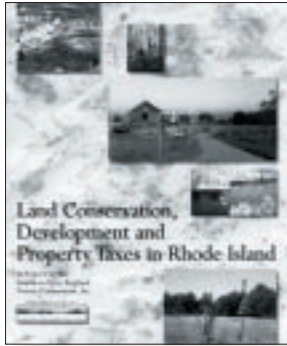
Plans are underway to redevelop this abandoned commercial building as a model for sustainable, "green" building design to provide a space to launch new business ventures.

JOSEPH E. NEWSOME,
PRESIDENT,
SOUTH PROVIDENCE
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



"The State, primarily through the Economic Development Corporation, should support urban neighborhoods that are working to reclaim abandoned commercial structures and vacant lots, putting them back to productive use."

LAND CONSERVATION, DEVELOPMENT AND
PROPERTY TAXES IN RHODE ISLAND
Southern New England Forest Consortium, 2001



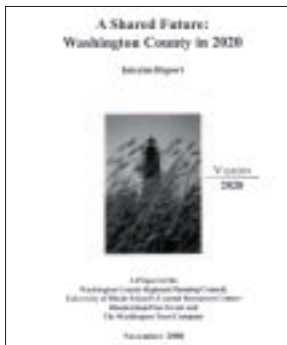
This study investigates the relationship between permanent land conservation, land development, and property taxes in Rhode Island.

AQUIDNECK ISLAND:
OUR SHARED VISION
Rhode Island Sea Grant, 1999



This document describes islanders' shared vision of the future of Aquidneck Island.

A SHARED FUTURE:
WASHINGTON COUNTY IN 2020,
Rhode Island Sea Grant, 2000



This document is intended to create a clear, future vision and a common action agenda to achieve that vision for South County.

HOW CAN COOPERATION BE FOSTERED?

Executive Order 00-2

The Council shall:
Foster partnerships among state agencies, communities and the private sector to build local capacity to plan for and implement sustainable growth.

To foster cooperation, the Council has undertaken the development of a Planning Institute. Conceived by both the development community and regulators as addressing a critical need, the mission of the Planning Institute is to encourage and facilitate proactive planning at the local, regional, and state levels in a broad range of areas -- economic growth and education, land use planning, drinking water supply protection, open space preservation, emergency management, and fiscal planning. The Institute will be a permanent non-profit corporation governed by a

Board of Directors representing the public and private sector development community, with representation of the participating academic institutions.

The Planning Institute's goal is to improve planning capacity where it is needed and currently lacking. Towards this goal, it will bring public and private sector resources together to develop and offer training, technical assistance, and information management or exchange programs. The target audience for these programs includes local officials and citizens concerned with planning for balanced growth and resource management. Work has already begun on curriculum development and the first classes will be offered in September 2001.

The initial focus will be on providing training programs for municipal officials, including members of local councils, boards and commissions, as well as building, fire code, and public safety officers. Training programs will also be made available to members of the building trades, other participating professions, and to citizen groups and nonprofit organizations. The Planning Institute will, on an ongoing basis, seek to identify and meet needs for training and other forms of planning assistance.

Training provided by the Institute will incorporate more creative land use planning techniques, examples of which are highlighted in the South County Design Manual. The manual was created through a collaborative effort by DEM and the Rural Lands Coalition to give South County communities the tools they need to guide future growth and to protect environmental quality and community character.

EXISTING CONDITIONS
BEFORE DEVELOPMENT



AFTER CONVENTIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



AFTER CREATIVE
DEVELOPMENT



CURT SPALDING,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SAVE THE BAY



"It is really very simple, the more land we live on and pave the more we pollute.

The Council is setting the agenda for "smarter growth" that should, if implemented, prevent damage to the Bay for generations to come."

CHRIS MODISSETTE,
MEMBER
RURAL LANDS COALITION



The continuing loss of open spaces to more intensive land uses is a critical problem across the state. It is my hope that the Council will drive creative thinking about how to balance economic prosperity and land conservation.



**RICHARD GODFREY,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
RI HOUSING AND
MORTGAGE FINANCE
CORPORATION**

"Municipal planning must accommodate housing for all incomes and family styles. Reliance on local property taxes and localized zoning decisions often favors commerce over homes, and large houses over smaller ones. A statewide approach can bring low- and moderate-wage earners, essential for economic growth and community vitality, back from the margins."

WHAT'S NEXT?

Next year will mark a new start for the Council as we look to assist the Governor in implementing and monitoring some of the recommendations proposed herein. We look forward to the establishment of the Planning Institute and the forum for exchange of ideas that this will provide. The Council has adopted several recommendations formulated by its Property tax subcommittees (full report available as an addendum). The Council will now work to implement these items. Moreover, the Council stands ready to work with agencies identified in the state program inventory towards implementation of those important recommendations.

Implementation of our recommendations will provide a good beginning but more remains to be done. Specifically the Council is committed to the next steps which we see as:

- Development of a Strategic Investment Policy that focuses public investments to areas that have been prioritized for growth;
- Developing policy recommendations for supporting brownfields reuse in the State; and
- Examination of the affordable housing crisis facing all of Rhode Island's communities.

The Growth Planning Council has begun discussions on the concept of targeting growth related state investments by prioritizing areas for growth in cooperation with municipalities, the business community, and the State. Growth would be encouraged in existing urban, town, and village centers or in new centers, where appropriate, through incentives to avoid sprawl development patterns, to increase the efficiency of infrastructure, and decrease the costs of urban services. The benefits of such an initiative are many:

- Maximizing the utility and efficiency of public service, energy and infrastructure expenditures;
- Providing long-term planning and strategies for growth development;
- Reinforcing and revitalizing the role of Rhode Island's villages and cities as centers of commerce, industry and community life;
- Reducing development pressures on important natural resource lands;
- Preserving the character and aesthetic integrity of the State, and thereby, the economy it fosters; and
- Delivering a clear message to the development community and provide for less risk and expense in the permit process.

With your support, we will continue to explore the concept of targeted public investments to address this important charge in your Executive Order.

BROWNFIELDS – REUSING HISTORIC INDUSTRIAL SITE



Once an underutilized, contaminated site, the Thames Street Landing project is restoring historic harbor buildings in Bristol to be used as restaurants, office space, a hotel and public waterfront access.



SCOTT WOLF
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
GROW SMART RI



“Redeveloping brownfields is a very efficient and practical way to boost our economy, strengthen our urban and town centers and reduce development pressures in our rural areas. Achieving this vision requires new state financial incentives, better site marketing and regulatory streamlining.”

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Project Coordinator

Sally J. Spadaro

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Writers

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COUNCIL MEMBERS

Thomas Ahern, Administrator, Division of Public Utilities and Carriers

William Ankner, Director, RIDOT

Kip Bergstrom, Executive Director, Economic Policy Council

Kevin Breene, Senator (Minority Member), RI Senate

Michael Cheston, RI Airport Corporation

Peter S. Damon, The Damon Company

Tom Deller, Chapter President, RI Section-American Planning Association

Grover Fugate, Director, Coastal Resources Management Council

Richard Godfrey, Executive Director, RI Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation

Clark Greene, Policy Director, Office of the Governor

Peter McWalters, Commissioner, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Chris Modisette, Member, Rural Lands Coalition

George Nee, Secretary/Treasurer, AFL/CIO

Joseph E. Newsome, President, South Providence Development Corporation

Dr. Patricia Nolan, Director, RI HEALTH

John O'Brien, Chief, Statewide Planning

Doug Parker, Director, RI Field Office, The Nature Conservancy

Jennifer Perkins, Associate Director, Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns

John Picerne, President, Rhode Island Builders Association

Lawrence Reilly, President, New England Electric Systems

Jan Reitsma, Director, RI Department of Environmental Management

Rick Richards, Policy Support, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education-Commissioner's Office

M. Paul Sams, General Manager, Water Resources Board

Gary Sasse, Executive Director, Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council

Tom Schumpert, Executive Director, RI Economic Development Corporation

Beverly Scott, General Manager, RIPTA

Curt Spalding, Executive Director, Save the Bay

Scott Wolf, Executive Director, Grow Smart RI