

## **Element 121: Land Use 2025, Rhode Island State Land Use Policy and Plan**

### **01 Introduction**

State Guide Plan Element 121, *Land Use 2025: Rhode Island's Land Use Policies and Plan*, was approved by the State Planning Council on April 6, 2006. The land use State Guide Plan Element is the over arching element in the State Guide Plan and serves several key purposes. The Plan brings together other elements of the State Guide Plan such as natural resources, economic development, housing and transportation to guide conservation and land development in the State. It articulates goals, objectives and strategies to guide the current and future land use planning of municipalities and state agencies. And it sets future land use goals and objectives under which state and municipal plans and land use activities will be reviewed for consistency with the State Guide Plan.

This element sets forth a statewide land use plan for Rhode Island for a 20-year time period - to 2025. It contains a future land map which evolved from a Geographic Information System (GIS) overlay analysis of land suitability and availability and scenario planning for future growth. The GIS analysis focused on the 37 % of the State identified as undeveloped and unprotected in an analysis of RIGIS 1995 land use land cover data. The Plan examined areas suitable for conservation and development, based on the location of key natural resources and public infrastructure. The future land use map identifies areas with future use potential, under three categories of development intensity and two categories of conservation.

The future land use map is a graphical representation of recommendations for future growth patterns in the State. It depicts where different types of development should occur (e.g. parks, schools, houses, offices) by color. The map contains an Urban Services Boundary (USB) that shows where areas with public services supporting urban development presently exist, or are likely to be provided, through 2025. Within the USB, most land is served by public water service; many areas also have public sewer service, as well as, public transit. Also included on the map are growth centers which are potential areas for development and redevelopment. Growth Centers are envisioned to be areas that will encourage development that is both contiguous to existing development with low governmental fiscal impacts and minimal environmental impacts.

The Plan directs the state and communities to concentrate growth inside the USB and within potential growth centers in rural areas. It establishes different development approaches for urban and rural areas. It is intended as a policy guide for directing growth to areas most capable of supporting current and future developed uses and to direct growth away from areas less suited for development. It should be used to assist the state and communities in making land use policies. It is important to note the Map is a generalized portrayal of desired state land use policy. It is not a statewide zoning map.

### **The Vision:**

Rhode Island of 2025 will be a unique and special place, influenced by its proximity to the Boston metropolitan area, but separate from it. The State's landscape will retain its distinctive character. Its history, tradition, and compelling natural beauty will prevail as its hallmarks. Land use patterns and development design will distinguish its diverse communities and celebrate the authenticity of its special places.

## **02 Goals and Objectives:**

There are several overarching goals to meet in order to realize the *Land Use 2025* vision. The first describes the reason we plan; the next cover 3 components of land use - greenspace, community design, and infrastructure; and the last addresses implementation of the Plan. These goals and related objectives are:

### **1. A Sustainable Rhode Island**

*Goal LUG 1:* A sustainable Rhode Island that is beautiful, diverse, connected and compact with a distinct quality of place in our urban and rural centers, and abundance of natural resources, and a vibrant sustainable economy.

#### *Objectives*

LUO 1A: Focus growth within the urban services boundary and in centers of different sizes and types; support traditional centers instead of new development.

LUO 1B: Support regional and watershed-wide planning to coordinate policy development and promote cooperative implementation of plans, programs, and projects affecting more than one community.

LUO 1C: Promote holistic systems planning approaches at the watershed level.

### **2. The Greenspace System**

*Goal LUG 2:* A statewide network of greenspaces and greenways that protects and preserves the environment, wildlife habitats, natural resources, scenic landscapes, provides recreation, and shapes urban growth.

#### *Objectives*

LUO2A: Permanently protect critical natural resources.

LUO 2B: Upgrade and maintain urban and community Greenspace.

LUO 2C: Provide a diverse, well-balanced system of public outdoor recreation facilities.

LUO 2D: Use Greenspace to shape urban development patterns.

LUO 2E: Ensure that shoreline areas compose a significant portion of the Greenspace system.

### **3. Community Design**

*Goal LUG 3:* Excellence in community design: communities that are of high quality, energy efficient, safe and healthful, distinct, diverse and aesthetically pleasing; communities that are rich in natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources; communities that provide abundant economic opportunities.

#### *Objectives*

LUO 3A: Give a majority of the State's residents the opportunity to live in traditional neighborhoods, near growth centers.

LUO 3B: Preserve and enhance special districts and special places, supporting particular uses and resources.

LUO 3C: Maintain and protect the rural character of various parts of Rhode Island.

LUO 3D: Provide a diverse, affordable housing stock.

LUO 3E: Focus development of major employment centers.

LUO 3F Promote well-designed public facilities and properties.

LOU 3G Increase energy efficiency through building design and location.

#### **4. Infrastructure**

*Goal LUG 4:* First class supporting infrastructure that protects the public's health, safety and welfare, fosters economic well-being, preserves and enhances environmental quality, and reinforces the distinction between urban and rural areas.

##### *Objectives*

LUO 4A: Maintain fully functional water and sewer systems; focus development to maximize the investment and capacity of these community assets.

LUO 4B: Protect drinking water supply resources.

LUO 4C: Utilize infrastructure to avoid or mitigate significant negative environmental impacts from development.

LUO 4D: Locate new infrastructure in appropriate areas.

LUO 4E: Promote intermodal centers and greater reliance on transit.

LUO 4F: Provide pedestrian connections through all centers and urban districts.

LUO 4G: Maintain the functional integrity of existing and planned roadways.

#### **5. Implementation**

*Goal LUG 5:* Implement and maintain the vision. Continue to support public stewardship for land use through strategic public investments in growth centers, land conservation, development, and enhanced planning capacity at the local and regional levels.

##### *Objectives*

LUO 5A: Reform Rhode Island property tax system in a manner that supports the goals and objectives of this plan.

LUO 5B: Encourage municipalities to maintain clear and current land use plans, and coordinated regulations to attain land use goals on a statewide, regional and community level.

LUO 5C: Develop and maintain excellent land use information and technology systems.

LUO 5D: Ensure that State and municipal planning officials are well-trained and properly supported.

LUO 5E: Revise current statutes to ensure that Rhode Island's planning enabling legislation will be the contemporary and responsive foundation for State and municipal land management decisions.

LUO 5F: Achieve greater integration of State and municipal planning systems and support regional efforts.

### **03 Policies**

The policies outlined here are intended to guide activities toward fulfillment of the Plan's goals. These policies provide a foundation for action that encompasses related social, physical, and environmental factors to be considered in making land use decisions.

LUP 1: Link land use planning with water use planning to encourage growth in appropriate locations that preserves water supplies.

LUP 2: Control sprawl and the urban exodus of business and industry.

LUP 3: Use open space to control and shape growth.

LUP 4: Achieve a livable, coherent, and visually pleasing environment.

LUP 5: Relate the use of land to its natural characteristics, varying suitability and capacity for development.

LUP 6: Relate the use of land to the level of public facilities and services available, or planned to be available.

LUP 7: Promote the establishment of higher residential densities where public water and or sewer service is present. In areas that lack supporting infrastructure, promote alternative development patterns and identification of appropriate areas for growth centers that will provide compact mixed-use areas for locating services, commercial space, housing, and public transportation.

LUP 8: Promote low overall densities where public services are unavailable and are not planned. Promote alternative development in areas that lack supporting infrastructure.

LUP 9: Recognize Narragansett Bay and watersheds as assets that contribute significantly to the State's beauty and connectivity. Promote holistic systems planning approaches at the watershed level.

LUP 10: Guide development in a manner that will prevent encroachment on floodways, dunes, barrier beaches, coastal and freshwater wetlands, and other natural features that provide protection from storms, flooding, and sea-level rise.

LUP 11: Facilitate public stewardship of healthy and vibrant watersheds that sustain life and support current and future uses.

LUP 12: Encourage development patterns that protect water for drinking, ecosystems, and other critical purposes, as well as natural resources.

LUP 13: Factor into decisions regarding development the importance of recreation, open space, historic resources, and public access to the shore to the State's economy, in tourism, and in maintaining our quality of life.

LUP 14: Design open space systems and corridors to protect complete ecologic units and provide structure and character to the built environment. Maintain the openness of our western borderlands and recognize the significance of this system within the Northeast Corridor.

LUP 15: Protect and enhance those values of the coastal region, including scenic values, which contribute to the State's quality of life. Examine proposals for changes in the coastal region in terms of their importance to the State as a whole.

LUP 16: Create an interconnecting network of bike paths, trails, and walkways to expand pedestrian and bicycle travel options.

LUP 17: Preserve and enhance wildlife, fish, and plant species diversity and stability through habitat protection, restoration, enhancement, and prevention or mitigation of adverse impacts due to human activities.

LUP 18: Protect rare and unique geologic or other natural features.

LUP 19: Preserve the best farmland and active farms in the State for active agricultural use.

LUP 20: Develop residential, commercial, and mixed-use areas that are compactly grouped, attractive, and compatible with the ability of land and water resources and level of public facilities and services available to support development.

LUP 21: Develop and promote innovative and sustainable land development techniques and apply available technology to make decent housing affordable for low- and moderate-income households.

LUP 22: Provide a variety of housing options in proximity to major employment generators to meet the needs of the labor force.

LUP 23: Preserve and enhance the distinctiveness of urban, suburban, village, and rural communities and landscapes.

LUP 24: Preserve historic buildings, districts, and archeological sites.

LUP 25: Relate the location of residential developments and neighborhoods to employment and commercial centers, community facilities and services, and mass transit corridors.

LUP 26: Relate industrial and commercial development to overall land use by promoting the use of development controls and performance standards that mitigate conflicts with other land uses and activities.

LUP 27: Stimulate the expansion of economic development activities, including cultural, educational, and research centers, in the central business districts of municipalities.

LUP 28: Protect and provide utility services that are adequate to meet the needs of present and future populations.

LUP 29: Conserve and enhance desirable existing industrial areas, regional shopping areas, office complexes, and concentrations of service activities to maximize the investment and utilization of existing infrastructure.

LUP 30: Locate public water and sewer facilities so as to shape development in accordance with State land use policies, rather than simply to accommodate growth.

LUP 31: Plan new or expanded public sewer and water services, highway improvements, and mass transit service, for industrial and commercial development where such development is appropriate in terms of natural constraints of the land, air, and water, and where the area is being developed at an intensity that is consistent with State land use policy and will not promote wasteful use of resources.

LUP 32: Locate development with other than domestic waste discharges in areas served by public sewer systems, or where appropriate waste treatment and disposal can be provided and maintained in an effective, environmentally sound manner.

LUP 33: Encourage development that applies best management practices for water and stormwater management.

LUP 34: Promote State and local development programs and activities that encourage new growth in locations and at densities that will achieve appropriate use of existing water supply sources.

LUP 35: Develop and maintain a balanced, integrated, safe, secure, and cost efficient transportation system, locating residential, industrial, commercial, and institutional development within transportation corridors. Relate the design and location of transportation facilities positively to the natural and cultural landscape.

LUP 36: Provide a high aesthetic quality in the transportation system.

LUP 37: Link transportation and land use planning and apply appropriate land use controls and design standards in transportation corridors and interchange areas in order to maintain the functional integrity of existing and planned roadways, alleviate congestion, promote safety, and reduce the need for new highways.

LUP 38: Promote concentrations of high-density housing and employment near existing and planned commuter rail stations and other mass transit routes and terminals.

LUP 39: Require the integration of appropriate transit, pedestrian, bicycle and other modal choices in new development to lessen dependence on the automobile where feasible.

LUP 40: Develop land in the immediate vicinity of airports in a manner that will be compatible with airport operations. Seek to minimize adverse impacts, if any, to pre-existing land uses.

LUP 41: Encourage development patterns that promote energy efficiency and help attain State air quality objectives.

LUP 42: Promote land use development that contributes to energy conservation and increased reliance on renewable energy resources, while assuring dependable sources of fuel supplies to meet long-term energy needs.

LUP 43: Recognize the varying demands for energy associated with different land use patterns, and encourage patterns that tend to reduce the need for energy.

LUP 44: Promote the designation of growth centers at appropriate locations to achieve a concentrated development pattern. Implement a State investment strategy that recognizes growth centers as a priority.

LUP 45: Support property tax reform efforts that will reduce the negative influences of the current system on land use decision-making.

LUP 46: Continue implementation of the State Guide Plan / Community Comprehensive Plan system as a coordinated framework for attaining state and municipal goals for land use and development.

LUP 47: Maintain and enhance the capacities of state, regional, and municipal land use planning functions in support of the land use vision and goals of *Land Use 2025*.

LUP 48: Facilitate multi-community regional and watershed-wide planning to coordinate policy development and promote cooperative implementation of plans, programs, and projects affecting more than one community.

LUP 49: Ensure that State-of-the art tools and practices are available to the State's planning professionals, and that planning systems are adequately resourced relative to their mandated missions.

LUP 50: Strengthen the planning database through continued support for development and use of a statewide geographic information system.

LUP 51: Develop training programs on an ongoing basis for those involved in municipal land use planning.

#### **04 Strategies:**

The overall approach to land use planning is outlined in 107 strategies to implement the goals objectives, and policies under the same 5 subject headings as the goals. The strategies are considered to be an agenda for further action by the state and/or by municipalities.