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Grow Smart thanks our summer intern, Master of Public Affairs candidate Aaron Hertzberg of the Brown University Taubman Center for Public Policy, who assisted in researching and writing the Briefing Book.
August 2012

Dear Candidates and Voters:

We are pleased to provide you with Grow Smart Rhode Island’s 2012 Briefing Book for Candidates and Voters.

This is a critical time for Rhode Island and its cities and towns. Major cuts have been necessary to balance budgets at the state and local level and too many Rhode Islanders are out of work or underemployed. In these tough economic times, we believe that Rhode Island voters are looking for leadership, vision and something more dynamic than damage control. They want to elect candidates who have specific ideas for improving economic conditions by playing to our strengths.

Despite Rhode Island’s current difficulties, we are convinced that our state has tremendous untapped potential. The Briefing Book considers seven areas on which we believe government should focus in order to tap that potential. It also offers many recommendations for specific policies that can be adopted and implemented at both the state and local levels, with some recommendations for federal action as well.

We hope candidates find the recommendations useful as they formulate policy positions and that voters make use of the recommendations when questioning and evaluating candidates.

We welcome any questions you may have or requests for additional information. We look forward to working with you and all Rhode Islanders to promote a policy agenda that capitalizes aggressively on Rhode Island’s underappreciated assets in order to provide more economic opportunity for all.

Sincerely,

Scott Wolf, Executive Director
Grow Smart Rhode Island

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About Grow Smart Rhode Island

Grow Smart Rhode Island represents a diverse alliance that includes the business, labor, academic, environmental, housing, health, development and preservation sectors. Since its establishment in 1998, Grow Smart has led its allies in calling for sustainable economic growth that builds upon and strengthens Rhode Island’s exceptional quality of place.

We work to achieve:
- Revitalized, walkable urban and town centers
- Responsible stewardship of natural resources
- Expanded transportation choices
- Housing options and affordability
- A viable and profitable agricultural sector

To accomplish these goals, Grow Smart
- Conducts research on the impacts of suburban sprawl and urban disinvestment and evaluates policies used elsewhere to achieve efficient, vibrant and sustainable development.
- Advocates for policies and programs to steer future growth to revitalized urban, town and village centers and to reduce development pressures on farms and forestland
- Provides training, conferences and forums to increase municipal and state capacity to shape growth;
- Builds public awareness of issues and resources by maintaining an extensive website, publishing a monthly e-newsletter and hosting a biennial Power of Place Summit.

Grow Smart’s advocacy and public education work benefits from close collaboration with many other organizations and agencies. In a number of cases, to focus on key issues, Grow Smart and its partners have formed coalitions. These coalitions are listed under Resources on pages 20-21.

Through involvement in national coalitions, Grow Smart brings cutting edge smart growth policy ideas and other resources to Rhode Island. Executive Director Scott Wolf serves on the Board of Directors of Smart Growth America, the smart growth movement’s national advocacy and communications organization. He is also a representative to the Brookings Institution’s national Blueprint for Prosperity Initiative, which promotes federal support for metropolitan wide approaches to issues such as transportation, housing and sustainable economic development.

A non-partisan, 501(c)(3) organization, Grow Smart receives general operating support from businesses, foundations, non-profit entities, universities and individuals. We also receive grants for specific programs including our Power of Place Summit and our Land Use Training Collaborative workshops.

Our work has been honored with awards from the US EPA, American Planning Association/RI Chapter, Rhode Island Housing, Preserve Rhode Island, the Providence Preservation Society, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission and the Environmental Business Council of New England.

Our Vision for Rhode Island

A state where all generations enjoy abundant natural and architectural beauty, a high performance economy, a dynamic connection to the past and a prosperous future.

If Grow Smart’s vision for Rhode Island is realized . . .

We will have valued, maintained and invested in our state’s diverse built and natural assets that offer compact, walkable city and town centers close to working farmlands and forested areas and the incomparable resource that is Narragansett Bay.

Revitalized city and town centers will accommodate most of the commercial buildings and infrastructure needed by both the state’s small and large businesses.

We will have established an efficient and integrated transportation system that enables Rhode Islanders to get to jobs, schools, services and recreational areas easily and affordably while safeguarding the environment and reducing automobile dependence.

We will have conserved our natural resources and strengthened our resource-based economic sectors — farming, fishing, forestry. Just as we have valued and taken full advantage of our land, we will have treasured Narragansett Bay for its recreational and commercial uses and its beauty.

Most importantly, Rhode Islanders will have renewed pride in our state and feel empowered to continue taking the bold action necessary to tap its full potential.
How Rhode Island manages and invests in its physical assets will have a tremendous impact on future economic development.

Some of our state’s greatest assets — the things that distinguish us from other places — can be found in our natural and built surroundings. They include:

- Compact development patterns that give us the opportunity to have the most energy efficient and walkable communities in America — at a time when both energy prices and healthy living are of growing national concern.
- Cities, towns and villages featuring historic neighborhoods and buildings, excellent housing and work spaces as well as world class cultural, educational and culinary offerings.
- The abundant natural resources, natural beauty and recreational opportunities to be found in our shorelines and rivers, farmlands and forests, which can be reached and enjoyed easily from anywhere in the state.
- Some of the most highly productive agricultural land in America.
- A competitively positioned airport and seaports.

Rhode Island’s small size (approximately 1,000 sq. miles), however, gives us little margin for error. We must use our land area and existing buildings carefully and creatively if we want to improve commercial and industrial growth, housing and transportation infrastructure, community and cultural facilities while at the same time ensuring that future generations will continue to enjoy the many benefits offered by green, undeveloped spaces and working farmland.

The smart growth approach to development is the best way to make the most of our limited land area and protect and capitalize on our numerous natural and built assets. This Briefing Book details seven areas that are keys to stimulating sustainable economic growth.

For several topic areas we offer specific policy recommendations. A number of our recommendations require little or no public investment. We do, however, also call for targeted investments which are necessary to tap the State’s full potential, generate sufficient long term economic growth, and make a major dent in our persistent structural budget deficit. And we urge close monitoring of returns on investment so that we can retain effective strategies and eliminate those that don’t produce intended benefits.

Our “Outstanding Smart Growth Projects, Policies, and Plans” section (pp. 18-19) illustrates what we can achieve. With the right smart growth strategy and full appreciation of Rhode Island’s strengths, Rhode Island’s best days should still be ahead.

“At the heart of the American dream is the simple hope that each of us can choose to live in a neighborhood that is beautiful, safe, affordable and easy to get around. Smart growth does just that.” — Smart Growth America
Everyone is agreed that **economic growth is essential for our state’s future**, and there is already fairly broad consensus that growth must be sustainable. In other words, economic development should avoid consuming or damaging the resources and community livability that future generations of Rhode Islanders will need for their own economic prosperity and quality of life.

Grow Smart urges that economic development policies should be based not only on a commitment to sustainability but also on a realistic understanding of the state’s assets and its limitations. Rhode Island’s total land area is just over 1,000 square miles. We can never compete for businesses that require hundreds of acres of developable land. Instead, we need to seek out businesses that value what we have to offer — energy efficient development patterns, easy access to airports and seaports, historic buildings that offer redevelopment opportunities, abundant natural resources and recreational opportunities.

**Smart growth helps to make full use of existing roads, sewers, water mains and utility lines rather than incurring the costs of new infrastructure in undeveloped areas.**

Smart growth promotes both sustainability and economic development. Smart growth changes the terms of the development debate away from the traditional growth/no growth question to “how and where can new development best be accommodated?” Sustainable economic growth requires that we (1) provide sufficient space for new and expanding businesses, housing and economic activity in and around our urban and town centers and seaports and airports and (2) avoid development on environmentally critical lands in order to protect natural resources and our quality of place. Smart growth encourages new commercial and residential development in and adjacent to traditional urban, town and village centers and along already built-up corridors connecting those centers. It emphasizes re-development of existing vacant or underused properties and “infill” construction on vacant lots. By directing public and private investment to existing centers, smart growth helps to make full use of existing roads, sewers, water mains and utility lines rather than incurring the costs of new infrastructure in undeveloped areas.

Smart growth is not only sustainable, but it also gives Rhode Island’s economic development initiatives a competitive edge by playing to our physical assets. Smart growth calls for continuing the compact mix of residential, commercial and government uses traditionally found in downtowns. This compact mix of uses enables people to walk and bike more and drive less, resulting in significant health and environmental benefits. The walkable, vibrant downtowns and residential neighborhoods that smart growth supports are particularly attractive to knowledge economy start-up businesses, workers seeking urban and family amenities and retiring babyboomers looking for a high quality of life. Smart growth reinforces our state’s energy-efficient development patterns as concerns increase about rising energy costs.
At the same time, by concentrating growth in city and town centers, smart growth lessens development pressure on undeveloped open spaces and working agricultural lands. It enables us to preserve forests and coastal features in their natural state, retaining the highly accessible recreational and natural places that appeal to current residents, transferring business executives and employees and tourists.

Rhode Island already has many excellent examples of smart growth innovation, but further reversing the sprawling, economically inefficient pattern of development that has prevailed in Rhode Island for most of the last six decades will not be easy. Public infrastructure funding, state aid to municipalities for school and library construction, state and local economic development incentives, regulations and permitting, taxation and public facilities siting all influence private development decisions. State and municipal officials must take the lead in revising policies to incentivize compact, mixed-use development and discourage haphazard development that destroys precious farm and forestland.

**Per acre infrastructure costs for single-family homes by location**

Building infrastructure to serve new development on the fringe can cost a town up to three times more per acre than urban infill development.  
Source: Calthorpe Associates; Strategic Economics, 2011
In the wake of the 38 Studios fiasco and state and municipal budget pressures, many candidates and voters might conclude that Rhode Island and its municipalities should curtail government investment in infrastructure and eliminate the use of public incentives to promote economic growth and other public goals.

Grow Smart believes that would be a serious and costly mistake, one that would likely ensure long term economic under performance for our state. We believe that state and municipal investments and incentives are essential if we want to

- protect and enhance our state’s infrastructure and building stock;
- capitalize on those assets to encourage future economic growth;
- maintain and provide expanded access to the natural and built surroundings and recreational opportunities that are some of our state’s great strengths
- compete effectively with other states.

Direct government investment entails spending public monies to secure future benefits for our citizens — economic benefits, environmental benefits, social benefits. By purchasing land outright or purchasing development rights, we can ensure that working farmlands will be available for future production and that future generations will enjoy recreational opportunities. Government investments to improve roads, sidewalks and public transit in a given area encourage new businesses to locate in the area, stimulating new jobs and new tax revenues. Government investment in rental housing that will remain affordable for the long term not only provides for the future health and safety of low and moderate income families, the elderly and Rhode Islanders with special needs but also provides more discretionary income for Rhode Islanders to spend in support of local businesses and encourages more of our workers to stay in Rhode Island.

Incentives — such as tax credits, tax abatements or fee waivers — are designed to encourage business creation and growth in Rhode Island and to motivate private individuals and businesses to invest their private resources in the areas of the state where development is most needed and environmentally sustainable.

Given recent headlines, it is natural that many Rhode Islanders are skeptical about the effectiveness of government investments and incentives and concerned about the risks involved. But it’s important to remember that investments and incentives are not created equal. So let’s study our past successes and past mistakes to craft a set of standards against which we can measure proposed investments and incentives. Grow Smart suggests that voters should demand, and elected officials should be held responsible for ensuring, that future investments and incentives be

- Developed in consultation with stakeholders

“...historic structures tax credits provide an economic incentive for private-sector investment in the rehabilitation of historic properties” — RIPEC, Historic Preservation Tax Credits Revisited, May, 2012
• Targeted to achieve clearly defined goals
• Designed to leverage additional public/private investment
• Administered transparently, fairly and expeditiously
• Monitored closely
• Evaluated regularly

Perhaps the biggest challenge for policy-makers is determining how to measure the return on investment of government spending. The public sector looks at return on investment somewhat differently from the private sector. For the private sector, the ultimate goal is an increase in profits. Thus return on investment looks at the new revenue resulting from a given investment and determines how long it takes for a company to recoup its original investment and begin to generate increased profits. For the government, or public sector, the ultimate goal is greater public benefit, which might be an increase in jobs, new recreational facilities or public transit services that reduce Rhode Islanders’ household transportation costs. What must be measured is whether the public benefit desired is ultimately achieved. Ideally the government may recoup its original investment, but that is not always a necessary or reasonable expectation, especially when government investment results in private sector job creation and expanded economic opportunity for our residents.

### Historic Preservation Incentives Strengthen Neighborhoods & Municipal Budgets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Assessed Value Before</th>
<th>Assessed Value After</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Tax Collected Before</th>
<th>Tax Collected After</th>
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### State Open Space Investments Leverage Federal and Private Dollars

- Working farmland, open space and habitat lands protected in FY 2011: 905 acres
- Total Value: $14.0 million
- State Bond Money Spent: $2.9 million
- Federal & Private funding leveraged: $11.0 million
Revitalized Urban & Town Centers

Revitalized urban and town centers are demonstrating that they can strengthen our economy and our quality of life. Economic, environmental and demographic changes — as well as shifting lifestyle preferences — are all altering the definition of today’s American dream. There is mounting evidence that people are increasingly being drawn back to live in more traditional and walkable neighborhoods with easier and more efficient access to all of life’s essentials.

Businesses too have begun to recognize that the highly-valued cadre of younger talent puts a much greater value on workplaces located in vibrant, transit-rich mixed-use centers and transit corridors. By contrast, the more isolated modern office park, while still an important part of a diversified economy, has relatively little appeal to these young workers.

A 2010 report by Reuters suggests that the current national economic downturn has in fact spurred smart growth projects in centers and transit corridors around the country. For developers, homeowners and governments, there are dollars to be saved and dollars to be made in revitalizing our centers and corridors.

Rhode Island’s existing network of mixed-use urban, town and village centers gives our state a distinct advantage. Our cities offer excellent housing and work spaces as well as world class cultural, educational and culinary offerings. Town centers offer “Main Street” commercial and retail establishments, community services and residential neighborhoods. Rhode Island boasts of more than 350 villages, many with capacity for additional growth or redevelopment.

Many of the techniques that make communities more attractive and affordable places to live also make them healthier places. Streets that are safe and comfortable for walkers and bikers encourage people to get more exercise as part of their daily routines. Having numerous alternatives to single occupancy auto travel helps reduce traffic and air pollution, and preserving green space helps protect water quality while making communities more attractive. Smart growth strategies help ensure communities develop in ways that keep our children and families healthy, with clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and safe places to exercise outside.

The continued revitalization of our centers and corridors, while challenging, is essential to Rhode Island’s future economic prosperity and requires public leadership and private partnerships. By putting an end to the many wasteful public subsidies of sprawl and instead focusing on incentives for future commercial and residential growth and re-growth in centers — where buildings, roads, utilities, and transportation infrastructure are already in place — we can capitalize on our assets, play to our strengths and reap the economic, environmental and community benefits of doing so.

“Every metro area has good suburbs, but if you don’t have a strong downtown and close-in neighborhoods, then you’re not offering a choice that many young, educated adults are seeking.” — Carol Coletta, CEOs for Cities
Key Facts

- Driven by young adults, cities across the nation are growing faster than suburbs for the first time in 100 years.\(^1\) From 2000 to 2010, Providence grew at a rate 6 times faster than the state.\(^2\)
- 56% of American homebuyers now prefer to purchase in traditional, walkable neighborhoods where they have easier access to services, over a sprawling community with larger lots, limited options for walking and a longer commute.\(^3\)
- As the 2nd most urbanized state in the nation, Rhode Island has an abundance of existing, albeit underutilized, compact and traditional neighborhoods with easy access to transit.\(^4\)
- Since 2002, the now halted State Historic Tax Credit Program is credited with stimulating $1.2 billion of private investment rehabilitating 208 historic buildings (mainly in urban and town centers) spread across the state in 15 different communities. It is estimated that these projects created 22,000 construction jobs and 6,000 permanent jobs and paid $806 million in wages.\(^5\)
- To accommodate suburbanization, Rhode Island built more than 2,300 miles of new roads (mainly local roads) between 1962 and 2007, an increase of 52%,\(^6\) while the state’s population only increased an estimated 16% during the same period.
- Nearly 30% of Historic Tax Credit projects are also remediating contaminated brownfield sites in urban, suburban and rural communities.\(^7\)

Policy Recommendations

At the State Level

- Reinstate a targeted State Historic Tax Credit.
- Capitalize on opportunities to develop new strategies for smart growth and sustainable economic growth through Rhode Island’s new HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant of nearly $2 million.
- Ensure that state economic development programs adequately market location-efficient, transit-friendly sites.
- At no cost to the State, provide an incentive for municipalities to encourage location-efficient economic development by exempting from the property tax levy cap (S-3050) a portion of new property taxes generated in Main Street districts provided that the captured funds are reinvested in capital improvements in these districts.
- Amend the existing Municipal Economic Development (MED) Zone law (44-18-30C) to include all qualified retailers to participate, including those in existing or rehabbed building space and lift the <50,000 population restriction.
- Modify existing state economic development grants, loan programs, tax incentives and technical assistance to prioritize economic development in established centers and corridors with existing infrastructure capacity.

At the Municipal Level

- Define Main Street districts and “growth centers” in municipal Comprehensive Plans and enact zoning to allow more compact, mixed-use development.
- Utilize Transfer of Development Rights in local zoning ordinances to balance land conservation with increased density in centers.
- Where practical, locate municipal buildings and facilities in urban and town centers.

At the Federal Level

- Support the continuation and proposed expansion of the Federal Historic Tax Credit program contained in S. 2074 and H.R. 2479

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\(^1\) 2011 U.S. Census Estimates
\(^2\) 2010 U.S. Census
\(^3\) Nat. Assoc. of REALTORS, 2011 Nat. Community Preference Survey
\(^4\) U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, 2011
\(^5\) RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
\(^6\) RI Statewide Planning Program, Transportation 2030, August 2008
\(^7\) RI Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit Economic & Fiscal Impact Analysis, 2007
Conserving forests and other undeveloped open spaces is just as important to our future as revitalizing cities and towns. Open space reduces susceptibility to flooding, protects drinking water and provides wildlife habitat. It provides scenic landscapes and recreational opportunities that contribute to our quality of life and attract out-of-state tourists. Effective land conservation policy requires state and municipal government to identify and prioritize land for protection, work with many public and private partners and pursue multiple strategies.

Some land protection can be achieved without public expense. State legislation enables Rhode Island municipalities to use planning tools such as Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Conservation Development. These planning approaches, carefully applied, can enable communities to permanently conserve land without incurring the public cost of purchasing land or development rights.

In order to protect a critical mass of land for open space or recreation, however, the state and municipalities will also need to continue purchasing land outright or purchase development rights. State and municipal dollars can and have been stretched by partnering with the Federal government and with private conservation entities. But Federal funding requires state and local match. Rhode Island and most municipalities depend almost entirely for this on bond issues, which voters have consistently supported. A supplemental approach is to establish dedicated state and local funding sources for land conservation.

With proper management, Rhode Island’s relatively ample water supply can be a competitive economic advantage. However, our abundant annual rain and snowfall have created a false sense of security and resulted in our paying too little attention to water conservation. Recent years have seen a growing number of instances, particularly in summer months, when some areas had insufficient water to meet household needs for potable water, support industry and agriculture and maintain healthy river and stream ecosystems.

Rhode Islanders work, play, travel and transport goods on Narragansett Bay. With careful planning and stewardship, we can have a healthy Bay that continues to serve the interests of fishermen, the maritime trades and recreational boating, commercial shipping, the tourist industry, and every Rhode Islander who values the Bay. To continue to enjoy such rewards, state and local governments must vigilantly protect public access to the coastline and draw on the knowledge of all interested parties in planning for the Bay’s use and protection.

“The tourism industry is the state’s fourth largest employer, supporting approximately 65,000 jobs, generating $2.37 billion for our economy and responsible for 8.4% of all state government revenue.”
Key Facts

- Nearly 60% of Rhode Island’s land remains forested.¹
- The amount of impervious cover (impenetrable surfaces such as roads, parking lots, rooftops, etc.) in Rhode Island increased by almost 45% between 1972 and 1999, six times faster than the state’s population growth. Only 17 municipalities now have less than 10% impervious cover. Streams surrounded by 10-25% impervious cover show clear signs of degradation, and when impervious cover is over 25% streams are severely impacted and can no longer support diverse stream community.²
- In a May, 2010 poll of likely Rhode Island voters, 87% agreed that “Parks, open space recreation facilities and protecting what farmland remains are important to enhancing the quality of life in Rhode Island not only for this generation but future generations.”³
- In FY 2009, Rhode Island ranked 50th in per capita expenditures for natural resources, parks and recreation.⁴
- Daily household water use in Rhode Island averages 58-72 gallons per person in winter. In summer, lawn and garden watering increases daily usage by 30-50 gallons per person.⁵

Policy Recommendations

At the State Level

- Update the state’s land conservation plan, which is nearly 20 years old. It is time to review goals and strategies to ensure that the state’s natural resources will be used as effectively as possible.
- Support the 2012 Clean Water Bond (Question 5) funding improvements to wastewater treatment and drinking water in cities and towns.
- Support the 2012 Environmental Management Bond (Question 6), allocating funds for local recreation and open space grants, the protection of farmland and open space and restoration of the Narragansett Bay Watershed.
- Activate Rhode Island’s Housing and Conservation Trust Fund and provide a permanent funding stream for the Fund.
- Update the current system for reporting installation of new private wells.

At the Municipal Level

- Prioritize land for protection, working collaboratively with state government, neighboring municipalities and private conservation entities, to ensure that funds will be spent as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Adopt a Conservation Development ordinance. Conservation Development provides for flexible siting of buildings on a parcel of land in order to preserve at least 50% of the parcel as meaningful open space and minimize the visual and environmental impacts of residential development.
- Be vigilant in enforcing regulations that protect wetlands and waterway buffers.
- Forge effective working partnerships with non-profit land trusts, where possible offering them municipal assistance with their land conservation work such as funding projects, mapping and legal work.
- Support municipal land trusts’ ability to operate effectively and independent of political influence to protect the community’s special places and priorities identified in the community comprehensive plan.
- Work with water suppliers to develop and implement effective water conservation policies and incentives.
- Consider incentives or requirements for property owners to manage storm water on site and use drought-tolerant landscaping.

¹ Annual Report, FY 2009, RIDEM Land Conservation & Acquisition Program
² Narragansett Bay Watershed Counts (www.watersheadcounts.org)
³ Rhode Islanders Support Open Space, information publication by The Nature Conservancy et al.
⁵ Water for Rhode Island: Today and Tomorrow, Environment Council of Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Water Resources Board
Investing responsibly in our state’s transportation infrastructure — including a 21st century mass transit system — is increasingly seen by civic and business leaders as essential to Rhode Island’s economic recovery and future prosperity.

Smart growth strategies create transportation systems that better serve more people while fostering economic vitality for both businesses and communities. These strategies include creating transit options like Rhode Island’s new Interlink, connecting T.F. Green Airport with MBTA Commuter Rail, RIPTA and I-95 and which is now giving rise to the economic redevelopment of the Warwick Station Development District. They also include investing in a first class transit system, including buses, trolleys and streetcars which accommodate more travelers in the same space and create better options for getting between home, jobs and stores.

People want more transportation choices, whether it’s to save money on gas, to get into shape by walking or biking to their destinations, or to have a more relaxing commute. Communities can provide these choices by designing roadways that make it easier for residents and visitors to drive, walk, bike, or take transit.

Smart growth transportation strategies help families, too. The average American family spends more than 50% of their household budget on housing and transportation costs combined. Smart growth transportation strategies help reduce that cost and help families to prosper.

Like most states however, Rhode Island’s transportation funding mechanism has long been unsustainable and inadequate to properly maintain existing infrastructure and to operate a user friendly public transit system. At the urging of Grow Smart and others, some steps were taken in 2011 to reduce our reliance on borrowing to raise the State match needed for Federal investment in roads and bridges, but the still unfunded transportation liability in Rhode Island is staggering. Decades of deferred maintenance on our highways and bridges has resulted in alarming deterioration and ultimately higher costs.

Making better use of Rhode Island’s rail lines and port facilities would also ease congestion, reduce road maintenance costs and air pollution while providing a more economical and competitive option for moving freight.

A transportation system dominated by single occupancy automobile travel is no longer viable — or competitive. The health, safety, and economic well-being of our citizens depend on the development of an economically and environmentally sustainable transportation system.

“Transportation only works when it works as a system.”
— Michael P. Lewis, RIDOT Director
Key Facts

• More than 77% of Rhode Islanders live within a 5 minute walk (1/2 mi.) of a RIPTA bus stop.¹
• RIPTA ridership has increased 11% between July 2011 and July 2012.
• The average annual cost to own and operate a car is nearly $9,000, including maintenance, insurance, depreciation and gasoline.² The annual cost of an unlimited monthly pass on RIPTA is $744.³
• The age of our infrastructure and deferred maintenance has resulted in Rhode Island having the worst record for bridge deficiencies of any state in the nation.⁴
• While State leaders took steps in 2011 to reduce future borrowing and mounting debt service for road and bridge repair, no steps have yet been taken to implement an adequate, long-range and sustainable funding mechanism to sustain our state’s transportation infrastructure, including public transportation.
• Operational and financial audits have shown that RIPTA ranks among the highest in its peer group.⁵

Policy Recommendations

At the State Level

• Amend the Transportation Investment and Debt Reduction Act of 2011 to include new dedicated funding sources for public transportation.
• Prioritize implementation of RIPTA’s 5-Year Strategic Plan for improving transit service in Rhode Island.
• Provide meaningful incentives for employees (including state employees) to utilize public transit and disincentives to commute alone.
• Build on the recently passed Complete Streets Act by adopting the ITE/CNU 2010 Context Sensitive Manual for Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares as the standard recommended practice of RIDOT to create more walk and bike friendly communities.
• Protect emergency responders, bicyclists and pedestrians by passing the Vulnerable Road Users Act.

At the Municipal Level

• Modify local Comprehensive Plans and corresponding regulations to encourage compact, transit-supportive development near bus and rail stops.
• Pursue opportunities to improve the safety of children walking and biking to school through the 100% federally-funded Safe Routes to School Program.
• Adopt a “complete streets” design approach to local road improvement projects, making them safer for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users.

At the Federal Level

• Build upon what was largely an extension of the 2005 Highway Act (MAP-21) passed in July 2011 and that extends to September 2014 and begin working on a replacement bill that adequately addresses the needs of 21st century America by investing more aggressively in our aging infrastructure, mass transit and walkable, bikeable communities.
• Include as a priority the important role that mass transit plays in expanding economic development, community revitalization, healthier lifestyles and the efficient use of resources.
• Reinstate funding for walkable and bikable community programs removed from the newly passed Federal Transportation Funding bill.

¹ Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority (RIPTA)
² Your Driving Cost Study, AAA, 2011
³ Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority (RIPTA) website
⁴ Rhode Island’s Transportation Future, Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Transportation Funding, December 2008
⁵ Abrams-Cherwony & Associates, Peer Group Review of RIPTA, April, 2007
Housing policies can have a major impact on economic growth, community and family stability and our ability to protect natural resources. Elected officials must address two critical questions:

- Where and how will future housing be located?
- What should the state and municipalities do to help ensure continued creation of rental and home ownership units with long-term affordability provisions?

Economic growth requires a workforce to meet a wide range of employment needs. Rhode Island’s high housing costs relative to wages hinders our state’s ability to attract and retain that workforce. The median household income in Rhode Island covers only 64% of the budget necessary to purchase a median priced home. Additionally, the foreclosure crisis hit Rhode Island hard, and many more Rhode Islanders who remain in their homes are cost-burdened and particularly vulnerable to job loss, reductions in income or escalations in mortgage rates.

The majority of the workers who fill low and moderate paying service industry jobs require rental housing. There is a severe shortage of affordable, safe and healthy rental housing for low and moderate income households — particularly families. The dislocation of hundreds of tenants living in foreclosed multi-family buildings has made the rental situation worse and reduced neighborhood property values and property tax revenue for municipalities.

The residential construction industry should be an economic engine for Rhode Island’s economy; but, unfortunately, it has almost ground to a halt. The affordable housing bond passed in 2007 accounted for nearly 60% of the value of residential construction and accounted for nearly $800 million in economic activity before expiring in 2011.

In recent decades, municipal zoning ordinances have created a sprawling pattern of residential development by requiring single family homes on increasingly large lots. Many municipalities do not permit multi-family housing or even duplexes in the majority of their residential zones. These policies have resulted in undeveloped land being consumed at a rapid rate and contributed to increased household costs during the recent housing boom. In order to contain overall household costs and to protect the environment, state and municipal policies should incentivize developers to locate future residential growth in and around city, town and village centers and to create compact residential and mixed-use neighborhoods with smaller lots and more multi-family buildings.

A new Strategic Housing Plan for Rhode Island is being developed under the Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant recently awarded to the State Planning Office and will help to outline a better path for our cities and towns — particularly outlying communities in need of well-sited housing close to the limited transit service available.

1 HousingWorksRI, Myths & Facts
2 HousingWorksRI, 2011 Fact Book
Key Facts

- Nearly 40% of Rhode Islanders rent their homes, but rents often exceed incomes. The annual wage needed to afford the average 2-bedroom apartment is $46,600, but Rhode Islanders average only $41,808.¹
- One in four renters in Rhode Island is paying 50% or more of their income for housing related expenses.²
- In 2010, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island was $1,165, an increase of $407, or 50 percent, from 2000 prices.³
- Rhode Islanders voted by a two to one margin to support the $50 million affordable housing bond in 2006.⁴ The bond issue was supported by a majority of voters in every city and town.
- In a 2010 poll of likely Rhode Island voters, 69% favored continued state funding for affordable housing.⁵

Policy Recommendations

At the State Level

- Work to implement the Strategic Housing Plan currently in development
- Identify and enact a permanent funding source to fund the Housing and Conservation Trust Fund.
- Restore the State Historic Preservation Tax Credit, which helped to fund 596 low and moderate income housing units between 2002 and 2009.
- Support the Housing Bond of $25 million on the November 2012 ballot for the creation of long-term affordable homes.
- Appropriate funds to support the mandate requiring Rhode Island Housing to continue funding the Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP). NOP was the first Rhode Island program established to provide funds to address the housing needs of low and moderate income Rhode Islanders and is a key tool in the state’s effort to combat homelessness.

At the Municipal Level

- Work to implement the Strategic Housing Plan currently in development
- Review annually Local Comprehensive Plan low and moderate income housing creation strategies to evaluate their effectiveness and determine whether changes are necessary.
- Establish an Affordable Housing Commission to identify affordable housing opportunities and promote affordable housing in the municipality.
- Grant reasonable variances to allow re-development of existing abandoned or under-utilized structures for affordable housing.
- Review and retool zoning and subdivision regulations to facilitate compact residential development appropriate to the municipality’s location, physical characteristics and current level of development.
- Adopt a Conservation Development Ordinance to allow developers more flexibility in subdivision of land and determination of residential lot sizes.

¹ HousingWorksRI, 2011 Fact Book.
² HousingWorksRI, Issue Brief: Rental Housing in Rhode Island, February 2012
³ HousingWorksRI, 2011 Fact Book.
The state’s agricultural sector is expanding — in numbers of farms, numbers of farmers, total acreage and revenues.

Heightened consumer awareness about where food comes from, how it is raised and processed and the environmental costs of shipping food thousands of miles has increased demand for locally grown foods. Rhode Island’s small family-owned farms, located close to — and sometimes in — urban areas, are uniquely positioned to take advantage of that trend. So, too, are local fisheries. And, since agriculture is one component of a larger food system that includes not only production but also processing, distribution, retail and resource recovery, we have an opportunity to expand not only agricultural production but also other local food system businesses. By doing so, we can keep more of our food dollars in the state and the New England region, bolstering our state and regional economies.

To develop sound policies to support agricultural growth and sustain Rhode Island’s family farms, state and municipal policy-makers and voters must understand the risks and challenges inherent in the business of farming.

- First, agriculture requires land. In 2010, the average cost of farmland in RI was $13,600 per acre — the highest in the country. Furthermore, many Rhode Island farms are located in Newport and Washington Counties, some of the areas most in demand for residential development. When a farm goes on the market, due to a farmer’s death or retirement, its price is usually unaffordable for beginning farmers seeking land or for existing farmers seeking to expand. Instead, farm properties are most often sold for residential development. It is critical that we identify cost-effective ways to ensure that working farmland remains in operation and that we identify effective mechanisms to link farmers who need land with farm families who can no longer farm their land.

- The spread of residential development into previously agricultural areas often leads to tensions between farmers and neighboring homeowners. Even though Rhode Island has a strong right to farm law, new residents’ objections to the noise, dust, and smells that are part of agriculture can cause problems for farmers. And, while many municipalities want to maintain agriculture, they do not have strong farm-supportive language in their local comprehensive plans. Zoning ordinances often do not clearly spell out the agricultural activities permitted by right or by special use. Zoning is particularly out of date when it comes to new entrepreneurial efforts by farmers to realize revenue from their farms — ranging from expanded farm stands to agritourism.

- Farming is a high-risk business with low profit margins. State and local policies such as property taxes and some health regulations can unnecessarily escalate farming costs.
**Key Facts**

- In 2007, Rhode Island ranked third in direct marketing sales on a per farm basis with direct market sales up nearly 50% since 2002.
- In 2007, Rhode Island farmers produced $65.9 million in revenue from sale of agricultural products, up 19% from 2002.
- The number of farms in Rhode Island increased by 42% between 2002 and 2007 — the sharpest increase in New England and 10 times more than the national average.
- Rhode Island farms provide full or part-time employment for approximately 1,800 farm operators plus many full and part-time farm workers. Many more Rhode Islanders are employed by markets, restaurants, produce distributors, and other businesses related to local agriculture.¹
- As of August 1, 2012, twenty-eight farms are on the waiting list and six more applications are pending for purchase of development rights by the Rhode Island Agricultural Lands Protection Program.²

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**Policy Recommendations**

### At the State Level

- Support the 2012 Environmental Management Bond (Question 6), allocating funds for local recreation and open space grants, the protection of farmland and open space and restoration of the Narragansett Bay Watershed.
- Implement the recommendations for state action contained in the 5-Year Strategic Plan for Agriculture. Incorporate relevant portions of the 5-Year Strategic Plan into appropriate Rhode Island State Guide Plan elements.
- Determine the most effective mechanism for easing the estate-tax burden for farm families to avoid the next generation’s having to sell all or parts of their farms to cover taxes.
- Support Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act reforms which would provide for a reassessment and possible recalibration of rates to respond to current economic conditions and re-activate the Act’s Review Committee.
- Provide state funding for the Agricultural Extension program and Seafood Program within the URI College of The Environment and Life Sciences.

### At the Municipal Level

- Amend or update Local Comprehensive Plans to include a clear statement of the importance of agriculture to the local economy, natural resource protection and community livability.
- Provide for appropriate scales of agriculture in Local Comprehensive Plans, ordinances, and regulation. Address the specific needs of farmers within municipal ordinances.
- Review planning and zoning and municipal policies to ensure that they are farm-friendly and support the long term economic viability of working farms. Ensure that farmers have a voice in local planning.
- Consider establishing a Transfer of Development Rights Program.
- Partner with municipal and non-profit land trusts and the state Agricultural Land Preservation Commission to contact farmers and encourage them to protect their working farmland.
- When farmland development rights are purchased, craft easements that provide the flexibility farms need to adapt to new opportunities, technologies and changing market conditions.
- Lease suitable municipal properties for long term agricultural production.

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¹ USDA Census of Agriculture
² Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Examples of well-designed smart growth developments and plans can be found in a number of Rhode Island communities. Here are eight examples that were recognized as outstanding at Grow Smart’s 2012 Power of Place Summit. Go to www.growsmartri.org to view additional case studies.

**Hope Artiste Village, Pawtucket**
Made possible by State Historic Tax Credits, Hope Artiste Village fosters collaboration and innovation among a diverse community of creative professionals. Located on a major bus line and with easy access to I-95, the once-vacant mill complex is now home to nearly 100 commercial tenants including a dynamic mix of art studios, live/work lofts, retail shops, light industrial workshops and professional office suites. This thriving space boasts a coffee shop, music venue, theater, fitness studios, event spaces, the Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame and a bustling winter farmer’s market.

**Moran Shipping Agencies Corporate Headquarters, Providence**
Established in 1937, Moran Shipping Agencies is a family-owned company that maintained its corporate headquarters in Rhode Island. By 2006, anticipating a need for more space, the company rehabilitated the former Rhode Island Medical Society building on Francis Street in downtown Providence as its new corporate headquarters. Assisted by Federal and State Historic Tax Credits, Moran preserved the landmark historic building and created an energy efficient, sustainable and healthy work environment for its employees.

**Sandywoods Farm, Tiverton**
Developed on an agricultural parcel in northeast Tiverton, the Church Community Housing Corporation project used conservation development zoning to protect working farmland while providing 50 units of rental housing for low and moderate income households. It also incorporates facilities that benefit the town as a whole: a community garden and orchard, an incubator commercial kitchen, meeting room/performance center, gallery and shared studio space and a wind turbine providing alternative energy.

**Stillwater Mill, Burrillville**
In 2006, the town of Burrillville received a $500,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to kick-start the redevelopment of the vacant Stillwater Mill Complex in the heart of Harrisville Village. The goals of the multi-phase redevelopment project were to preserve the best of the original mill buildings and re-purpose the site into a live/work complex linked by a common road system, shared parking and a pedestrian circulation system. Today the completed project includes 47 mixed-income apartments, two office suites and a new 25,000 square-foot library.

**The Mercantile Block, Providence**
In 2010, the 25-year-old arts collective AS220 undertook the conversion of a 50,000 SF historic commercial building, The Mercantile Block, on Washington Street in Downtown Providence. Assisted by Federal and State Historic Tax Credits and affordable housing subsidies, the project created 22 units of affordable apartments for artists, 11 work studios and 10,000 SF of retail space. The Mercantile Block is now a place where artists live, work and collaborate. Especially noteworthy is the transformation of the block’s back alley into a vibrant pedestrian way that animates the neighborhood and enhances safety.
Outstanding Smart Growth Policies & Plans

Aquidneck Island Transportation Study
The Aquidneck Island Transportation Study, completed in 2011, is a comprehensive multi-modal transportation master plan that effectively integrates regional transportation and land-use planning. Developed through an inclusive public process, the plan encompasses all transportation modes (pedestrian/bike, auto, transit, ferry and rail) and recommends intermodal connection improvements consistent with sound land use planning.

Pawtucket Downtown Design Plan
The Pawtucket Downtown Design Plan — a collaborative undertaking that included the city, Statewide Planning, RIPTA, RIDOT and numerous downtown stakeholders — exemplifies the power of public-private partnerships to effect significant change. The study included a revised downtown zoning code, a matrix of capital infrastructure projects and an innovative parking management strategy that integrates transportation, land use and riverfront development.

Town of North Kingstown / Quonset Development Corporation Agreement
The Town of North Kingstown/Quonset Development Corporation Agreement is a model of smart growth collaboration between two agencies that, for many years, operated at odds with one another. In just over a year, the Town and the QDC forged binding agreements and leveraged millions of dollars of investment at levels that would typically require over a decade of negotiation. Massive reforms to the North Kingstown Local Comprehensive Plan and the land use regulations for both the Town and QDC created a unified approach to developing QDC land as well as an agreement for shared infrastructure that will unlock the mixed-use redevelopment potential of the Post Road Corridor.

Warwick Station Development District Plan
The vision of the Master Plan for the Warwick Station Development District is to transform the 95 acres surrounding T.F. Green Airport and the InterLink intermodal transportation facility into a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented “growth center” taking full advantage of the district’s many assets. The Master Plan creates a framework to accommodate 1.5 million SF of ground-floor retail, office and mixed-income housing. The plan and accompanying zoning ordinances are designed to leverage the existing public investment in expanded commuter rail with the development of a sustainable and attractive live/work environment that generates new economic activity, jobs and an improved quality of place.
Revitalized Urban & Town Centers
For further information from Grow Smart, contact: John Flaherty, Director of Research and Communications
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Natural Resource Protection
For further information from Grow Smart, contact: Sheila Brush, Director of Programs
273-5711 x3  sbrush@growsmartri.org

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Rhode Island State Building Rehab Code

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For further information from Grow Smart, contact: John Flaherty, Director of Research and Communications
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RI Senate Study Commission on Sustainable Transportation Funding

Transport 2020 Coalition website
Rhode Island Safe Routes to School Program
Transportation for America website
National Complete Streets Coalition website

Housing Options and Affordability
For further information from Grow Smart, contact Scott Wolf, Executive Director
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For further information from Grow Smart, contact Sheila Brush, Director of Programs
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