2014 Briefing Book for Candidates and Voters

Grow Smart RI
Sustainable Economic Growth & Quality of Place
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Dear Candidates and Voters:

We are pleased to provide you with Grow Smart Rhode Island’s 2014 Briefing Book for Candidates and Voters.

Despite Rhode Island’s continued serious economic challenges, we are convinced that our state has tremendous untapped potential – and that our best days can and should still be ahead of us. We know that this belief runs counter to the knee jerk negativity that dominates much of the conventional political and media wisdom in our state today. While some chose to moan and groan with a laser like focus on our weaknesses and mistakes – both real and imagined – we’re offering a comprehensive, positive policy reform agenda designed to capitalize on Rhode Island’s many underutilized and underappreciated strengths.

In publishing this, our 7th Briefing Book we intend to send a clear message that a sense of urgency about the economic problems we face is warranted and a critical ingredient for solving them, but that a sense of hopelessness and desperation about these problems is both unwarranted and counterproductive. In fact, we believe strongly that the dialogue about Rhode Island’s future needs more balance, and more connection to reality. We intend to push the dialogue hard in this direction.

This Briefing Book is designed to be both ambitious and practical. It focuses on 4 broad policy topics on which we believe government and its private/non-profit partners should concentrate in order to move beyond damage control and accelerate Rhode Island’s economic, environmental and social progress. We highlight policies, partnerships and projects that are already working to move RI forward, as well as those that have the potential to do the same.

The book also offers many recommendations for specific policies that can be adopted and implemented at both the state and local levels.

We hope candidates find the recommendations useful as they formulate policy positions and that voters make use of the recommendations when communicating with 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 strengths in order to provide more economic opportunity for all.

Sincerely,

Scott Wolf, Executive Director
Grow Smart RI
Since 1998, Grow Smart RI has provided statewide leadership for diverse public and private interests seeking sustainable and equitable economic growth.

We promote such growth by advocating for compact development in revitalized urban, town, and village centers balanced with responsible stewardship of our region’s natural assets - farmland, forests, the coastline, and the Bay.

We inform leaders, decision makers, and concerned citizens about the many benefits of compact development and asset stewardship and provide research and training on proven smart growth strategies.

We convene broad coalitions that advocate policy reforms and specific projects designed to build communities where all people and businesses can thrive.
When Grow Smart RI’s Vision for Rhode Island is realized, we will have

• valued, maintained, and invested in our diverse built and natural assets in order to strengthen our economy and provide all Rhode Islanders with the opportunity to live healthy and productive lives in a state with an outstanding urban/rural balance.

• revitalized our city, town, and village centers, incorporating historic rehabilitation and complementary new construction, walkable streets, parks, and recreational areas, to make these compact centers thriving places to live and visit, work and establish businesses.

• generated a broad range of attractive, healthy, and affordable housing choices that give all Rhode Islanders the chance to live close to where they work.

• conserved our natural resources, including farmlands, forests, and our incomparable Narragansett Bay, and strengthened farming, forestry and our marine industries.

• established an efficient and integrated transportation system that enables Rhode Islanders to get to jobs, schools, services, and recreational areas easily and affordably while reducing automobile dependence.

Rhode Islanders will have renewed pride in our beautiful state, renewed confidence in its future, and feel empowered to continue taking the bold action necessary to unleash its full potential.
Grow Smart supports economic development policies that recognize and capitalize on our state’s assets and that produce sustainable growth. We can never compete for business that requires hundreds of acres of undeveloped land. What we can and should do is support our existing businesses and seek out entrepreneurs and companies that value what we have to offer – energy efficient development patterns, easily accessible airports and seaports, historic buildings and neighborhoods with redevelopment opportunities, and abundant natural resources.

We also need to work with business to ensure that we grow sustainably – in other words, we need to expand the economy without damaging the resources and community vibrancy that future generations will need for their own economic prosperity. State and municipal officials must take the lead in revising policies to incentivize growth in compact, mixed-use centers and discourage haphazard development that destroys farm and forestland.

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

Sources:
1. RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
2. Survey of U.S. State Tourism Budgets, U.S. Travel Association
3. Quonset Development Corporation

For a more expansive list of research sources, visit www.GrowSmartRI.org
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.

**At the State Level**

**Implementation of New Economic Development Plan**: Move quickly to implement the recommendations contained in Rhode Map RI, the state’s new economic development plan that will be completed this fall.

**Historic Tax Credit**: Provide multi-year funding for the State Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit, allowing developers to plan on the future availability of credits and jumpstarting our lagging construction industry.

**Tourism**: Increase the state’s tourism promotion budget substantially, enabling us to be competitive with neighboring states.

**Marine Infrastructure**: Prioritize the marine infrastructure improvements needed to capitalize on our natural deep-water port in Providence and on port facilities at Quonset.

**At the Municipal Level**

**Permit streamlining**: Identify appropriate areas for business growth and encourage business development in those areas by streamlining permitting.

**Zoning**: Adopt zoning policies that address the need for workforce housing and locate new housing growth where residents will have access to transportation and community services.

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**Smart Growth on the Ground: 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.
Rhode Island’s towns and cities have historically been centers of rich urban life, arts, and prosperity. It’s not hard to find evidence in these communities of R.I.’s vibrant past. Out-of-use storefronts and Main Streets in transition throughout our state tell the story of the rise, fall and now the re-birth of our urban and town centers and offer a reminder of the prosperity our state has the potential to reclaim. Our cities and towns already have many of the ingredients they need to flourish, but they require coordinated investments based on public and private partnerships to nurture and capitalize upon them.

We’ve seen success stories in Providence, Pawtucket, the Harrisville section of Burrillville, Westerly and others that demonstrate how reinvesting in city and town centers can create jobs, increase tax revenues, expand existing businesses and attract new ones. Revitalizing projects bring new life to old town centers in many ways:

1. Attract new businesses and young professionals
2. Take full advantage of existing infrastructure
3. Turn community liabilities into assets
4. Create places where people and business want to be
5. Return vacant and underutilized properties back to municipal tax rolls
6. Reduce development pressure on farmland and open space

There is mounting evidence from organizations as diverse as the National Association of Realtors and Smart Growth America that people are increasingly being drawn back to live in more traditional and walkable neighborhoods that offer convenience and efficient access to all of life’s essentials.

The continued revitalization of our centers and corridors, while challenging, is an economic and environmental imperative essential to Rhode Island’s future prosperity and will require public sector leadership that facilitates partnerships with the private and non-profit sector.

Sources:
1. Architectural Digest, June 2014
2. 2013 National Community Preference Survey, National Association of REALTORS

For a more expansive list of research sources, visit www.GrowSmartRI.org
As America’s oldest indoor shopping mall, the Arcade has particular historical and economic value for downtown Providence. Developer Evan Granoff undertook a bold adaptive reuse project that combined careful preservation of the National Historic Landmark’s early 19th century architectural details with a 21st century residential concept. The Arcade now features retail shops and restaurants on the first floor and 48 micro-lofts on the upper floors. The project, designed by Northeast Collaborative Architects, demonstrates that a historically significant building can be repurposed to accommodate the demands for live, work, and play opportunities in urban areas.

At the State Level

**Targeted Public Investment:** Target and prioritize discretionary state investments to locally designated and state approved “growth/activity centers” such as a new state-funded and executed water and wastewater infrastructure program and incentive policies such as the MicroZone Economic Revitalization Act of 2014 or a reformed Enterprise Zone program.

**Technical Assistance:** Work with Commerce RI, the Division of Planning and other partners to develop a technical assistance program for municipalities seeking to pursue downtown development and redevelopment projects, through such tools as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), New Markets Tax Credits, and municipal tax stabilization agreements.

At the Municipal Level

**Planning:** Develop and execute plans and zoning reforms for revitalizing mixed-use “growth center”/“activity center” districts. Through such techniques as installation of green infrastructure, ensure that these plans address sea level rise and other impacts of climate change.

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**Smart Growth on the Ground:**

**The Arcade, Providence**

As America’s oldest indoor shopping mall, the Arcade has particular historical and economic value for downtown Providence. Developer Evan Granoff undertook a bold adaptive reuse project that combined careful preservation of the National Historic Landmark’s early 19th century architectural details with a 21st century residential concept. The Arcade now features retail shops and restaurants on the first floor and 48 micro-lofts on the upper floors. The project, designed by Northeast Collaborative Architects, demonstrates that a historically significant building can be repurposed to accommodate the demands for live, work, and play opportunities in urban areas.
A 2014 poll of 402 likely Rhode Island voters revealed that 76% believe that making roads safer for drivers, riders and pedestrians is important. 1

One of the most crucial components of a healthy economy and quality of place is a sound transportation system: one that supports diverse modes of travel and seamlessly connects Rhode Island to the rest of the world – and Rhode Islanders, more meaningfully to each other and to economic opportunity.

Our state’s residents clearly want to enjoy the benefits of transportation choice, whether it’s saving money on gas and parking, getting into shape by walking or biking more, or having a less stressful commute. The average American family spends more than 50% of their household budget on housing and transportation costs combined.

Throughout the Northeast the environmental costs of the current auto dominated transportation sector are high. This sector in the Northeast is the single largest and fastest growing contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and also a major contributor to increased impervious surfaces that worsen water pollution.

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 our ability to adapt to the transportation needs of a 21st century economy. Improving and diversifying transportation options – including more walkable and bikeable communities - creates economic opportunity, makes roads safer, and reduces traffic congestion.

Nationally and in Rhode Island the use of transit is on the rise, particularly among the younger millennial generation who are about to dominate the workforce. The metropolitan areas that are attracting and retaining this generation of workers are the ones that are thriving, while those that don’t continue to lose ground.

Throughout the country, centers of transportation have long been catalysts for economic growth and innovation. And in Rhode Island, given our strategic geographic location, and our compact development patterns, our transportation system has emerged as a key asset upon which to build.

Sources:
1. RI Statewide Poll conducted August 21-25, 2014 by Fleming & Associates
2. Your Driving Costs, AAA, 2014
3. Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, 2012

For a more expansive list of research sources, visit www.GrowSmartRI.org

The annual cost of owning and operating a car ($8,876) is more than 10x the annual cost of a RIPTA unlimited ride pass ($744). 2

More than 77% of Rhode Islanders live within a 5 minute walk (1/2 mi) of a RIPTA bus stop. 3
The Aquidneck Island Transportation Study is a multi-modal plan that integrates regional transportation and land-use planning. The plan aims to improve mobility, transportation choice and safety while enhancing economic opportunity and environmental protection. The plan includes 25 major short, mid and long-term improvements to pedestrian/bike, auto, transit, ferry and rail systems. Many of the recommendations have been incorporated into municipal and state capital improvement plans.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**At the State Level**

**Funding:** Fine-tune the 2014 funding transit reform policy to further stabilize RIPTA’s revenue and avoid service disruption.

**Transit Infrastructure:** Advocate passage and swift implementation of the Mass Transit Hubs Infrastructure Bond to fund transit enhancements and renovations benefitting the whole state by improving mobility and access to job centers.

**Incentives:** Build on RIPTA’s strong ridership increases by implementing RIGL 36-6-21 that would result in offering a transit incentive to the state’s 14,500 employees as an alternative to free paid parking.

**At the Municipal Level**

**Road Design:** Pursue more walkable/bikeable design elements (“complete streets”) when roads are being repaired or renovated.

**Green Infrastructure:** Encourage/advocate for use of green infrastructure strategies to mitigate and reduce harmful and costly effects of increasing stormwater run-off.

**Smart Growth on the Ground:**

**The Aquidneck Island Transportation Plan**

The Aquidneck Island Transportation Study is a multi-modal plan that integrates regional transportation and land-use planning. The plan aims to improve mobility, transportation choice and safety while enhancing economic opportunity and environmental protection. The plan includes 25 major short, mid and long-term improvements to pedestrian/bike, auto, transit, ferry and rail systems. Many of the recommendations have been incorporated into municipal and state capital improvement plans.
A strong local food system is characterized by successful and environmentally responsible farms, commercial fishing operations and food-related businesses and by adequately funded and effective food assistance and food distribution programs that enable everyone to count on three square meals a day. Through policy and budgetary decisions, state and local elected leaders can have a huge impact on the overall strength of Rhode Island’s entire food system and thereby help to strengthen our state’s economy, improve public health and create a healthy environment.

The Rhode Island agricultural sector is growing – in numbers of farms, numbers of farmers, total acreage, revenue and product diversity. Consumer demand for local food has not only supported the expansion of agriculture but is stimulating start-ups and expansion in food and beverage processing and manufacturing, food distribution and retail businesses, and food “waste” recycling.

Continued growth is not, however, guaranteed. Farming, fishing and other food system businesses are high-risk endeavors with low profit margins. State and municipal leaders need to adopt appropriate policies to address the challenges unique to food-sector businesses:

- The high cost of farmland, which makes land unaffordable for beginning or small farmers. Too often, farms that go up for sale are converted to residential or commercial development.
- Tension with neighboring homeowners who object to the noise, dust, and smells that are part of agriculture.
- Food safety regulations, which are critical to protect public health and the reputation of our locally produced foods, but which must be administered effectively to avoid unnecessary costs and time delays for businesses.
- The need for training and workforce development to address gaps in the food sector workforce and provide upward mobility for entry level workers.

15.4% of Rhode Island households lack the means to purchase adequate food. This is the highest level of food insecurity in New England. State and municipal elected officials, partnering with private entities, must develop a coordinated, multi-pronged approach to ensure that Rhode Islanders are well-nourished and to reduce the chronic diseases that result from poor diets.

Sources:
3. URI SNAP Outreach Project

For a more expansive list of research sources, visit www.GrowSmartRI.org
The Providence Community Garden Network, a project of the Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT), has transformed six acres of vacant urban land into a network of 43 gardens where more than 300 families grow, eat and sell healthy food. SCLT network gardens are located in walkable, urban neighborhoods with compact built environments and transportation alternatives. The gardens affordably repurpose vacant land, create new and significant neighborhood amenities, provide public open space and support healthy lifestyles.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

At the State Level

Business Ecosystem: Create a supportive business “ecosystem” that provides workforce training and development, access to capital and business planning resources tailored to the needs of agriculture and food processing, distribution and retail businesses.

LASA Grants: Establish a sustainable funding stream for the Local Agriculture and Seafood Act grants.

Farmland Protection: Identify and protect land for agriculture in urban, suburban and rural communities and link new/beginning farmers with available land.

Food Safety Regulations: For regulations pertaining to food production, processing and sales, charge reasonable regulatory fees, streamline regulatory administration, make guidance part of the regulatory process and provide sufficient staff to ensure timely inspections.

Nutrition Incentive Program: Establish a sustainable state funding stream for a statewide Farmer’s Market Nutrition Incentive Program to encourage consumption of more fresh food in low-income communities and boost direct sales of local food from Rhode Island producers.

Food residuals recycling: Streamline the environmental and business regulatory process to ensure appropriate regulations relative to size of operation, and provide planning guidance to municipalities related to zoning and permitting of food recycling businesses.

Inter-State Cooperation: Work closely with other New England states to advance regional agriculture and the regional food system and to ensure that federal policies address the needs of New England's fishing fleets and small, diverse farms.

At the Municipal Level

Local Planning: Include strong farm-supportive language in municipal comprehensive plans and enact zoning ordinances that clearly delineate permitted agricultural activities and, where appropriate, provide for auxiliary activities.
The former Rau Fastener complex, embedded within a primarily residential area of Providence’s West End, consisted of several 19th century mill buildings and additions, parking lots and outlying parcels. Neglected for decades, the facility finally closed in the early 1990s, leaving the neighborhood with a blighted brownfield property that attracted prostitution and drug dealing. West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation’s complicated two-phase redevelopment project converted the property from blight to a neighborhood asset. The mixed-use project utilized state and federal Historic Tax Credits and created 16 market rate and affordable living units and 5,000 square feet of commercial office space.

Hope Artiste Village - Pawtucket
Hope Artiste Village, one of Rhode Island’s largest successful mill rehabilitation projects made possible by the State Historic Tax Credit, fosters collaboration and innovation among a diverse community of creative professionals. Located in Pawtucket 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 mill space boasts a coffee shop, music venue, theater, fitness studios, designers, artisans, event spaces, the Rhode Island Music Hall of fame and a bustling wintertime farmer’s market.

Sandywoods Farm - Tiverton
Sandywoods Farm demonstrates that with public-private collaboration and context-sensitive design, a mixed-use project can create affordable housing and other public amenities while protecting a community’s rural character. 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.

Westfield Commons and Lofts - Providence
The former Rau Fastener complex, embedded within a primarily residential area of Providence’s West End, consisted of several 19th century mill buildings and additions, parking lots and outlying parcels. Neglected for decades, the facility finally closed in the early 1990s, leaving the neighborhood with a blighted brownfield property that attracted prostitution and drug dealing. West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation’s complicated two-phase redevelopment project converted the property from blight to a neighborhood asset. The mixed-use project utilized state and federal Historic Tax Credits and created 16 market rate and affordable living units and 5,000 square feet of commercial office space.
Outstanding Plans

**Warwick Station Development District Plan**  
*Warwick -*  
The Master Plan for the Warwick Station Development District aims to transform the 95 acres surrounding T.F. Green Airport and the InterLink intermodal transportation facility into a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, “growth center”. 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.

**Woonsocket Main Street Livability Plan**  
*Woonsocket -*  
The Woonsocket Main Street Livability Plan, begun in 2012, outlines a plan to revitalize Main Street and make Downtown Woonsocket an inviting place to live, work and shop. The plan aims to leverage the city’s success with arts and entertainment and calls for policy changes in land use and zoning, streetscape improvements, creation of dedicated bikeways, improved pedestrian connections and reconfigured traffic patterns. The 209-page analysis was prepared by The Cecil Group and reflects a comprehensive approach to smart growth.

**South Kingstown Healthy Places by Design Action Plan**  
*South Kingstown -*  
In 2011, the RI Department of Health selected the Town of South Kingstown as a model community for its Healthy Places by Design grant program. The town partnered with the South County YMCA to involve local residents and stakeholders in identifying ways to improve policy regarding land use, transportation and urban design and healthy eating. A Healthy Places by Design Action Plan, including policy changes suggested by residents, was developed during a week-long community summit and approved by the Town Council in March, 2012. “Grass roots” groups have maintained the project’s positive momentum and involved new residents, business owners and interested parties.