May 21, 2015

The Honorable Raymond E. Gallison, Jr.
Chairperson, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Opposition to House Bills 5643, 5644, 5713, 6040, 6041, 6042, 6043

Dear Chairperson Gallison:

I am writing on behalf of Grow Smart Rhode Island to voice our deep concern about House Bills 5643, 5644, 5713, 6040, 6041, 6042 and 6043. These bills, individually and collectively, would erode our state planning system at a time when confronting our economic challenges cries out for a cohesive and comprehensive approach to planning. I would have attended the Finance Committee hearing to speak in person on this important issue if Grow Smart were not hosting 200 people at our annual Smart Growth Awards Program, which is scheduled for the same time as the hearing.

The State and its individual municipalities are refocusing and redoubling efforts to rebuild our economy. While there are many details yet to be worked out, the General Assembly, the Administration, municipal officials and the private sector are agreed that strengthening our economy calls for a multi-pronged approach that addresses our transportation system, energy, utility and water infrastructure, availability of appropriate sites for new commercial development and workforce housing. At the same time, there is wide recognition of the important role that natural areas, historic sites and Narragansett Bay play in making Rhode Island a desirable place to live, work, visit and locate businesses. For Rhode Island to thrive and retain its exceptional character we must coordinate the location of transportation systems, infrastructure and commercial and residential development and the conservation of our natural resources, both within communities and across municipal borders.

The General Assembly’s creation of the Statewide Planning Program and passage of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act established a land use planning system that received national recognition for its visionary approach. It provides for state-local collaboration to establish a long-term, coordinated state vision and goals that guide state agencies. It places responsibility for planning and zoning decisions with individual municipalities, while encouraging municipalities to align their local comprehensive plans with the broad state vision and goals.

We urge you and the members of the Finance Committee not to weaken this system just when Rhode Island and its municipalities are making critical decisions about the future of our economy and our environment, decisions that must be informed by good planning to produce positive outcomes.

Sincerely,

Scott Wolf
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Nicholas A. Mattiello, Speaker of the House