GROW SMART RI
Sustainable Economic Growth & Quality of Place

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To those who believe in Rhode Island and think it can do much better:

I’m a passionate and impatient Rhode Islander, a native who boomeranged back here after experiencing much of the rest of the country.

That’s why I’m honored to be part of the smart growth movement to revitalize our local city and town centers while protecting our natural assets, like Narragansett Bay and our 1,200 farms. Like you, I want to have the choice to live, work, and play in an outstanding community, one that is user-friendly and rich in opportunities for all.

While Rhode Island’s distinctive beauty and funky charm are undeniable, we all know there’s plenty of work to be done here to expand economic opportunity and community vibrancy. Fortunately, the possibility for achieving this progress is very real.

To move Rhode Island forward vigorously, Grow Smart RI is working relentlessly to strengthen our state’s economy and neighborhoods, along with our transportation and food systems. Our challenge, and our opportunity, is to systematically capitalize on the untapped strengths of all four to help Rhode Island become a high economic achiever that fully retains its soul and character.

We all have a choice. We can act now and work together to unleash Rhode Island’s economic potential, focusing on such undeniable assets as our world-renowned collection of historic buildings and neighborhoods, our strategically positioned ports and natural harbors, our superb urban/rural balance, and our easy access to magnificent natural resources and environmental treasures. Or we can endlessly obsess about our weaknesses, real and imagined, while opportunities for advancement pass us by. For Grow Smart RI, the choice is clear.

With the right collaboration, can-do spirit and thoughtful policy reforms, we believe that Rhode Island’s best days are still to come.

Never have the stakes been higher for Grow Smart RI to lead a march forward with a thorough, well vetted game plan—not just for the growth and sustainability of our organization, but for the prosperity and enhanced quality of life for all Rhode Islanders.

With enough supporters rowing in the same direction, this five-year strategic plan can ensure that our policy advocacy, training, and government watchdogging make a big and positive difference in Rhode Island’s future. We invite you to explore where we’re headed and how we plan to get there, and then to join us in our effort to make Rhode Island a more vibrant and opportunity rich state.

Together, we can leave the skeptics in the dust and elevate Rhode Island back to where it should be and needs to be.

To getting it done,

Scott Wolf
Executive Director
What We Do

Grow Smart RI provides 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.

" build communities where all people and businesses can thrive. "

rhode island’s full potential.

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, 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, as well as strengthened farming, forestry, and 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.

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build communities where all people and businesses can thrive.
What We See

Once our 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, 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, as well as strengthened farming, forestry, and 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.

“unleash Rhode Island’s full potential.”
Contribute Grow Smart RI’s expertise to Rhode Island’s formulation and implementation of a dynamic and innovative plan for sustainable economic development

Desired results to be achieved in 5 years:

- Any new Rhode Island economic development plan incorporates strategies that capitalize on Rhode Island’s built and natural assets and align with smart growth principles.
- Public and private partners implement the Rhode Island Economic Development Plan.
- General Assembly maintains commitment to State Historic Tax Credit funding on a multiyear basis.
- State tourism budget is more competitive with budgets of neighboring states.
- State policies make effective use of Rhode Island’s marine infrastructure to support the marine sector’s contribution to economic expansion.
- State land use policies support state’s need for clean affordable energy.

Let’s do this:

- Participate in committees and contribute to and review materials associated with development and implementation of the Rhode Island Economic Development Plan, the “Make It Happen” campaign, and other strategic initiatives.
- Research/promote economic development strategies that capitalize on built and natural assets and have worked successfully in other states and in specific Rhode Island communities.
- Share information on promising economic development ideas with the executive and legislative branches and civic/business leaders.
- Co-lead advocacy effort to secure and maintain multiyear funding for State Historic Tax Credits.
- Monitor, analyze, and publicize results and benefits of State Historic Tax Credits.
- Advocate for increase in tourism budget through testimony, speeches to civic groups, and outreach to media.
- Play a role in promoting development and effective use of the state’s marine infrastructure.
- Play a role in promoting land use policies that support increased availability of clean affordable energy to Rhode Island businesses.
**Intensify** state and municipal efforts to direct growth to revitalized urban and town centers

**Desired results to be achieved in 5 years:**

- Increased municipal capacity to advance urban and town center revitalization.
- State and municipal adoption of incentives and regulatory reforms to encourage private investment in redevelopment and new development in urban, town, and village centers.
- New state enterprise zone program stimulates job growth in urban and town centers.
- Increase in volume of brownfields redevelopment.
- Adoption and implementation of state housing plan that is closely integrated with urban, town, and village center planning, as well as transportation planning.
- Municipalities revise local zoning to support diversified housing types and price options in urban and town centers to meet current and future demographic needs.
- Rhode Island state policies and programs continue to support the principle that every community in Rhode Island needs low- and moderate-income housing and support creation of additional units.
- State and municipal plans address the impacts of climate change on land use, including sea level rise and extreme weather conditions.

**Let’s do this:**

- Provide municipalities with information and training on planning procedures and urban/town center revitalization strategies.
- Work with Commerce RI, the Division of Planning, and other partners as appropriate to develop a technical assistance program for municipalities seeking to pursue downtown development and redevelopment projects.
- Advocate in support of proposed smart growth projects on behalf of communities and developers.
- Research strategies used effectively elsewhere to foster urban and town center revitalization and advocate for strategies suited to Rhode Island.
- Advocate for targeting discretionary state funding programs to locally designated and state approved “growth”/ “activity” centers.
- Overhaul the existing Enterprise Zone Program to create a more effective incentive program for job creation targeted to city and town centers.
- Advocate for state funding for brownfields redevelopment.
- Use workshops and other public education vehicles to promote municipal zoning revisions designed to expand housing types and affordability.
- Advocate for strong state support for low- and moderate-income housing via state funding and low/mod housing legislation.
- Use Grow Smart RI’s network and communications vehicles to promote planning to address the impact of climate change.
3. **Lead** the charge for a sustainably funded state and regional transportation system that provides all residents, visitors, and businesses with user-friendly transportation options

**Desired results to be achieved in 5 years:**

- Passage of legislation providing multiyear funding sustainability for RIPTA as well as for road repair and bridge maintenance. Ensure that RIPTA’s funding levels are sufficient to meet the growing demand for transit service consistent with RIPTA’s Five-Year Strategic Plan.
- Introduction of two new multimodal transit hubs in Providence to improve rider experience, support job growth, attract new riders, better integrate transit with commuter rail, and support revitalization of Kennedy Plaza as an economically vibrant public square.
- State government adoption of more aggressive transit benefits and options for 14,500 state employees.
- RIDOT and municipalities include elements of “complete streets” design in road repair and reconstruction projects, improving mobility and safety for all users.
- State achieves incremental milestones advancing the key passenger and freight rail goals outlined in the recently enacted State Rail Plan.
- Federal legislation is passed that supports clean, efficient transportation choices.
- Advance an economically catalytic Providence Streetcar project from drawing board to successful implementation.

**Let’s do this:**

- Continue to co-chair the statewide Coalition for Transportation Choices (CTC), the leading advocacy group influencing transportation policy decisions at the state and local levels.
- Through CTC, spearhead advocacy for transportation funding, particularly transit funding reform.
- Shape and influence the funding and development of alternate transit hubs.
- Support the City of Providence’s proposed Providence Streetcar project.
- Institutionalize “complete streets” in the regulations for the new Municipal Road and Bridge Revolving Loan Fund.
- Use workshops and other appropriate public education vehicles to promote local implementation of “complete streets” road design.
- Identify, track, and promote federal legislation and influence Rhode Island’s delegation to be leaders in supporting clean, efficient transportation choices.
**Strengthen Rhode Island’s agricultural sector and food system**

Desired results to be achieved in 5 years:

- Increase in amount of food produced locally and increase in local food as percentage of total food consumption in Rhode Island.
- Passage/adoption of federal and state legislation and regulations that support farm and fisheries viability and will help to strengthen Rhode Island’s food system.
- Municipal adoption of less restrictive local regulations pertaining to agriculture and ordinances and programs that support food processing, distribution, sale, and recycling.
- Increase in permanently protected acres of working agricultural land and increased capacity within state to link beginning/expanding farmers with available land.
- Expansion of urban agriculture and community gardening.
- Decrease in the number of Rhode Islanders who lack access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food.
- Local Agriculture and Seafood Act grants program receives multiyear funding from state and private funders.

**Let’s do this:**

- Use Grow Smart RI’s communications, Land Use Training Collaborative workshops, and other appropriate public education vehicles to build support for agriculture and fisheries, farmland protection, and a strengthened food system.
- Add Grow Smart RI’s organizational support to legislative advocacy efforts around agriculture and food systems.
- In cooperation with partners, complete analysis of municipal ordinances affecting agriculture and other food system components. Identify and research ordinances that support agriculture and food system components and are appropriate for Rhode Island municipalities.
- Continue to support and contribute RI Food Policy Council (RIFPC) and RI Agricultural Partnership (RIAP).
- Offer to serve on Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Advisory Committee responsible for implementing grants program and helping to identify private funding sources for the grants program.
**Enhance** Grow Smart RI’s organizational sustainability

**Desired results to be achieved in 5 years:**

- Stabilized organization’s financial position:
  - A positive balance in Liquid Unrestricted Net Assets no later than the end of 2016.
  - A cash reserve equivalent to 2 months’ operating expenses no later than the end of 2017.
- Increased annual revenue by 30%.
- Expanded staff and Board commitment and participation in development activities.
- Organization has sufficient resources to support robust staffing, implement strategic plan, and respond to promising opportunities.
- Board of Directors more closely reflects Rhode Island’s demographics in gender, ethnicity, age, and geographic diversity.
- Increased utilization of Board’s diverse expertise and skills.

**Let’s do this:**

- Recruit additional members to Development Committee and strengthen structure and scope.
- Annual adoption and implementation of a detailed and comprehensive Development Plan and calendar.
- Establish competitive staff salaries and benefits, including retirement benefits.
- Establish an endowment.
- Streamline content and delivery of information to Board.
- Develop a committee structure that encourages all Board members to contribute to the productivity of the organization and creates opportunities for non-Board members to become involved with Grow Smart RI.
- Succession and recruitment planning for staff and Board.
- Establish an evaluation program to measure implementation of strategic plan.
- Conduct annual performance reviews of Board and staff.
2 Increase Grow Smart RI’s organizational visibility and communications effectiveness

**Desired results to be achieved in 5 years:**

- Increased awareness of and support for Grow Smart RI and its mission, as well as smart growth principles on the part of state and municipal officials, civic and business leaders, and engaged citizens.
- Inclusion of smart growth principles in state and municipal campaign platforms.
- Publicly voiced support for smart growth principles and policy priorities by business and civic associations and individual business/civic leaders.
- Increased financial support for Grow Smart RI.
- Increased public interaction with Grow Smart RI via eBriefs, social media, and website.
- Increased free media coverage.

**Let’s do this:**

- Implement an annual communications plan and calendar that serves both policy and development needs.
- Publish 12 monthly eBriefs annually.
- Use social media effectively.
- Maintain a robust, relevant, and up-to-date website.
- Expand public relations and media outreach activity.
- Public outreach by staff and Board via community forums, conferences, and talks to community groups.
- Explore targeted paid media opportunities.
- Convene regular Power of Place Summits and Smart Growth Awards Programs.
- Communicate with candidates and newly elected officials via Candidates’ Briefing Books, meetings with gubernatorial candidates, and outreach to Governor-elect.