We have strengths
Now how do we unleash them?

“The greatest crime in the world is to not develop your potential. When you do what you do best, you are helping not only yourself, but the world.”

-Roger Williams, Founder of Rhode Island
A LETTER FROM SCOTT WOLF

October 1, 2016

Dear Candidates and Voters,

We are pleased to provide you with Grow Smart Rhode Island’s 2016 Briefing Book for Candidates and Voters.

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 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.

Over the last couple of years our state has turned some important corners. We have started to make smart economic investments that have helped reduce unemployment and spark additional development and redevelopment projects, many in our compact, centrally located neighborhoods. In the midst of this progress we are faced with a choice. We can continue to act together to unleash Rhode Island’s economic potential, focusing on such undeniable assets as our world-renowned collection of historic buildings and neighborhoods, our compact, energy efficient and transit friendly development patterns, 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 pass us by. For Grow Smart RI, the choice is clear.

In publishing this, our 8th Briefing Book, we intend to show that Rhode Island has made meaningful progress, that there is still much work to be done. We are convinced that our state has tremendous untapped potential — and that our best days can and should still be ahead of us. We’re offering a comprehensive, positive policy reform agenda designed to capitalize on Rhode Island’s many underutilized and underappreciated strengths.

Some of the keys to realizing our potential include the following:

• Helping our communities rediscover, reimagine and rebuild their downtowns and village centers, where so much of RI’s achievement and character were forged.
• Developing a comprehensive public transportation system for which we already have the right ‘bones’ in order to support a vibrant regional economy.
• Reducing the barriers to maintaining and expanding farming activity, a critical but fragile asset in such a heavily urbanized state.

This Briefing Book is designed to be both ambitious and practical. It focuses on 5 broad policy topics on which we believe government and its private/non-profit partners should work in collaboration to expand economic, environmental, and social progress. We highlight policies, partnerships and projects that are already working 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 while preserving our soul.

Sincerely,

Scott Wolf
Executive Director, Grow Smart RI

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COVER
Mosaic portrayal consisting of Rhode Island’s strengths — the people, the places, and projects and policies exemplifying smart growth principals. Images derived from our eShareCommunity campaign.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Scott Wolf

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Sincerely,

Scott Wolf
Executive Director, Grow Smart RI
Who We Are

Scott Wolf, Executive Director
John Flaherty, Deputy Director
Annette Bourne, Training Manager
Scott Millar, Manager, Community Technical Assistance
Victoria Picinich, Development Coordinator
Leslie Denomme, Executive Assistant for Finance
Dorothy Dauray, Office Assistant

Our Mission

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.

Learn more:

Sustainable Economic Growth
Scott Wolf | swolf@growsmartri.org

Strengthened Farms, Forests, and Food Systems
Scott Millar | smillar@growsmartri.org

Revitalized Urban and Town Centers & Expanded Transportation Choices
John Flaherty | jflaherty@growsmartri.org

Core Municipal Training & Affordable Housing
Annette Bourne | abourne@growsmartri.org

Our Vision

Grow Smart RI’s has an ambitious Vision for Rhode Island, one that fortunately is starting to be realized.

Our Vision’s key elements include:

- Valuing, maintaining, and investing 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.
- Revitalizing 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.
- Generating a broad range of attractive, healthy, and affordable housing choices that give all Rhode Islanders the chance to live close to where they work.
- Conserving our natural resources, including farmlands, forests, and our incomparable Narragansett Bay, and strengthening farming, forestry and our marine industries.
- Establishing 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.

We seek for all Rhode Islanders to have renewed pride in our beautiful state, renewed confidence in its future, and to feel empowered to continue taking the bold action necessary to unleash its full potential.
Grow Smart RI supports economic development policies that recognize and capitalize on our state’s assets and that produce sustainable growth. We need to be keenly aware of our competitive economic advantages and disadvantages to achieve this critical objective. We can seldom compete effectively with other states 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, user friendly airports and seaports, historic buildings and neighborhoods with major redevelopment opportunities, a strategic location along the Northeast Corridor and abundant, easily accessible natural resources.

These investments focus on strengthening our state’s existing infrastructure, and helping to rejuvenate our economy by incentivizing creation and growth of business and development projects throughout the state’s urban, town and village centers. To further utilize these assets the General Assembly also approved funding to improve a state-branded tourism marketing campaign, something that Grow Smart RI has been advocating so we can more effectively play to our strength as a beautiful, user-friendly and historically rich locale.

While we have supported many of the new sustainable economic initiatives enacted by the State under the leadership of the Raimondo Administration, we have challenged the Administration on one of their high profile economic initiatives, the subsidizing of infrastructure improvements for a forested suburban site selected by Citizens Bank as a consolidated office for its RI employees. We believe it is crucial that businesses 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 crafting policies to incentivize growth in compact, mixed-use centers and discourage haphazard development that destroys farm and forestland.

We also have raised some concerns with the Administration about the expectations, restrictions and evaluation mechanisms embedded in the Rebuild RI Tax Credit program. To the Administration’s credit, it responded with a proposal enacted by the General Assembly earlier this year that we hope will make it easier for the Rebuild RI Tax Credit program to be a significant redevelopment financial incentive and to work seamlessly in tandem with the Federal Historic Tax Credit. This is absolutely critical to maintain the momentum for historic rehab in RI because almost every historic rehab project in the state over the last 15 years has required the combination of these two incentives to be completed.

Since the publishing of our 2014 Briefing Book Rhode Island voters have approved the strongest set of investments in smart growth and community revitalization in Grow Smart Rhode Island’s 18 year history. The Governor and General Assembly followed these voter investments in 2015 with passage of an Economic Comeback Agenda, a series of policies and incentives encouraging (re)development in urban and transit friendly areas.

What are the benefits of tapping into our existing assets to unleash economic prosperity?

Preserving Open Space

13,478 ACRES

not consumed for residential development (area the of size of Providence) as a result of re-purposing vacant and underutilized historic buildings rehabbed using the State Historic Preservation Tax Credit.

Source: *RI Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit, based on State HTC Economic and Fiscal Impact Analysis, 2007

Tax Revenue

$72 M

in property value brought back to municipal tax rolls due to Brownfield revitalization projects completed in the 8-year period between 1995 and 2003 (the last year brownfield redevelopment impact on those values was tracked).

Source: *RIEDM, Brownfield Successes, April 2003

Port-Related Economic Growth

The Port of Davisville at Quonset is one of the top 10 auto importers in the country, and the Port of Providence is one of only 2 deep water ports in New England.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

AT THE STATE LEVEL

Investing Strategically in Our Future

Ensure that the State is doing all that it can to make strategic investments in our assets and basic infrastructure. This is critical for increasing the State’s ability to retain and attract talented individuals and dynamic businesses. That’s why we advocate passing the $35 million Green Economy Bond that has seven components. Grow Smart RI supports all of these but is particularly enthusiastic about the $5 million proposed to renew the State’s Brownfield remediation grant program, the $10 million for expansion and improvement of Rhode Island’s Bike Path system, and the $4 million to leverage private resources to acquire and preserve farmland and open space, both of which contribute to Rhode Island’s distinctive and valuable urban-rural balance.

We also strongly recommend passage of the $50 million Housing Opportunity Bond to be invested in the development and revitalization of affordable housing and to improve blighted properties. Passage of the bond should reduce the widespread burden of housing costs and create new housing opportunity in a state where, according to a recent report by HousingWorks RI and Rhode Island Housing, the demand for housing is expected to accelerate over the next decade through a combination of moderate population growth and continued shrinkage in the average size of households. Since proposed affordable housing projects in RI are measured by how well they adhere to the State’s long range Land Use Plan, they are highly likely to be concentrated in and contribute to the further advancement of walkable, transit friendly neighborhoods.

Marine Infrastructure

Prioritize the marine infrastructure improvements needed to capitalize on our world renowned collection of historic buildings and neighborhoods.

There are at least three essential steps for this to happen: 1. Continue to make the Rebuild RI Tax Credit program more user friendly by having Commerce RI do outreach to developers, property owners and municipal officials about the recent changes to the Rebuild RI program. 2. Consider additional changes to the program to ensure that the requirements for developers to provide a return on investment to the state are aligned with market conditions. 3. Enable the State Historic Tax Credit program to complement the Rebuild RI program more fully, especially for smaller Historic Rehab projects that may find the Rebuild RI program too costly and complicated on the front end. This can be accomplished by an infusion of new multi-year funding for the program. The program has not had a general appropriation of new state funds in several years.

Capitalizing fully on our world renowned collection of historic buildings and neighborhoods.

Smart Growth on the Ground

The Foundry Corporate Office Center and Promenade Apartments

Fully occupied for the first time since the early 1960s, the former Brown & Sharpe manufacturing complex, is now home to more than 50 companies and 2,000 employees in 500,000 square feet of high end office space, with an additional 433 luxury apartments, all within walking distance of downtown Providence. The Foundry Corporate Office Center and Promenade Apartments is a highly visible testimony to the smart growth principles re-shaping RI’s urban core. The recent $53 million renovation of the Sharpe Building is the culmination of the nearly five-decade transformation of the 25-acre, 13-building revitalization project completed by the Guerra family that blazed the trail for historic mill refurbishments throughout the State. In addition to re-use of existing infrastructure and promotion of walkable neighborhoods, the success of the project is rooted in adherence to historic preservation and environmental protection. The importance of this project to the City and State was underscored by public private partnerships that were secured to ensure successful completion and long-term viability.

Zoning

Adopt zoning policies that allow the necessary density to address the need for workforce housing and locate new housing growth where residents will have access to transportation and community services.
Rhode Island is home to an assortment of places that have a deep and unique cultural history. These towns and cities have historically been centers of rich urban life, arts, and prosperity. Main Streets are transitioning throughout our state, displaying a mix of vibrant new businesses and out-of-use storefronts. They tell the story of the rise, fall and now the re-birth of our urban and town centers. In conjunction with the State Historic Tax Credit program and the state’s Brownfield Remediation grant program, they have already contributed to success stories in Providence, Pawtucket, the Harrisville section of Burrillville, Westerly and others across the state, but the rollout of the Rebuild RI program has been slower and more complicated than would be ideal and the lack of a long range commitment to the highly successful State Historic Tax Credit program has been problematic.

Revitalization projects help the whole state and bring new life to urban and town centers in many ways:

- Create jobs
- Attract new talent and keep existing talent in state
- Expand Rhode Island based businesses and attract new ones
- Capitalize more fully on established infrastructure
- Increase tax revenues by returning vacant and underutilized properties back to municipal tax rolls
- Reduce development pressure on farmland and open space

These important investments coincide with growing 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. Given Rhode Island’s small size, high level of urbanization and valuable but vulnerable natural resources, the continued revitalization of our centers and corridors is an economic and environmental imperative essential to Rhode Island’s future prosperity. Through public sector leadership that facilitates partnerships with the private and non-profit sector we will be able to redevelop and rebirth many of our important urban and town centers, enabling them to reach much more of their potential.
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 tools such as State and Municipal Tax Increment Financing (TIF), the Rebuild RI Tax Credit, the State Historic Tax credit, the State Brownfields Remediation and Economic Development Fund, New Market Tax Credits, municipal tax stabilization agreements and the activation of local redevelopment authorities.

Provide multi-year funding for the State Historic Preservation investment Tax Credit, allowing developers to plan on the future availability of credits and continuing to improve our construction industry while revitalizing our urban and town centers and capitalizing fully on our nationally renowned collection of historic buildings and neighborhoods.

Incentivize corporate siting in our urban and town centers, ensuring that the State is not subsidizing suburban Greenfield moves. (Grow Smart RI is currently studying corporate siting decision making and incentives.)

Develop a competitive grant program similar to MassWorks in Massachusetts that targets public investments largely in urban, town and village centers where public investment can be maximized for public benefit.

Critical Infrastructure Investment Program

Historic Tax Credit

Corporate Siting

Technical Assistance

Planning

Develop and execute plans and zoning reforms for revitalizing mixed-use development districts where some level of infrastructure already exists. Consider targeted changes in parking requirements, building height limits and setback requirements among other items. Through such techniques as installation of green infrastructure, ensure that these plans address sea level rise and other impacts of climate change.

Unified Project Review

Enabling legislation approved in 2016 (H-7833 Sub A), amends the required procedures pertaining to proposed subdivisions and zoning ordinances to allow for unified development review by local planning and zoning boards or commissions. We urge localities to pass ordinances to allow for this unified review of land development and subdivision projects to facilitate growth in urban and town centers.

Overlay district have proven successful for remaking downtowns and neighborhoods across the United States into more vital and inviting places to go. The City of Woonsocket recently adopted this effective zoning tool in an effort to redefine itself and adapt to the growing national and regional market for walkable urban places. The new district zoning allows for many uses such as entertainment and the arts, including outdoor cafes, live/ work units, artist studios and galleries, hotels, restaurants and theatre. Upper floor residential units and lowered parking requirements will increase foot traffic while also improving the fiscal viability of redevelopment proposals. Interim uses such as food trucks, pop-up retail, art and cultural installations, farmers’ markets and performances will all serve to encourage more visitors to the city’s historic downtown, soon to be served by private commuter rail between Worcester and Providence. With eyes on the continued rehabilitation and revitalization of its landmark Main Street area, the City is positioning itself to better welcome investors and developers.

“This type of zoning overlay really promotes smart growth principles.”

~Martha L. Werenfels | Principal, DBVW Architects
Grow Smart RI Board Member
One of the most vital components of a healthy economy and a competitive quality of place is a sound transportation system - one that supports diverse mobility needs for people and businesses, including freight, and that seamlessly connects Rhode Islanders with economic opportunity, whether across town or across the globe.

Among the challenges facing many states today is how to simultaneously reinvest in ailing 1960’s roads and highways while at the same time contributing positively to neighborhood revitalization and serving diverse community needs. Rhode Island is no exception. Like several others around the country, the urgently needed rebuilding of the decrepit Route 6/10 corridor has mobilized a number of community activists seeking design alternatives that better balance mobility needs with neighborhood revitalization and economic development.

At the same time, a robust mass transit system is increasingly seen by business and civic leaders around the nation, and here in Rhode Island, as a key competitive advantage to building and sustaining a strong 21st century economy. It is well-documented that the millennial generation, soon to dominate the workforce, prefers living and working in walkable, bikeable urban places that are well-served by mass transit. In fact, many leading employers are now relocating to urban locations in order to compete for or retain young talent. As the 2nd most urbanized state in the nation, the presence of an effective mass transit system in Rhode Island is essential to maximizing the revitalization potential of our many urban, town and village centers.

Over the past three years Rhode Island has made significant advances to improve its transportation system. Most notably, the General Assembly passed Governor Raimondo’s RhodeWorks proposal, a bold initiative for raising and investing significant new resources to repair Rhode Island’s crumbling roads and bridges, and to free up funds for investments to modernize Rhode Island’s transportation system, including increased investments in transit and other alternative transportation modes. RIPTA has introduced rapid bus transit (the R-line) to better connect commuters traveling through the most heavily trafficked areas in the state more rapidly and efficiently. Voters handily approved the 2014 Transit Hub Infrastructure bond referendum, which is helping to fund the creation of a proposed public-private multimodal transit hub in the vicinity of the Amtrak Station in Providence. Rhode Island has been successful in winning competitive federal TIGER Grants to re-establish commuter rail service in Pawtucket and Central Falls and to build an enhanced transit corridor through the capital city and the hospital district. And in 2013, RIDOT embraced and promoted with its road engineering contractors the use of a forward-looking “complete streets” design manual that serves as an engineer’s “how-to” reference for designing road repair and reconstruction projects in a way that benefits all users.

Still, there’s significant work to be done in order to more fully achieve the multiple benefits of a modern transportation system and to be sure that our investments contribute to a more competitive, vibrant and user friendly Rhode Island. The health, environmental concerns, safety and economic well-being of our citizens depend on our ability to adapt to the transportation needs of a 21st century economy.
First envisioned by Fred Lippitt, Jane Sherman and the Providence Plan in the early 1990s, the concept of a bikeway along the Woonasquatucket River—linking some of the most challenged Providence neighborhoods—was met with skepticism to say the least. Undeterred, together with the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council, the herculean effort of getting many agencies to work together to complete a 2.7 mile off-road bikeway from Olneyville to Johnston, was completed in 2007. Today, the Greenway has expanded to 7 miles on and off road and thousands of bicyclists use it, which has gone on to spur other public investments for new parks and recreational resources.

“People wanted park space where they can play with their kids, and they wanted a way to connect with places in their community.”

-Alicia Lehrer | Executive Director, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council

People voters will have the opportunity to approve the Green Economy ballot initiative on November 8th that includes a $10 million investment to expand and connect Rhode Island’s many existing but often disconnect- ed bikeways. Additionally, the Division of Planning will prepare the first-ever Statewide Bicycle Mobility Plan to guide investments in a way that yields maximum long-term benefit.

Road Design
Ten municipalities in Rhode Island have passed Reso- lutions stating the importance of designing road repair and reconstruction projects to include pedestrian-friendly “complete streets” elements whenever practical. Additional municipalities are encouraged to adopt these principles through resolution or ordinance.

Partner with RIPTA
Optimize transit service and amenities in your commu- nity by partnering with RIPTA planning staff to coordi- nate the physical requirements for improved passenger service.
**STRENGTHENED FARMS AND FOOD SYSTEMS**

Grow Smart RI is dedicated to maintaining Rhode Island’s unique urban-rural balance that contributes to a high quality of life and serves as a marketing tool for our economic development and talent attraction efforts. We want to maintain the rich culture and beauty of our rural areas and this starts with protecting our farms, forests, and food systems.

A strong local food system encompasses all of the processes involved in feeding people: it includes the production, harvesting, and processing of food; its distribution and marketing; its consumption (whether at home, in schools and institutions, or in restaurants); and ultimately, the recycling or disposal of food waste. 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. A 2015 study assessed the economic value of plant-based agriculture in RI and determined that it supports over 2,500 jobs and contributes $238.9 million annually to our economy. Consumer demand for local food has not only supported the expansion of agriculture but is stimulating food start-ups.

During the past several years, the State has increased its investments in our farms and food systems by creating a variety of new methods of funding that are starting to aid the local food system, including the Innovation Network Matching Grants, the Industry Cluster Grants and the Local Agriculture and Seafood Grant Act (“LASA”). These efforts have focused on job creation and have even been paired with the state’s higher education institutions to spark innovation in the food science field.

What if we could strengthen our entire food system?

**$13,800**

average value per acre of farm real estate, ranking Rhode Island the highest in the country.

Source: US Department of Agriculture, USDA Census of Agriculture, 2012

**$238.9M**

amount that plant-based agriculture contributes to the RI economy, along with supporting over 2,500 jobs.

Source: Tom Sproul, *The Economic Impact of Rhode Island Plant-Based Industries and Agriculture*, February 2015

Rhode Island farmers’ markets continue to expand. In 2015 there were 55 farmers markets of which 30 accepted SNAP benefits.

Source: Rhode Island Food Policy Council, “RI Food Assessment, 2016”

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 such as the high cost of farmland, implementing food safety regulations to protect public health and the reputation of local farms, and providing adequate training and workforce development to give workers in the food sector the tools for upward mobility.

According to the Rhode Island Food Policy Council (2016) 14% of Rhode Island households lack the means to purchase adequate food, and even worse, 21.3% of children are food insecure. This is the second highest level of food insecurity in New England. While the number of food insecure in the state is similar to the national average, that is an unacceptably high rate of food insecurity. Therefore, 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. A growing body of literature shows that an investment in community food security is an effective strategy for improving public health outcomes, decreasing public health spending, and catalyzing economic growth 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 prioritize implementation of the 2014 Clean Water, Open Space and Healthy Communities Bond, a new voter approved program to link the next generation of 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 its small, diverse farms.

Local Ordinances
Adopt smart growth ordinances such as Conservation Development, Village Zoning and the Transfer of Development Rights that can help to preserve farmland as development pressures build.

Accessory Business
Allow farms to have appropriate accessory business uses to supplement revenue generated from conventional farm products.

Community Comprehensive Plans
Recognize and support agriculture in community comprehensive plans for its important role in the local economy.

Development Rights
Support local programs to purchase the development rights to farms to preserve farms for future generations.

SMART GROWTH ON THE GROUND

Hope & Main
As the state’s first culinary incubator, Hope & Main is an innovative nonprofit enterprise that provides low overhead kitchen space and business mentoring to beginning food businesses. In five short years, visionary founder Lisa Raiola has worked with an energetic Board, food industry leaders and a supportive town government to put together a self-sustaining business model, secure funding and rehabilitate an empty 100-year old school on Warren’s Main Street. Already, 14 businesses are in operation and many more are in the pipeline. Hope & Main’s organizational mission to support the expansion of Rhode Island’s food sector and its decision to convert a vacant downtown property to a vibrant new use exemplify the principles and vision of smart growth.
Rhode Island is 56% forested despite being the second most densely populated state in the country (USDA, 2015, Forests of RI). Forest products contribute an estimated $710 million annually to the Rhode Island economy and support over 3,300 jobs (North East State Foresters Association, 2015). Moreover 75% of Rhode Islanders get clean and safe drinking water from reservoirs protected by forests (RI Forest Facts, RI Tree Farm Program, 2012). The state’s forests also play a critical role in mitigating the effects of the changing climate by storing carbon, moderating air temperatures, and reducing air pollution.

Rhode Island forests also:

- Support numerous recreational and tourism opportunities
- Reduce flooding
- Improve air quality as photosynthesis yields oxygen and removes carbon dioxide from the air
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Produce a renewable fuel to heat homes and businesses
- Add immeasurably to our quality of life

The continuation of these vitally important values is not guaranteed. 72% of our forests are privately owned (RI Forest Facts, RI Tree Farm Program, 2012) and as forests are fragmented into smaller parcels by development their value to harvest timber products, provide clean water, support recreation and wildlife habitat is greatly reduced. State and municipal leaders need to adopt appropriate policies to prevent further forest fragmentation to maintain forest benefits for existing and future generations.
**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**AT THE STATE LEVEL**

**Forestland Protection**
Support adequate State funding to identify and purchase priority forestlands to sustain the economic, water quality and other benefits from Rhode Island’s forests. A key objective should be to maintain large unfragmented forests of 250 acres in size or greater.

**Forest Management and Climate Change**
Climate change policies and actions should recognize the role that forests play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, moderating temperatures and storing carbon.

**Incentives to Retain Forestland**
Consider strengthening the existing Farm Forest and Open Space Act and encourage the use of local forest products to help landowners to maintain and properly manage their forestland.

**Forest-Based Business**
Recognize and integrate the economic value of Rhode Island’s forest products into State economic development policies and programs.

**Good Forest Management**
State forestlands should be used to demonstrate how trees can be properly harvested to maximize forest functions and values.

**SMART GROWTH ON THE GROUND**

**Exeter**

The town of Exeter has adopted smart growth land use ordinances such as conservation development, village zoning and the transfer of development rights to accommodate growth while protecting their working farms and forests. Exeter will allow mixed use density in areas that can support it as a trade-off to permanently preserve land elsewhere in the town. Exeter is also working on an ordinance that would allow forestland owners to have small accessory business uses to provide economic incentives to maintain forestland.

**AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL**

**Local Planning**
Community comprehensive plans should identify and map forestlands and include land use policies that encourage no net loss of these forestlands.

**Forest Business Friendly Zoning**
Zoning should be amended to allow forestland owners to establish eco-friendly accessory business uses on their land to reduce development pressure and maintain forest values. The Community Guidance to Maintain Working Farms and Forests (DEM 2012) has a model ordinance and more information on how this can be achieved.

**Adopt Smart Growth Land Use**
The adoption of smart growth land use techniques such as the Transfer of Development Rights, Conservation Development and Village Zoning, can all help to accommodate development while preserving meaningful forestland.

**Support Local Forestland Preservation**
Local bond initiatives are often needed to meet the match requirements for State and Federal programs to cost-share purchasing the development rights to forestland.

**Support the Farm, Forest, & Open Space Act**
This is a tool to conserve forestland and prevent its conversion to more intensive land uses.

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**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**What if we could save our forests, while saving jobs and endangered species?**

**75%**

of Rhode Islanders get their drinking water from reservoirs protected by forests. Clean water is a forest product.

Source: RI Forest Facts, RI Tree Farm Program, 2012

**$710M**

RI Forest products contribute $710 million annually and support 3,300 jobs in the RI economy.

Source: North East State Foresters Association, 2015

**90%**

of our endangered species need forests to survive.

Source: RIDEM, 2015, Wildlife Action Plan
Smart Growth on the Ground
Outstanding Projects

1. North Cove Residential Neighborhood

Located adjacent to Wickford Village in North Kingstown, North Cove is a great example of how a suburban community can encourage and support development of affordable rental homes, using a traditional village neighborhood design. North Cove was completed in 2013 by North Dartmouth Properties, Inc. and features a compact design with a clustering of 38 homes. Allowed under North Kingstown’s Planned Village District zoning, the development preserves 45% of its land area as open space and offers easy access to walking trails, a boat launch, bike paths, Narragansett Bay and Wickford Village. The neighborhood makes good use of existing infrastructure and is conveniently located near stores, amenities, employment opportunities and mass transit.

2. Woonsocket Middle School Complex

Faced with the need to build two new middle school facilities, City leaders evaluated many potential sites. Following a complicated clean-up of the site and of contaminated groundwater that had threatened the Blackstone River, the city created a safe, state-of-the-art educational complex that features two freestanding 880-pupil middle schools, athletic facilities, and additional site improvements. The complex, located just a short walking distance from downtown, residential and commercial centers and adjacent to the new and impressive Rivers Edge recreational complex, has reinvented a large, blighted swath of the central portion of Woonsocket.

3. Center for Physician Assistants Studies at Johnson & Wales

Setting its sights on a growing segment of the healthcare sector, Johnson & Wales University selected a former jewelry factory in Providence’s Knowledge District to begin the first-ever physician assistant’s program in Rhode Island. Leveraging its proximity to Brown University’s Warren Alpert Medical School, the two schools are now collaborating, sharing professional resources – in addition to a neighborhood and infrastructure – and creating a whole that’s greater than the sum of their parts. Completed in 2014, the Center for Physician Assistants Studies is among the first major investments directly adjacent to the I-195 redevelopment district and is playing an important role in building critical mass for a successful high-tech, medical and business hub to fuel Rhode Island’s economy.

4. Providence Community Health Centers

Providence Community Health Centers (“PCHC”) has, for over 40 years, provided medical care to 20% of Providence residents within a network of seven clinics of medical and dental services throughout the city. Its new campus sits on a 3.5 acre site at 355 Prairie Avenue that included the historic buildings of the Federated Lithographers, a printing company, and Beaman & Smith, a tool shop. Abandoned for years and declared a brownfield site, the property became a catalyst for PCHC’s commitment to revitalize the South Providence community. The dilapidated mill complex was transformed into a $45 million state-of-the-art medical and health service campus that supports 200 staff and the community, encouraging a green and smart environment. Designed by Vision 3 Architects, the campus encompasses an entire city block, and was developed over an eleven-year, four phase period ending in September, 2014. The completed development includes a 41,750 s.f. LEED Silver Certified, primary care health center, a 50,000 s.f. medical office building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and a 4,800 s.f. retail building which is a pharmacy.

5. Tiverton Public Library

First set forth as a goal within Tiverton’s Comprehensive Plan, the new Tiverton Public Library was part of a town vision to develop a new town center for municipal buildings and a library with community meeting space. Decades of local advocacy, along with a federal grant, a successful local capital campaign, and a narrowly won bond referendum resulted in a new civic building that has been labeled the “crown jewel in the network of libraries across the state of Rhode Island.” The Town passed a commercial form-based zoning code to accommodate this new vision for an activity center sited in Bliss Four Corners. Designed by Union Studio Architects, the building is harmonious with the community and recalls the classic simplicity of the original Essex Library. The interior reflects a flexible, modern and data-rich 21st century community gathering place. The new library is located in a mixed-use neighborhood that includes homes, two schools, public ballfields and commercial enterprises.

6. The Design Exchange

Constructed in 1880 at 161 Exchange Street in Downtown Pawtucket, the Design Exchange is a restored four-story brick mill building which was once part of the RI Cardboard Company complex. The 100% commercially occupied mill sits within a city and state historic district that’s become a center for the arts, including the Pawtucket Armory Arts Center and the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre and the adjacent Blackstone Studios Building. Owned and developed by LLB Architects, the project received state and federal historic tax credits. The building is filled with graphic, industrial/interior designers, photographers, textile designers, architects, and engineers helping realize the building’s full potential and drawing visitors and businesses to the Arts District.
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