The State Guide Plan: Rhode Island’s Big-Picture Policy Guide for Agencies and Municipalities

Presented to the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Entire Area of Land Use, Housing, Environment, and Regulation

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I’ll Tell You About

1) The Division of Statewide Planning
2) The State Guide Plan
3) Local Comprehensive Planning (and the State’s Role)
4) Land Use 2025
   a) Where We Were
   b) What We Knew
   c) What’s Changing

Objective: inform future discussion about land use and subdivision statutes and local regulation, tools to help implement local goals and objectives.
Division of Statewide Planning

The Statewide Planning Program consists of the State Planning Council, and the Division of Statewide Planning, a division within the Department of Administration.

• The State Planning Council (27 members) is comprised of federal, state, local, public representatives, and other advisors, and guides the work of the Program.
• The Division of Statewide Planning is the staff agency of the State Planning Council.
Central state planning agency established by R.I. General Law 42-11

Coordinate the activities of government agencies, communities, and organizations through the State Guide Plan

Provide planning assistance to the Governor, the General Assembly, municipalities, and other state agencies

Review local comprehensive plans, proposed projects, and activities for consistency with the State Guide Plan

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for federal transportation planning and funding
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- **RIGIS**
- **US Census**
- **Aerial Photography**
- **Staff to Water Resources Board**
- **Drought Mitigation**
- **Drinking water protection**
- **Climate Change**
- **Resiliency**
- **EC4**
Division of Statewide Planning Mission Statement

The Division of Statewide Planning promotes and encourages best practices for the balanced growth and development of the State of Rhode Island. We do so by:

- Connecting agencies, communities, and organizations;
- Guiding land use, water, and transportation choices; and
- Promoting continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive application of planning principles, along with data-driven analysis, to create and implement State, regional, and local plans.

Our goal is to ensure equitable, sustainable, and resilient development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future.
“Steak Guy Plan”
State Guide Plan

42-11-10 – State Guide Plan Law

Series of topical plans used to centralize long-range goals, policies, plans, and implementation activities for the State. The State Planning Council is responsible for approval of elements of the State Guide Plan.

Currently there are 18 Elements of State Guide Plan
Economic Development
Land Use
Energy
Historical Preservation and Cultural Heritage
Housing
Recreation & Open Space
Natural Resources
Transportation
Solid Waste Management
Water Resources
Equity
Climate Change & Resiliency
Land Use
What is the State Guide Plan?

The SGP provides a degree of continuity and permanent policy direction for the State’s future development.

The SPC is responsible for approval of all elements of the SGP, which has four primary functions:

- It sets long-range goals and policy positions (generally twenty years);
- It provides a means to evaluate and coordinate projects or proposals of State importance;
- It sets standards for comprehensive community plans; and
- It serves as a source of information on various topics of statewide importance.
# How Do We Review Local Community Comprehensive Plans?

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Local Comprehensive Plans

- In 2011 revisions were made to the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulations Act. A major change was that State approvals were extended from 5 years to 10 years. Also added was a new requirement for an implementation report.

- Municipalities are now required to submit an; “Informational report on the status of the comprehensive plan implementation program with the Division of Planning not more than five (5) years from the date of municipal approval” (§ 45-22.2-12).

- Ensures municipalities are assessing progress toward achieving actions identified in their implementation program

- 25 fully-approved
- 12 expired
- 2 denied
Why a Status Report?

This requirement is meant to help, not hinder municipal planners.

Keep Comprehensive Plans “Alive”

Track Implementation to see where communities have successes and where they struggle.

Feedback will shape the types of technical assistance provided by Statewide Planning.

Help focus local planning efforts and continue to maintain the importance of Comprehensive Plan consistency in all development reviews.
Are Communities Penalized If They Don’t Have An Approved Comp Plan or Exceed the 5 Year Reporting Deadline?

• Although the required by law, **there is no specific penalty** for failure to comply.

• Per RIGL 45-22.2-13 “(h) Upon approval by the chief or superior court, the municipality is eligible for all benefits and incentives conditioned on an approved comprehensive plan pursuant to this chapter, and the municipality is allowed to submit the approved comprehensive plan or relevant section thereof to any state agency which requires the submission of a plan as part of its requirements, and the plan or relevant section thereof shall satisfy that requirement.”
Where does the power to protect the public interest come from?

Federal Government
Delegates power via constitution and laws

State of Rhode Island Enabling Legislation
• Comprehensive Planning Act
• Zoning Enabling Act
• Land Development & Subdivision Review Act
• Others

Municipality
City/town council or mayor appoints board and commission members
Legal Authority given to public bodies provided via State law, municipal charters and or local ordinances

Public Body
Protects the public interest through land use planning and administration of land use regulations and ordinances.
Land Use
2025
Land Use 2025

- Where are we, and where are we going?
- Where do we want to be in 2025?
- Issues to be concerned while getting there?
- How do we get there?
- What must be done to achieve vision?
Where are we?

- 80%+ Rhode Islanders still live in urbanized areas along the Bay & major rivers

- In recent decades, growth has been both outward from this core; and coming into the state from neighboring states

- More significant is the way we are growing and impacting on the RI landscape
We Used to Live and Work in Compact Communities….

- Small house lots
- Mix of housing types
- Interconnected street network to disperse traffic
- Mixed uses; Housing, shopping and civic functions
What is Different Now?

- Lots have larger footprints than traditional development
- One dominant housing type (single family)
- Single-use areas – separation of industrial, business & civic uses
- Roads have few interconnections
- Traffic concentrated on collectors and arterials
Results

- Developed land increasing 9 times faster than population
- Population and jobs moving away from urban core
- Unsustainable sprawl
- ~ 30% of state’s land currently developed
It took 330 years to develop the first 20% of our land, but just over 25 years to develop the next 10%.
Total New Developed Land by 2025

109,000 acres or 16% of state area
Population & Land Development Rates in the United States

Changes in Population & Newly Developed Land from 1982-1997
Rhode Island Population & Land Development Rates

Changes from 1982-1997
Where are we going?

Developed and Protected Lands

1995

Current Trend

2025?
Primary Goals

A Sustainable Rhode Island

Greenspace & Greenways

Excellence in Community Design

First Class Infrastructure
What Does This Look Like?

- Concentrates growth in:
  - Urban Service Boundary
  - Growth Centers

- Maximizes investment in existing infrastructure

- Promotes more efficient development:
  - Infill
  - Rehabilitation
  - Higher Densities

- Maintains Green and Open Space
Not all new ideas

Relate state land use policies to anticipated population growth to enhance the distinction between urban and rural places.

Use open space to control and shape urban growth.

Promote the use of higher residential densities and smaller lot frontages in urban and suburban areas, and town centers, where public water and sewer service is present or planned.

Promote low overall density where public service are not planned. Promote the clustering of development in these areas.
I'm sorry, good intentions aren't enough.
What Needs To Be Done?

State Investment Strategy that focuses support for growth-inducing development investment within the Urban Services Boundary and in Growth Centers.
State Investments

Discretionary public infrastructure investments which can help shape Smart growth:

- Community Development – CDBG
- Housing – Neighborhood Opportunities Program
- Economic Development – CEDS
- Land Preservation – Open Space grants, Bikeways
- Drinking Water – Clean Water SRF
- Wastewater – RI Clean Water Finance SRF
- Transportation – Transportation Enhancement Program, CMAQ
- Education – School Housing Aid
What Are Some Of The Other Issues?

- Affordable Housing
- Economic Development
- Resource Constraints
  - Water
  - Sewer
- Open Space Protection
- Transportation
A plan without data is a guess;

A plan isn't just a list of hopes and wishes, it develops measurable, achievable criteria.
The Challenge Ahead

How do we measure success?

Or lack of?
Land Use Performance Measures

To be measured within the Urban Services Boundary:

- $$ Investments
- # of Housing Units permitted
- Amount of Commercial/industrial square footage constructed
- Density of housing units
- # of current Comprehensive Plans
- # of Towns with full-time planning staff

To be measured outside of Urban Services Boundary

- # of lost acres of farmland
- # of Growth Centers
- # of current Comprehensive Plans
- # of Towns with full-time planning staff
Tools to Promote Compact Development

- Community Comprehensive Plans
- Form based Codes
- Transit Oriented Development
- Projects of Regional Significance
- Transfer of Development Rights
- Permit Allocation Systems
- Historic Tax Credits
Tools to Promote Preservation

- Comprehensive Plans
- Land Acquisition
- Farmland Zoning
- Historic Overlay Zoning
- Buying Development Rights
- Cluster Development
- Conservation Development
Q7 What is most important land use related issue facing Rhode Island today?

issues land use plans make residential infrastructure sustainable planning rural housing sea level rise solar communities development land use climate change energy need encourage State Keep areas green
This map shows the percent change in total population from the 2010 Census to the 2020 Census at the municipality level.

- Top 5 in terms of population growth were New Shoreham, Central Falls, East Greenwich, Cumberland and Providence
- Strong growth in northeast urban core cities
- Narragansett, Foster and Bristol lost population.
Rhode Island’s Population Grew 4.3% Last Decade

Rhode Island Counties
(Ranked by percent change in population, 2010–2020)

1. Providence County 5.4%
2. Newport County 3.3%
3. Kent County 2.5%
4. Washington County 2.3%
5. Bristol County 1.8%

Population Density in Rhode Island Counties: 2020

People per square mile
- 800+ or more
- 250.0 to 499.9

Rhode Island Counties
(Ranked by 2020 total population)

1. Providence County 660,741
2. Kent County 170,363
3. Washington County 129,839
4. Newport County 85,643
5. Bristol County 50,793

Population (1910–2020)

- 1910: 503,397
- 1920: 697,087
- 1930: 712,746
- 1940: 791,385
- 1950: 880,986
- 1960: 945,744
- 1970: 942,773
- 1980: 940,649
- 1990: 1,003,419
- 2000: 1,062,310
- 2010: 1,067,276
- 2020: 1,067,276
OTHER DATA RESOURCES

- Free access and downloads
- Several Hundred Spatial Datasets, Categories
- Many Contributors
- Managed by URI Geospatial Extension Specialists
- Aerial Photography – RIDSP, RIDOT, RIDEM...
Thank You!

Questions?

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