

RHODE ISLAND  
STATEWIDE  
PLANNING  
PROGRAM



# State Guide Plan Modernization Project

Public Comment and Hearing Report  
November 2, 2016



Division of Planning  
Department of Administration

The Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program is established by § 42-11-10, Statewide Planning Program, of the Rhode Island General Laws as the central planning agency for Rhode Island. The State Planning Council, comprised of state, local, public representatives, and other advisors, guides the work of the Program. The objectives of the Program are to:

- prepare Guide Plan Elements for the State
- coordinate activities of the public and private sectors within the framework of the State Guide Plan
- assist municipal governments with planning, and
- advise the Governor and others on physical, social, and economic planning related topics.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

This is a report on the public hearing and comment period held by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program (SPP), Division of Planning, Department of Administration, on behalf of the State Planning Council (SPC) to consider rescinding 5 State Guide Plan Elements. This Report outlines the attendance at the hearing and the public comments received. The written statements submitted are included in the Appendix. The hearing was conducted in accordance with the SPC Rules of Procedure. The public comment period ran from September 27, 2016 through November 2, 2016. A public hearing was held on Wednesday, November 2, 2016 at 5:30 PM at the Department of Administration William E Powers Building, Conference Room A, One Capitol Hill, Providence, Rhode Island 02908.

Notice of the public hearing and opportunity to comment more than thirty days in advance of the hearing date on the proposed action was provided by:

- a posted hearing notice on the RI Secretary of State website
- posted hearing notices in English and Spanish on the SPP website
- a direct mailing to about 380 SPP planning and transportation contacts, and
- an article in the SPP monthly e-newsletter in August 2016.

A copy of the 5 Elements under consideration was available for review in the SPP office at one Capitol Hill during regular business hours and on the SPP website. All persons were invited to present their views on the draft document in person at the public hearings, through a representative, or by filing a written statement with the Secretary of the State Planning Council. Written statements could be mailed or e-mailed to Parag Agrawal, Associate Director, Division of Planning, One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908, or submitted at a hearing.

The hearing location was accessible to individuals with disabilities. Any individual with physical or sensory impairments requiring assistance for a reasonable accommodation or individuals requiring the services of a spoken language interpreter to participate in these hearings were also able to make requests for accommodation. There were no requests for accommodations or interpreters. In total, 2 people attended the hearing and gave spoken comments. Over the course of the public comment period, 1 organization submitted written comments.

## II. Public Hearing Proceedings

Call to Order - Mr. Rhodes called the hearing scheduled for 5:30 P.M. on November 2, 2016 at the Rhode Island Department of Administration to order at 5:32 P.M.

Attendance – Two persons attended the hearing, as well as staff from the Statewide Planning Program (SPP). Members of the public included Megan DiPrete, Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor, Inc. and Don Rhodes, RIPTA Riders Alliance. SPP staff in attendance included Jared Rhodes, Chief of Statewide Planning, and Nancy Hess, Supervising Land Use Planner.

Opening Statements - Mr. Rhodes explained that in September of 2016, the State Planning Council authorized this proposed action for a public hearing. Subsequently, SPP held a 30-day public comment period on the proposed action beginning on September 27, 2016. He explained that notice of the hearing and opportunity to comment was posted on the Secretary of State website and the SPP webpage in English and Spanish more than 30 days in advance of the hearing date. A direct mailing to approximately 380 planning and transportation contacts was also done. An article explaining the proposed action appeared in the SPP monthly electronic e-newsletter in August 2016. A copy of the 5 Elements under consideration was available for review in the SPP office at one Capitol Hill and on the SPP website. He further explained that this hearing was being held for the purpose of accepting public comment on the proposed action. Mr. Rhodes then explained that the hearing would be conducted in accordance with the Rules of Procedure adopted by the State Planning Council and the Administrative Procedures Act and that he would first call upon Nancy Hess to provide a brief explanation on the purpose of the proposed action

Ms. Hess explained that The SPP has been working to simplify the SGP by consolidating or eliminating older plans with content that are no longer current or appropriate. As of this hearing, there were 21 Elements in the SGP. This project would reduce the number of SGP Elements to seventeen. The Elements proposed for repeal are below.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
110	Goals and Policies	Nov-74
112	Resources Management in the Reuse of Surplus Navy Lands	Apr-79
621	Policy Statement: Proposals for a New or Restructured Public Transit Facilities or Service	Jan-87
131	Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor	Sep-90
912	Howard Center Master Plan, Phase 1	Oct-94

She explained the rationale for proposing to rescind the Elements and that the Elements were checked to ensure that no goals, policies, or other materials important to on-going work would be lost by the repeal. The SPP has contacted known stakeholders to determine if any of the 5 Elements might still have value or if there were any objections or concerns to the repeal of the Elements. No objections or concerns were received. There was support from the stakeholders contacted to rescind the 5 Elements.

Public Comments - Mr. Rhodes opened the hearing for public comment. The following people spoke:

- 1) Megan DiPrete, Deputy Director, Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor, Inc., (BHC) asked that SGP Element 131, *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor*, **not be** rescinded. She gave a background history of the Corridor and cited numerous portions of the Plan which she felt were still very relevant to the current work of the BHC. This Element was a key in the establishment of the John. H. Chafee National Historical Park in 2014. She stated that the BHC believes the content of Element 131 is still important and urges that Element 131 be retained as a vital component of the State Guide Plan. Additionally the BHC, urges that the State Planning Council undertake an update of the Element. Following her presentation she submitted written comments reiterating the BHC concerns. (Her written comments are attached.)
- 2) Don Rhodes, RIPTA Riders Alliance – spoke to the importance of public transportation to people in the State. He had no comments about the proposed action but was present to learn about the planning process. He felt that any plans for downtown Providence and Pawtucket should consider preserving and extending public transportation based on contemporary needs and data. He specifically mentioned the existing use of Kennedy Plaza as a central hub and its importance for public transit in Rhode Island.

Mr. Rhodes asked if anyone else wished to be recognized to speak on the proposed action. There were no others present.

Adjournment- Mr. Rhodes thanked everyone for their comments. He stated that the SPP staff would document the comments received and provide them to the State Planning Council with a recommendation for its consideration in rescinding the Elements. He adjourned the hearing at 5:51 P.M.

## III. Summary of Comments

This report captures what was heard about the proposed action to rescind 5 State Guide Plan Elements. There were 2 people representing 2 organizations who submitted verbal comments, and 1 of these persons also submitted written comments which are attached in the Appendix. The only formal comment received concerning the proposed action was to request that SGP 131, *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* not be rescinded. There were no comments on the other 4 Elements and general support for rescinding these Elements.

# IV. Copy of Public Notices

## RHODE ISLAND STATE PLANNING COUNCIL

### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

In accordance with Rhode Island General Law, § 42-11-10 and Chapter 42-35, this is notice that the State Planning Council has under consideration the repeal of five State Guide Plan (SGP) Elements. The SGP is not a single document but a collection of plans referred to as Elements. As of September 2016, there are 25 Elements. There are five Elements that have not been updated in an extremely long time (see below). Due to their outdated nature, the content of these Elements has been found to have limited relevance to current conditions. The Division of Planning has contacted known stakeholders to determine if any of the five Elements might still have value or if there were any objections or concerns to the repeal of the Elements. No objections or concerns have been received to date. The Elements proposed for repeal are:

Element	Title	Date
110	Goals and Policies	Nov-74
112	Resources Management in the Reuse of Surplus Navy Lands	Apr-79
621	Policy Statement: Proposals for a New or Restructured Public Transit Facilities or Service	Jan-87
131	Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor	Sep-90
912	Howard Center Master Plan, Phase 1	Oct-94

Notice is given that a public hearing will be held on the repeal of the five obsolete Elements at which time the opportunity shall be given to all persons interested to be heard upon the matter.

The date, time and location of the hearing is:

**November 2, 2016 at 5:30 PM**

Conference Room **A**, 2nd Floor  
Department of Administration  
One Capitol Hill  
Providence, Rhode Island

The hearing will begin with a brief informational presentation about the proposed action followed by the opportunity for public comment. Written statements relative to any aspect of the proposed action, including alternative approaches, overlap, or potential economic impact, can be submitted in writing prior to, at the time of the hearing, emailed, or mailed by the close of business on Wednesday, November 2, 2016 to: Parag Agrawal, Associate Director, Division of Planning, One Capitol Hill, Providence, Rhode Island 02908.

The five Elements may be viewed at Statewide Planning's website at: <http://www.planning.ri.gov/> Copies of the five Elements are also available for review from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM at the Department of Administration, Division of Planning, One Capitol Hill, 3rd Floor, Providence, Rhode Island (401-222-7901).

This meeting place is accessible to individuals with disabilities. Any individual requiring a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in this meeting should contact Thomas Mannock at 222-6395 (voice) or #711 (R.I. Relay) at least five (5) business days prior to the meeting.

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Parag Agrawal, AICP  
Secretary

# Copy of Public Notices

## CONSEJO DE PLANIFICACIÓN ESTATAL DE RHODE ISLAND

### AVISO DE AUDIENCIA PÚBLICA

En cumplimiento con el capítulo 42-35 y sección 42-11-10 de la Ley General de Rhode Island, se avisa que el Consejo de Planificación Estatal está considerando anular cinco elementos del Plan Guía Estatal o SGP, por su sigla en inglés. El SGP no es un solo documento sino una serie de planes a los que llamamos "elementos". Existen 25 elementos desde setiembre de 2016 y cinco no han sido actualizados en muchísimo tiempo (véase abajo). Debido a su antigüedad, se ha determinado que el contenido de estos cinco elementos es poco relevante en relación con las condiciones actuales. La División de Planificación se comunicó con partes interesadas conocidas para determinar si alguno de los cinco elementos podría ser útil todavía, o si existe alguna objeción o preocupación ante su anulación. A la fecha, nadie ha manifestado ninguna objeción ni preocupación al respecto. Los elementos propuestos para su anulación son los siguientes:

Elemento	Título	Fecha
110	<i>Goals and Policies</i> (metas y políticas)	NOV 74
112	<i>Resources Management in the Reuse of Surplus Navy Lands</i> (gestión de recursos en la reutilización de terrenos excedentes de la Armada)	ABR 79
621	<i>Policy Statement: Proposals for a New or Restructured Public Transit Facilities or Service</i> (declaración de políticas: propuestas para servicio o instalaciones de transporte público nuevos o reestructurados)	ENE 87
131	<i>Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor</i> (plan de gestión de tierras y patrimonio cultural para el corredor patrimonial Nacional de Blackstone River Valley)	SET 90
912	<i>Howard Center Master Plan, Phase 1</i> (plan maestro de Howard Center, fase 1)	OCT 94

Por este medio se avisa que habrá una audiencia pública para tratar la anulación de los cinco elementos obsoletos. Durante esta audiencia se dará oportunidad a todos los interesados de hacer preguntas y comentarios sobre el tema.

Fecha, hora y lugar de la audiencia:

**2 de noviembre de 2016 a las 5:30 p.m.**

Conference Room A, 2nd Floor  
Department of Administration  
One Capitol Hill  
Providence, Rhode Island

La audiencia iniciará con una breve presentación informativa de la acción propuesta, seguida de comentarios del público. Aquellos que deseen someter comentarios por escrito sobre cualquier aspecto de la acción propuesta, incluyendo planteamientos alternativos, traslape o impacto económico potencial, pueden hacerlo antes de la audiencia o durante la misma, por correo electrónico o postal a más tardar al finalizar la jornada laboral del miércoles 2 de noviembre de 2016, a esta dirección: Parag Agrawal, Associate Director, Division of Planning, One Capitol Hill, Providence, Rhode Island 02908.

El contenido de los cinco elementos está disponible al público en el sitio web de Planificación Estatal: <http://www.planning.ri.gov/>. Además, pueden obtenerse copias de los cinco elementos en: Department of Administration, Division of Planning, One Capitol Hill, 3rd Floor, Providence, Rhode Island (401-222-7901), de 8:30 a.m. a 4:30 p.m.

La audiencia se realizará en un sitio accesible para personas con discapacidad. Aquellos que necesiten alguna facilidad especial dentro de lo razonable para poder participar en la audiencia, deben comunicarse con Thomas Manno al 222-6395 (de voz) o 711 (R.I. Relay) con por los menos cinco (5) días hábiles de antelación a la audiencia. Las personas que necesiten un intérprete de idiomas para poder participar en esta audiencia, deben llamar a Michael C. Moan al (401) 222-1236 (de voz) con por lo menos cinco (5) días hábiles de antelación a la audiencia.

Parag Agrawal, AICP  
Secretario

# Appendix

## Written Comments



**Blackstone  
Heritage  
Corridor, Inc.**

RI Statewide Planning Council  
c/o Mr. Parag Agrawal  
Associate Director, DOA  
Division of Planning  
One Capitol Hill, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Providence, RI 02908

October 28, 2016

Dear Mr. Agrawal,

There is a proposal before the State Planning Council to repeal Element 131 of the State Guide Plan. According to the public hearing notice which BHC received by mail, this element is proposed for repeal based on a presumption that the content has "limited relevance to current conditions." This simply is not correct.

Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Inc. is writing to strongly object to the proposal to repeal Element #131 of the RI State Guide Plan on both substantive and procedural grounds.

**BACKGROUND:**

In 1986 Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (the "Corridor") in recognition of the important historical, cultural and natural resources found in the Blackstone River Valley. Expanded in 1996 and again in 2014, and re-named in 1999 for former Senator John Chafee, the Corridor generally includes the cities and towns within the Blackstone River watershed. In Massachusetts, the Corridor includes 14 cities and towns. In Rhode Island, nearly one-third of the state's cities and towns lie within the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. Those communities are: Burrillville, Central Falls, Cumberland, East Providence, Glocester, Lincoln, North Smithfield, Pawtucket, Providence, Smithfield and Woonsocket.

The Blackstone Valley is a region so nationally-significant that, in 2014, Congress took the long-awaited and historic step of creating the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park as the 402<sup>nd</sup> unit of the National Park System (the "Park").

**RI STATE GUIDE PLAN ELEMENT 131 CONTENT:**

The Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan was developed for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in 1989. This report was subsequently adopted by State of RI in 1990 as State Guide Plan Element 131.

In submitting the Plan to the Secretary of the US Department of the Interior, then-governor Edward D. DiPrete noted that Element 131 “carefully takes into account the distinctive needs of the communities and the people of Rhode Island.” The Governor further noted: “The national heritage corridor develops a positive and genuine partnership among the private sector, local government, state government and national government. It recognizes that ... we need to develop more imaginative ways to protect nationally significant resources. It develops a working relationship for economic development and for historic and natural resource protection to accomplish that goal.”

The Action Agenda of Element 131 contains numerous recommendations and discussions. These action items are grouped into several thematic areas that provide guidance for work within the Corridor, including: historic preservation, interpretation, environmental conservation, land use management, recreation development and, finally, economic development and tourism.

BHC maintains that many of the actions and strategies are and were always recognized as being long-term. Indeed, even a brief review of the categories demonstrates the timeliness and relevance of Element 131 in the context of today’s National Heritage Corridor. Following is a discussion of just a couple of action items suggested in just a few of those action categories:

#### **Valley-wide identity programs**

- *Valley-wide interpretation.* Over the years, state agencies such as RI DEM and HPHC, local governments and local stakeholder groups such as Boy Scouts of America have pursued interpretive activities. Often funded or otherwise supported by BHC, that work has included consistent Corridor Signage, highway signage, interpretive panels, interpretive walks, historic markers, walking tours, self-guided paddle tours, and more. This material is periodically refreshed and continues to be in great demand.

#### **Historic Preservation**

- *Preserve key historic districts, properties and sites that define the character of the Blackstone River Valley.* Certainly this continues to be a priority for the state. The work completed and currently in process by state agencies, local organizations, the National Park Service and Blackstone Heritage Corridor in this regard is almost too numerous to mention. And is it relevant? The establishment of the National Historical Park less than 2 years ago reflects the passion and commitment of the region and the way that that passion has been focused.

#### **Environmental Conservation**

- *Improve the water quality of the Blackstone River.* This is a constant focus of RI DEM, and BHC is pleased to be active partner in the effort to advance this provision of Element 131. This ongoing commitment of local and nonprofit partners to work with state officials to carry out this state goal is no doubt part of the reason that Congress identified the Blackstone River as part of the new Park.

## Recreation Development

- *Complete or enhance state and local parks and forests within the Corridor.* BHC has a strong relationship with RI DEM, and currently has a license and agreements to make improvements to the Blackstone River State Park by constructing a replica barn at the Kelly House and Transportation Museum. Design is complete, a grant application for that work is pending and construction is anticipated in 2017. This single project demonstrates the state agency's commitment to partnership, enhancement of state parks, and enrichment of National Heritage Corridor resources that are called for in Element 131.
- *Implement construction, maintenance and landscaping projects that provide greater public use and access to the river, including Bikepath, Trails, Towpath, Portages, Picnic Facilities, Signs/markers, and Wayside Exhibits.* On behalf of BHC, I hardly know where to begin to summarize work in this arena. The Corridor was instrumental in securing millions of dollars to the state DOT to fund development of the Blackstone River Bikeway. The RI portion of this project is now more than half-way completed, and several of the remaining portions are nearing construction-readiness. This singular project represents extraordinary coordination of federal, state, local, nonprofit organizations and stakeholders.

Additionally, BHC has provided funding and assistance to develop river access in more than a dozen RI locations, numerous portages so as to avoid river hazards, a program of river signage, landscaping, site stabilization and enhancement projects, all with extensive volunteer labor and ongoing stewardship. RI DEM, RI DOT and local governments, local organizations and passionate residents of the National Heritage Corridor have been enthusiastic in support of this State Guide Plan goal.

## Economic Development and Tourism

- *Participate in a targeted development program to attract the next generation of industries.* The work undertaken through the RhodeMapRI project, as well as programs with our state, regional and national partners have worked to identify opportunities and threats to developing a strong 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and maintaining the natural, historical, cultural and recreational environment that continues to result in the Blackstone River Valley offering a high quality of life. During many of the public input opportunities, numerous comments reflected the need to embrace the history of the region as a platform for supporting development of the future. Residents and businesses realize the value of the resources of the Corridor, and recognize that embracing the region's nationally-significant heritage improves the quality of life for employees and their families.

The Corridor continues to provide financial, public health, recreational, economic and transportation benefits to residents and businesses of the region and the state. BHC has long enjoyed strong partnerships with various state agencies in the quest to coordinate work that protects, restores and revitalizes those resources. Furthermore, establishment of the National Historical Park came about in no small part because of the relevance of the region's attributes, and the dedication of its residents, businesses and visitors who protect those attributes.

BHC urges the State Planning Council to agree that the content of Element 131 is substantially timely, relevant and essential.

**PROCESS:**

In addition to the substantive considerations above, BHC urges that the current proposal to repeal Element 131 be rejected due to procedural concerns.

The public hearing notice states that the Division of Planning “contacted known stakeholders” to determine if these Elements might still have value, and further noted that “no objections or concerns” were received.

As part of US Public Law 99-647 that created the Corridor in 1986, Congress also established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission (the “Commission”). The Commission quickly became the Corridor’s principal advocate and champion. Its thoughtful stewardship of the Corridor’s resources built a sturdy foundation for the Valley’s future.

As part of the legislation by which it created the Park in 2014, Congress provided for an orderly termination of the Commission. The Commission was never intended to continue in perpetuity, and thus it was with a view toward continuing the Commission’s important work that the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Inc. (“BHC”) was incorporated in 2010 as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. In 2012 the Commission delegated its authority to BHC, and the 2014 legislation completed the transfer of the Commission’s authority to BHC as the “local coordinating entity” for the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

As described above, BHC is the designated local coordinating entity for the National Heritage Corridor but was not contacted about this current proposal until receiving the notice of public hearing by US mail on October 7.

**SUMMARY:**

While some of the data and specific references within Element #131 may be somewhat dated, it is indisputable that many of the actions remain timely and relevant. Element 131 of the State Guide Plan is by no means “obsolete.”

Repeal of this element would send the message that the cultural heritage and land management objectives it advocates for are no longer valued by the State of Rhode Island and that the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor does not warrant particular attention in the local, regional or state arenas. Repeal of the element would suggest to the 11 RI communities within the Corridor that their local comprehensive community plans should not pay special attention to the natural, historical, cultural and recreational resources within the context of the NHC.

Given the formal designation of BHC as the Corridor’s local coordinating entity, the 2014 designation of the national historical park, the investments to date and the

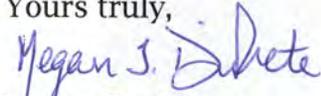
resources that the Corridor continues to bring to bear for the benefit of the residents, businesses and visitors of the Valley and the State, BHC urges state agencies to continue to embrace the provisions of Element 131.

BHC believes that the content of Element #131 is perhaps more important and more relevant than ever. Accordingly, BHC strongly urges that Element #131 be retained as a vital component of the State Guide Plan.

Additionally, BHC urges the State Planning Council and the Division of Statewide Planning to undertake an update of the element which reflects updated demographics and statistics, the designation of the National Historical Park and a refreshed sense of strategies and actions to protect, promote, restore and revitalize the nationally-significant elements of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

I trust you find this helpful. Please feel free to contact me with any additional questions.

Yours truly,



Megan T. DiPrete  
Deputy Director