





GROWTH CENTERS:
Recommendations for Encouraging
Growth and Investment in Economically
and Environmentally Sound Locations
in Rhode Island



A Report Of The Governor's Growth Planning Council

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August 2002

Dear Governor Almond,

One of the four charges to the Governor's Growth Planning Council is to "Recommend ways of encouraging growth in economically and environmentally sound locations". To help achieve this goal, the Council appointed a subcommittee to develop criteria for use in identifying priority areas for growth and to study how public investment can be used to encourage municipalities to identify priority growth areas and direct growth to those areas. This report contains the subcommittee's recommendations for establishing a process to target public investments in these growth centers.

Implementing this proposal will require the active support and involvement of each state department and agency as outlined on page 11 of this report. That involvement will begin with an inventory by all agencies of funding resources that can be targeted to growth centers, and regulatory changes which could be made to encourage development in these centers. This inventory will be a critical guide for determining how the state can best target its resources to appropriate growth centers and we urge you to direct all state departments and agencies to immediately begin its development.

It was your understanding of the need to promote sustainable development in Rhode Island that led to the creation of the Growth Planning Council. With your leadership we can begin to lay the groundwork for a statewide process that ensures the efficient and effective investment of public dollars in locally determined, sustainable centers for growth and development.

We look forward to working with you on implementing the recommendations of this report. Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to sustainable growth in Rhode Island.



Jan Reitsma, Director
RI Department of Environmental Management



Tom Schumpert, Executive Director
RI Economic Development Corporation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why "growth centers"?

Planning for the future.

This proposal establishes a process for communities to identify, and the state to approve, growth centers. The growth centers concept will help cities and towns plan for the future by identifying where **they** want growth and development to occur and what they want that growth to look like. By planning ahead communities can reduce their costs for building and maintaining the infrastructure needed to support residential, commercial and industrial growth. At the same time, by directing future growth to specific areas the character of other parts of the community can be preserved, including historic areas and open space.

Making the most of limited public resources.

Under this proposal, state agencies and organizations will be responsible for identifying the resources they have available which could be targeted to growth centers. State resources will be used as an incentive for communities to target growth where it makes the most sense. For the first time all state agencies and organizations will work together to focus their limited resources on areas identified by the cities and towns as priority areas for growth and development. Communities benefit by having an array of resources brought to bear on their growth centers. Public departments and agencies benefit from the leveraging of other resources and the cost savings realized from not having to create an entirely new infrastructure system to support development.

Removing hurdles for investment in growth centers.

In addition to offering a financial "carrot" to encourage development in growth centers, the proposal will begin the process of removing "sticks" that may be impeding development in these areas. State agencies and organizations will be directed to identify statutory or regulatory changes which could be made to promote development in growth centers. This is not an "all or nothing" public investment strategy. Rather it could set aside and target portions of programs deemed to be appropriate for promoting diverse yet desired types of growth such as urban and village centers.

What is a "growth center"?

Growth centers are dynamic and efficient centers for development that have a core of commercial and community services, residential development, and natural and built landmarks and boundaries that provide a sense of place. Growth centers may differ in size, regional importance, and services provided but they do share common characteristics such as public and private investments in services, facilities, buildings, transportation, water and wastewater systems; and they contain some combination of schools, commercial and industrial buildings, and housing.

Recommendation

The Governor's Growth Planning Council recommends that the Governor issue the intent, definition, and criteria for growth centers; create processes for growth center and priority area identification and approval; and direct state departments and agencies to identify resources that could be targeted to growth centers, and regulatory changes that could be made to promote development in these areas.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Growth centers are dynamic and efficient centers for development that have a core of commercial and community services, residential development, and natural and built landmarks and boundaries that provide a sense of place."

One of the four charges to the Governor's Growth Planning Council is to "Recommend ways of encouraging growth in economically and environmentally sound locations" (EO 00-2, Section 3C). The State Program Inventory undertaken by the Council and published as part of its first annual report indicates a need to link public investment and smart growth strategies and to prioritize both in a coordinated fashion. Following up on the Inventory, the Council appointed a subcommittee to develop criteria for use in identifying priority areas for growth and to study how public investment can be used to encourage municipalities to (1) identify priority growth areas and (2) direct growth to those priority areas.

This report refers to these priority growth areas as growth centers, and proposes definitions, criteria, and processes for identifying, approving, and targeting resources to such centers in Rhode Island's cities and towns. The objective of these recommendations, in keeping with the

Executive Order charge, is to have communities and the State work together to identify priority areas for development. The recommendations do not seek to obstruct development outside of growth centers, but to give priority to public investments that will facilitate investment within these areas.

While consistent with and complementary to many goals and principles currently embodied in state statutes, programs and regulations, the proposed growth centers do not duplicate or create redundancies with existing programs. For example, the growth center concept is distinguished from the Enterprise Zone program in that Enterprise Zones specifically target the state's most economically distressed areas with incentives that focus on job creation while the growth center concept can be applied more broadly across the state's communities.

In the sections that follow, the Governor's Growth Planning Council provides its recommendations on the purpose and characteristics of growth centers, processes for identifying and approving such centers, and procedures for giving growth centers priority in competing for the array of existing state resources that are relevant for targeting growth and investment in those centers.

2. DEFINITION OF GROWTH CENTERS

Growth centers are dynamic and efficient centers for development that have a core of commercial and community services, residential development, and natural and built landmarks and boundaries that provide a sense of place. Development in the growth center draws development pressure away from critical or unique natural, cultural, and historic resources located outside of the growth center. Encouragement of development within identified growth centers is intended to reduce the pressure for sprawl development outside of the growth centers.

Growth centers can be divided into two categories: those that are already developed centers and those that are planned for development. Identified growth centers serve to prompt development in areas consistent with the State Guide Plan and local comprehensive plans, but do not prohibit future growth in other areas.

Growth centers are not all alike; they differ in size, regional importance, and services provided. However, they do share common characteristics such as public and

private investments in services, facilities, and buildings; investments in transportation, water supply, and wastewater disposal systems; and they contain some combination of schools, commercial and industrial buildings, and housing.

The preferred locations for growth centers are in areas with existing infrastructure and underused structures and resources, rather than in undeveloped greenfield sites. In some cases, such as in

rural communities with no defined center, it may be necessary to provide new infrastructure to support compact growth in areas identified in a community's comprehensive plan. Growth centers should include a mix of land uses and provide housing with a price range covering a full spectrum of income levels, and the center layout, density, and design should encourage public transit, walking, and biking over automobile use for local trips.

Below are descriptions of three examples of growth center types:

- **Urban Centers** - Urban Centers have a diverse mix of industry, commerce, residences, and cultural facilities. These centers have high concentrations of population. Urban centers are locations where redevelopment and revitalization opportunities exist and may in fact represent the primary form of growth. These centers contain large infrastructure systems, industrial facilities, corporate headquarters, medical and research services, government offices, convention centers, and other valuable built assets. It may be appropriate to identify most or all of the land within Rhode Island's urban core communities as growth centers as opposed to identifying specific neighborhoods. *(Examples: Providence, Newport)*
- **Town Centers** - Town Centers are characterized by a compact form of development with a defined central core providing many of the commercial, industrial, office, cultural, and governmental functions needed by the residents of the town and its economic region. A diverse housing stock is provided in the several neighborhoods that together form the town center. New town centers should emulate the characteristics of traditional town centers such as the human scale of blocks, streets, and open spaces; easy walking access; and a variety of housing options. *(Examples: downtown Westerly and Bristol)*
- **Village Centers** - Village Centers are mixed-use compact communities that offer basic consumer services and activities for their residents as well as nearby residents. Villages are not major regional shopping or employment centers. In suburban areas, new village centers will be distinguished from surrounding development by a more cohesive development form and closer proximity between residential and non-residential uses. In rural areas, new villages should be surrounded by natural areas, farmland, or open space and may have a commercial area in the core for neighborhood-scale goods and services. *(Examples: Wickford, Hope Valley)*



Newport, Rhode Island



Westerly, Rhode Island



Wickford, Rhode Island

Any of these three center types can be planned and implemented in an area currently characterized by sprawl development patterns. For example, the master planning process for T. F. Green Airport and the airport expansion area may result in a vision that fits the definition of an urban or town center, even though the area is currently characterized by the largely single-use, automobile-oriented development patterns associated with suburban sprawl.

In addition, it should be recognized that communities will have differing visions for their growth centers. Within any type of growth center, there can be variations in

approach to directing growth and investment, for example:

- **Existing centers/Minimal growth-** Focus on preservation, enhancement, and maintenance of their vitality as mixed-use centers.
- **Existing centers/Growth encouraged** - Focus on significant economic investment and development; existing infrastructure to be upgraded.
- **New Centers/Growth encouraged** Focus on significant economic investment and development; new infrastructure development required.

3. GROWTH CENTER CRITERIA

Consistency with State Guide Plan/state agency policies - Rhode Island does not lack policies related to planning for growth. The State Guide Plan contains the objective of and methods for maintaining urban and village centers, and has 29 elements that assess issues and provide goals, policies, and strategies for action. Each element was developed with stakeholder and public involvement and is continually updated and expanded to address emerging concerns. In accordance with the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, communities are required to be consistent with the goals and strategies of the State that influence future growth as found in the State Guide Plan. Listed below is a selection of existing elements and respective key policies consistent with the growth center concept and related to planning for growth:

Element 121 - State Land Use Policies and Plan:

- Relate the use of land to its natural characteristics, suitability to development, and the level of public facilities available or planned to be available.
- Maintain urban/village centers – provide needed infrastructure to

support development in these areas, while limiting extension to areas planned for low density development.

Element 155 - Greenspace and Greenways Plan:

- Direct new growth and development to areas and locations that minimize the potential for negative impacts upon the greenspace system; minimize unnecessary fragmentation of greenspace.
- Avoid direct and indirect public subsidization or support of projects which would significantly and negatively affect greenspace or greenways.

Element 212 - Industrial Land Use Plan:

- Reserve 20,000 acres of industrial land to sustain RI's economic growth.
- Match industry's needs to the land.
- Rehabilitate/reuse existing and underutilized buildings and infrastructure.

Element 421 - State Housing Plan:

- Preserve identity of historic neighborhoods and communities.

- Rehabilitate deteriorating neighborhoods and areas.
- Develop and support innovative techniques which make decent housing affordable for all low- and moderate-income households.

Element 611 - Ground Transportation Plan:

- Achieve more concentrated development patterns – emphasize downtowns, historic town centers, and higher housing densities.
- Preserve open space and rural character.
- Promote the control of land development along highways.
- Use land use planning to support transit service.

Element 715 - Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Narragansett Bay:

- Implement creative land use techniques to enhance growth management, protect water quality and preserve other sensitive natural resources.
- Communities should clearly identify and map areas that can accommodate new growth without adverse impact on sensitive natural resources.

Element 721 - Water Supply Policies:

- Encourage development that utilizes existing infrastructure.
- Land use regulations shall support water quality protection for public and private supply sources.

Capital Improvement Plan:

While not a State Guide Plan Element, the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is an important tool for directing state expenditures. The CIP is a five-year plan identifying capital projects to be funded during the planning period. The CIP identifies each proposed capital project to be undertaken, the fiscal year in which the project will be started or the property acquired, the amount expected to be expended on the project each fiscal year, and the proposed method of financing these expenditures.

Goals and Criteria for the Identification of Growth centers –

The following criteria embody widely accepted “smart growth” goals and principles, and should be used by communities to identify the physical limits and attributes of growth centers within their comprehensive plans.

CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING AND APPROVING GROWTH CENTERS

1. Strengthen and encourage growth in existing centers

Criteria:

The preferred locations for growth centers are areas with existing infrastructure and public services. *"Infrastructure" is defined here as adequate public water service, public sewerage system or wastewater management district, and transportation facilities and/or services.*

Infill projects, reuse of brownfields sites, and conversion of underutilized structures have priority over greenfields sites.

2. Scale new infrastructure to support compact growth

Criteria:

Planned infrastructure is sized to support designated compact growth, not a sprawl development pattern.

New growth centers should have adequate infrastructure either in place, or planned for a time-frame to coincide with development of the new center, as documented in the Facilities and Services Element of the local Comprehensive Plan.

Compact design should minimize the amount of land consumed on a per capita, per dwelling, and per job basis.

3. Include mixed land uses

Criteria:

Centers should include a mix of housing, significant employment opportunities, schools, commercial and industrial uses, and civic/public spaces and buildings.

A single-use development, such as an industrial park, may be considered a growth center if it is clearly linked to, compliments, and completes a nearby mix of compatible, existing or planned land uses.

Community comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances allow a mix of land uses to coexist within a center.

4. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices

Criteria:

Residential housing should include a range of housing opportunities, including single-family and multiple-household units for purchase or rental, and should cover a range of prices to address a full spectrum of income levels.

Community comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances allow and encourage a mix of housing types in centers.

5. Protect and enhance critical environmental resources

Criteria:

The center avoids converting working lands, such as prime farmland and forestland, into development.

The center avoids fragmenting existing greenspace, especially natural habitats and forests. Community green spaces should be designed for multiple uses (such as parks, sports fields, walking, biking, greenways, and water sports), and contribute to creating community/statewide, inter-connected greenspace/greenway networks wherever possible.

The center protects the local watershed and/or does not negatively impact critical and/or unique resource areas.

Critical Resource areas are defined as public water supply watersheds; groundwater aquifers; wellhead protection areas; rare/unique habitat; high value recreational waters; critical habitat for economically and/or ecologically valuable species.

The center does not negatively impact unique cultural resource areas.

Unique resource areas are defined as scenic vistas; archeological/historic sites; unfragmented forestland.

6. Provide a variety of transportation choices

Criteria:

Locations with convenient access to mass transit (existing or planned) are preferred. Centers are encouraged to include public transit hubs/stations to connect local routes.

Center layout, density, and design should encourage public transit, walking, and biking over automobile use for local trips.

Automobile traffic should be accommodated by inter-connected street patterns providing multiple routes to minimize congestion.

7. Promote community design that contributes to a sense of place

Criteria:

Community design within the centers should be used to encourage interactions among people, facilitate vibrant and safe street life, and maximize a strong sense of local community in harmony with the natural setting.

The streets have been designed with sidewalks, appropriate lighting, and connectedness, to promote easy and safe walking.

The center has committed to using older and historic buildings.

Centers should exhibit several or all of the characteristics of walkable communities: physical indicators of where the neighborhood begins and ends, relatively narrow streets with sidewalks, residential buildings in close proximity to commercial destinations, non-residential buildings with many windows and doors set close to the street, building entrances accessible to sidewalks, on-street parking, trees and/or architectural elements that protect pedestrians from weather, use of traffic calming devices including right-angled street corners, grid street pattern with connectivity to adjoining neighborhoods, and streetscapes that include amenities such as benches, good lighting, informative signage, and plantings.

8. Encourage growth in appropriately scaled centers

Criteria:

While the configuration of an identified growth center will vary from community to community, in accordance with community character and type of center desired by the municipality, growth centers should be small enough to be comfortably walkable. Except in the state's five historic urban core communities¹, municipally-identified growth centers should be no larger than an area with an approximately ¼ to ½ mile radius from its center to its edge in all directions (approximately ½ square mile to maximum of 1 square mile area).

¹ Providence, Woonsocket, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Newport.

4. PROCESS FOR MUNICIPAL IDENTIFICATION AND STATE DESIGNATION OF GROWTH CENTERS

There are two components to this initiative: (1) voluntary municipal identification of growth centers through the established local comprehensive planning process, and (2) voluntary municipal participation in a process for state designation of priority areas. The identification of the growth center is for the purpose of long term visioning by the community, while the state designation of priority areas is for the purpose of shorter term targeting of state level investments. This Section describes the first component; Section 6 describes the second.

centers consistent with the above definitions and criteria. The identification of growth centers is voluntary, but brings an incentive of making municipalities eligible for priority status in competing for existing state resources. Where appropriate, a municipality may choose to identify more than one growth center within its jurisdiction.

Local governments will identify growth centers through the existing comprehensive planning process, either through the regularly-scheduled five-year comprehensive plan update, or through a comprehensive plan amendment. In order to be considered for state level approval, the identification by a local government of a growth center within its jurisdiction should include:

“The successful implementation of growth centers at the municipal level requires integrated state support and incentives across a wide range of issue and program areas”

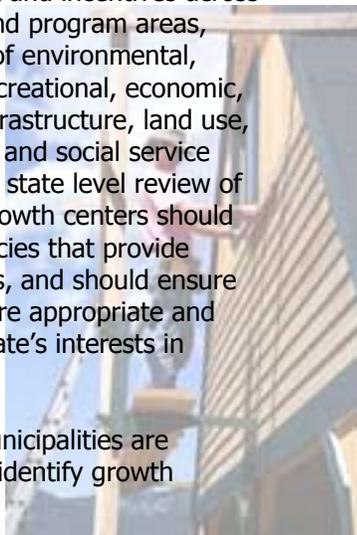
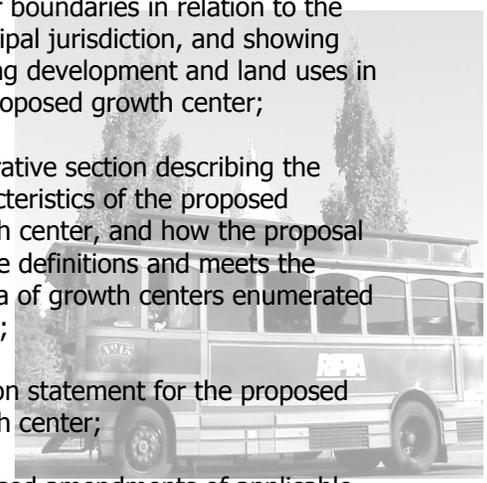
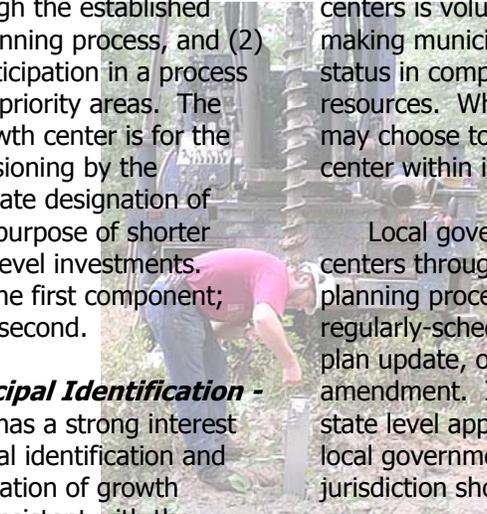
Municipal Identification -

The state has a strong interest in municipal identification and implementation of growth centers consistent with the above definitions and criteria. Such centers are beneficial to regional and state economies and resources; provide an alternative to suburban sprawl; help to protect the state’s valuable natural, cultural, and historic resources; and promote efficient growth and investment patterns and use of state resources.

The successful implementation of growth centers at the municipal level requires integrated state support and incentives across a wide range of issue and program areas, including the targeting of environmental, cultural, educational, recreational, economic, transportation, other infrastructure, land use, information technology, and social service delivery resources. The state level review of municipally identified growth centers should include a range of agencies that provide funding to municipalities, and should ensure that proposed centers are appropriate and serve to advance the state’s interests in planning for growth.

All Rhode Island municipalities are strongly encouraged to identify growth

- A map depicting the proposed growth center boundaries in relation to the municipal jurisdiction, and showing existing development and land uses in the proposed growth center;
- A narrative section describing the characteristics of the proposed growth center, and how the proposal fits the definitions and meets the criteria of growth centers enumerated above;
- A vision statement for the proposed growth center;
- Proposed amendments of applicable elements of the community’s comprehensive plan and future land use map;
- Proposed amendment of the implementation element of the comprehensive plan that describes a list of action steps the local government proposes to take to direct development, redevelopment and/or other investments to the proposed growth center. Such steps could include waiver of local license



and permit fees for development within the growth center, expedited local government permitting, prioritization of local infrastructure spending within the growth center, adoption of zoning overlays or "smart growth" codes and ordinances to promote growth in targeted areas;

- A statement discussing whether and how the implementation of the proposed growth center will impact development and investment patterns outside of the growth center;
- Documentation of required public participation and local adoption processes for proposed amendment.

State Designation - Whether submitted as a comprehensive plan amendment or as part of a five-year plan update, the proposed growth center will be reviewed by the Statewide Planning Program in conjunction with other agencies as appropriate, and will

be reviewed and acted on in accordance with the comprehensive plan regulations by the Director of the Department of Administration. This review process will ensure that the identified growth area is consistent with existing statutes and policies and with the State Guide Plan, and that the proposed growth center is sufficiently consistent with the criteria described above. Upon acceptance of a proposed growth center by the Director, the municipality will be considered to have an approved growth center.

State departments and agencies shall identify programs and resources that could be directed to approved growth centers. To ensure that these resources are being used to promote development in the most appropriate and highest priority areas, the Governor may choose to establish a process for further targeting public investments within growth centers.

5. DESIGNATION OF PRIORITY AREAS

The establishment of growth centers is a critical first step for managing future development in Rhode Island's cities and towns. They may include areas that communities envision for longer-term growth as well as areas that require more immediate revitalization. Since public resources are limited, a process is needed to target investments within growth centers to the highest priority areas as identified by the communities themselves.

There are many possible approaches to identifying priority areas, including some which are being used in other states. For example, Kentucky has established a phased program for increasing public investment in growth areas as participating communities achieve specific eligibility criteria. Maryland has passed "Priority Funding Areas" legislation, which limits most state infrastructure funding and economic development, housing and other program monies to Smart Growth Areas which meet

legislatively established standards and the local governments have designated for growth. The state also encourages development in these areas by facilitating the reuse of brownfields and providing tax credits to businesses creating jobs in Priority Funding Areas.

Connecticut has similarly established Neighborhood Revitalization Zones (NRZ) to revitalize neighborhoods through the collaborative involvement of residents, businesses and government based on the vision and priorities of the individual neighborhoods. Participating municipalities with adopted strategic plans do not receive any dedicated state funding but do receive other benefits. Those benefits include waivers of state and local regulations that have been identified in the strategic plan as barriers to neighborhood development; the opportunity to enter into tax agreements and allocate municipal funds to achieve the purposes of the plan; the right to petition the

judicial branch (local superior court) for appointment of a receiver of the rents for any deteriorated property; and; the ability for municipal corporations to be authorized to take abandoned or blighted property in a NRZ by eminent domain. The state Office of Policy and Management is charged with the responsibility of reviewing NRZ strategic plans and coordinating the NRZ waiver process.

Oregon has established an "Urban Growth Boundary" (UGB) around each of its 240 cities. The UGB line shows where a city expects to grow residentially, industrially and commercially, and is developed with the input of the cities, counties, and residents. Most land outside UGBs will continue to be used for farming, forestry, or low-density residential development and urban services, like sewers, will not be extended there. The zoning in areas outside of the UGB generally prohibits urban development and urban densities.

Other examples of targeted public investment include;

- **New Jersey** where communities may establish Centers and Planning areas which receive public investment and other priorities and benefit from expedited and coordinated program, capital funding and permit reviews and approvals by State and local government agencies;
- **Maine** where the legislature has required that all state growth-related investments be directed solely to designated growth areas; and
- **Delaware** where the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues recommends the most desirable state development



Constitution Hill, Woonsocket, RI

patterns and the timing and location of major public facilities.

Rhode Island has some experience in this area with its enterprise zone program. While the primary incentives have focused on economic development, the original design of the program was more holistic with a strong community leveraging component.

Alternatively, a local government that has received state level approval for a proposed growth center could participate in a multi-agency RFP process to designate all or part of the approved growth center as a priority area. State certified priority areas would receive elevated priority in selected state agency infrastructure funding, loan, and grant programs. Priority areas would be proposed by municipalities, and comprise all or part of an approved growth center.

These are only examples of possible approaches to targeting public investments in priority areas. Moving forward, the Governor's Growth Planning Council will explore these and other models to identify a process for prioritization that is best suited to Rhode Island's needs.

6. IDENTIFICATION OF DISCRETIONARY STATE AGENCY FUNDING SOURCES AND REGULATORY CHANGES THAT COULD BE USED AS INCENTIVES FOR MUNICIPAL GROWTH CENTERS AND PRIORITY AREAS

State departments and agencies will report to the Governor with a preliminary inventory of grant, loan, capital improvement,

cost reimbursement, technical assistance, expedited permitting, and other resources that can be targeted to growth centers and

priority areas. The completed inventory shall include a description of any changes to rules, regulations, or statute needed to give

such areas elevated priority in these programs.

Upon designation of a priority area, agencies will implement these changes to give the area higher priority in selection processes for resources for which it is otherwise eligible.

Such targeting of state resources is intended as an incentive to communities to identify growth centers and to assist in the implementation of such areas. However, receiving elevated priority for state resources does not guarantee that the growth center or priority area will receive new or additional funds, as other agency resource allocation processes and selection criteria will continue to apply. Nonetheless, agencies are asked to consider meaningful ways that resources and other types of assistance can be targeted to direct growth and investment to designated growth centers and priority areas, including siting and investing in their own facilities. It may also be appropriate for agencies to consider ways to prioritize funding to areas outside of growth centers, when such funds would advance the implementation of the

growth center, for example, targeting open space/conservation funding to areas surrounding a growth center in a rural context.

In addition to discretionary funding sources, departments and agencies should develop policies for aligning other sources of investment and assistance with the concept of targeting resources in growth centers. For example, the Economic Development Corporation should incorporate growth center criteria into its decision making regarding its loan programs, as should RI Housing in allocating its funding and tax credit programs, as otherwise allowed by these programs' governing statutes.

State departments and agencies that are asked to give priority funding and other assistance to growth centers include but are not limited to; all state departments, all quasi-public agencies, and all commissions that provide resources or assistance to growth centers.

7. STEPS TO IMPLEMENT GROWTH CENTERS PROGRAM

The Governor's Growth Planning Council envisions the following sequence of events for implementing the growth centers recommendations: the Governor approves the intent, definition and criteria of growth centers, directs state departments and agencies to identify available resources and adopt changes needed to give growth centers priority in receiving these resources, the Statewide Planning Program issues guidance to municipalities on identifying growth centers, municipalities propose growth centers, growth centers are approved by the State through the comprehensive planning process, a process for identifying priority areas is developed, priority areas are selected, state agencies direct resources to priority areas to assist communities in implementing their visions for their growth centers.

Short Term Steps

The Governor issues the intent, definition, and criteria of growth centers. – The Governor directs state departments and agencies to identify discretionary funds, capital improvements, and other resources for which certified growth centers and priority areas will be given elevated priority, as well as regulatory changes which could be made to encourage development in growth centers. The Governor shall designate a point person in each agency to coordinate this effort and to work with the Governor's Growth Planning Council in developing a process for targeting areas.

The Governor's Growth Planning Council shall explore alternatives for targeting public investments within growth centers and make recommendations to the Governor on the design of such a process for Rhode Island which shall be implemented upon approval.

State Guide Plan/Comprehensive Plan Regulations

- The Office of Statewide Planning in cooperation with the Growth Council and other state departments and agencies shall revise the State Guide Plan, especially its Land Use Element, to articulate the growth centers concept, criteria, process, and incentive program;
- The Office of Statewide Planning shall revise Comprehensive Planning regulations and/or relevant documents to include and provide guidance to communities on identifying growth centers and designating priority areas.

Agency Implementation

- State departments and agencies will report to the Governor within sixty days with a preliminary inventory of funding resources that can be targeted to priority areas. Within six months that inventory will be completed and shall include a description of any changes to rules, regulations, or statutes needed to give such areas elevated priority in these programs. State departments and agencies will also identify any other statutory or regulatory changes which could be made to further encourage development in growth centers.
- The Office of Statewide Planning coordinates review of municipally identified growth centers as proposed by local governments in comprehensive plan updates or amendments.

Local Government Implementation

- Communities undertake processes to identify and plan for growth centers suitable to individual community character and geographic location within the state and its regions;

- Communities submit proposals for the approval of growth centers and, if applicable, for the designation of priority areas;
- Communities may offer local level incentives as permitted by law to direct growth and investment to growth centers and priority areas.

Long Term Steps

Agency Implementation

- State departments and agencies provide annual report to the Governor on their progress in implementing priority areas; this reporting requirement shall be completed prior to the beginning of each fiscal year for existing programs and shall identify dollars expected to be available within each program and with the expected time frame. If a program is introduced during the fiscal year, the agency must inform the Growth Planning Council at least 30 days before the announcement of the program or request for applications.
- Baseline data relating to indicators of program success and mechanisms and processes to measure and analyze such data on a regular basis are established to track progress and to recommend changes to the program as needed.

Resources

- Encourage relevant non-profit and philanthropic organizations, e.g. Main Street Rhode Island, Preserve Rhode Island, and Rhode Island Foundation, to give municipalities with certified growth centers priority in competition for grant funding and other resources relevant to the implementation of the growth centers;
- Work with appropriate federal agencies to encourage them to target relevant resources to certified growth centers and priority areas;

- Float bonds to provide additional economic incentives for communities to direct development to growth centers; new funds could be used for infrastructure improvements, master planning, community visioning processes, development of new codes and ordinances, incentives for developers, etc.
- Recognize that existing regional planning initiatives and organizations provide important context and are potential assets in identifying and implementing growth centers; provide incentives for the development of new regional planning efforts; promote transfer of development rights programs, regional economic development planning entities, and tax sharing mechanisms through regional planning efforts.

State Guide Plan

- Reorganize the State Guide Plan into one document that sets goals and policies for future development, including a single vision statement. The reorganized Plan should focus on growth centers as the driver of development patterns in the state.
- Recognize and support existing informal regional mechanisms, for example, land trusts, regional-scale community organizations, watershed planning, etc.

Regionalism

8. POTENTIAL FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

The identification and implementation of growth centers will lead to an increase in regional cooperation and perspective. While municipalities would be in charge of identifying their own growth centers, it is essential to do so within a regional context. Municipalities share natural and built attributes, and often share common concerns such as roadways, water supply, economic health, industrial development, and housing demands.

Regional approaches can be formal or informal. *Formal* mechanisms include regional and/or consolidated government structure, metropolitan planning councils, special service taxing districts and joint service agreements. *Informal* mechanisms may include civic organizations, area-wide coalitions, and voluntary regional planning organizations. Local governments may need regional initiatives to establish strategies that benefit themselves and other communities.

Examples of regional approaches to planning for growth are many in Rhode Island:

- The Washington County Regional Planning Council, composed of appointed

town council representatives from the nine towns in the county, is a forum for

the ongoing exchange of ideas and information, and promotes new forms of municipal coordination and cost sharing. The regional effort is supported by local towns, businesses, and other groups that realize that growth and development trends within one town are influenced by those occurring in neighboring towns, and in the region as a whole. Currently the Council is partnering with Grow Smart Rhode Island and others to develop a long range sustainable economy plan for Washington County.

- The Rhode Island Watershed Approach has over the past three years brought together a wide variety of stakeholders to benefit the state's watersheds environmentally, economically, and socially. Watersheds by their nature cross numerous political boundaries. The Watershed Action Plans for the Narrow River, Pawcatuck River, Salt Ponds, Saugatucket River, Woonasquatucket River, and Blackstone River watersheds were developed to focus the efforts of

stakeholders in each of these ecologically-defined regions over the next two years.

- The communities of Charlestown, Exeter, Hopkinton, Narragansett, North Kingstown, Richmond, South Kingstown, West Greenwich and Westerly are working to identify the natural, cultural and recreational resources they want to protect through the South County Greenspace Project. The project aims to create a regional greenspace protection strategy that will portray the land protection goals of the towns and linkages along and across municipal boundaries will be made to form a regional greenspace picture (A similar project is underway in the Woonasquatucket River Watershed).
- The Aquidneck Island Partnership (AIP) formed in response to the need to protect the overall character of the island, which was perceived to be disappearing, and to resolve issues as one island community. The Partnership, comprised of

government, nonprofit, business, and community representatives is working to create a livable landscape, foster social well-being, secure a strong local economy, and encourage multiple modes of transportation.

- The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission (AIPC) is a joint municipal planning commission enabled by the Rhode Island General Laws and created by resolutions of the towns of Middletown and Portsmouth and the city of

Newport. The AIPC is made up of planning board members from Middletown, Newport and Portsmouth, as well as one member from the planning branch at Naval Station Newport. The goal of the AIPC is to promote effective regional planning for Aquidneck Island. The AIPC is currently working with the Navy to develop a plan for the potential

release of over 400 acres of land west of West Main Road. The plan provides an opportunity for determining future employment, transportation, public access, mixed-use development, and open space protection for a large segment of Aquidneck Island.

- Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission was established by Congress to help preserve and interpret the unique resources and qualities that make the Blackstone Valley significant to its residents and the nation. The corridor spans 24 towns and cities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and has partnered with over 500 private sector businesses, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and individuals.
- The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council (BVTC) is the state designated regional tourism development agency for the Northern Rhode Island Tourism District, as authorized under the Rhode Island General Laws, representing the cities of Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket and the towns of Cumberland, Lincoln, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Glocester and Burrillville. BVTC has worked to develop, promote and expand the economic and community development base for the cities and towns in Rhode Island's Blackstone River Valley as a prime visitor and cultural destination, while improving the region's quality of life, environment and historic preservation of the region's heritage, culture, environment and recreation. The Tourism Council has worked closely with public and private partnerships, worked as an interpreter and educator of the history and ecology of the Blackstone River, initiated ongoing international relationships of major importance to the region, worked closely with cities and towns in their community development projects and provided input on future riverfront and economic development impacting the surroundings, and developed various recreational activities.

These regional initiatives have started to address single issues, although as experience

"The Governor's Growth Planning Council encourages the strengthening of such regional planning efforts in conjunction with the identification and implementation of growth centers throughout the state."

has taught in other regions of the country, single-issue projects may evolve into broader initiatives. The Governor's Growth Planning Council encourages the strengthening of such regional planning efforts in conjunction with the identification and implementation of growth centers throughout the state.

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