

Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program
STATE PLANNING COUNCIL
MINUTES

Thursday, December 13, 2007

William E. Powers Building
Conference Room A
One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI

I. ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Mr. Jared L. Rhodes, II, Secretary	Statewide Planning Program
Ms. Susan Baxter	Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission
Mr. Daniel Beardsley	RI League of Cities and Towns
Ms. Lisa Bourbonnais	Representing Mr. William Sequino, Public Member
Ms. Jeanne Boyle	City of East Providence Planning Department
Ms. Sharon Conard Wells	West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation
Mr. Christopher Long	Representing Mr. Timothy Costa, Vice Chair Governor's Policy Office
Mr. L. Vincent Murray	Town of South Kingstown Planning Department
Mr. Peter Osborn	Federal Highway Administration (Advisory Member)
Ms. Anna Prager	Public Member
Mr. B. Michael Rauh	Environmental Advocate
Mr. Peder Schaefer	Representing Ms. Rosemary Booth Gallogly, Budget Office
Mr. Robert Shawver	Representing Mr. Jerome Williams, RI Department of Transportation
Mr. Henry Sherlock	Representing Mr. Steven Cardi, Public Member
Mr. John Trevor	Environmental Advocate

Members Absent

Mr. Kevin Flynn	Representing Ms. Beverly Najarian, Chair, RI Department of Administration
Mr. Thomas Deller	Department of Planning & Development, City of Providence
Ms. Janet White Raymond	Public Member

Guests

Mr. Dino Autiello	R.I. Senate
Ms. Michelle Komar	Warwick resident
Ms. Amy McPheters	Edwards & Kelcey
Mr. Ralph Rizzo	Federal Highway Administration

Staff--Statewide Planning Program

Mr. Robert Griffith	Chief, Strategic Planning
Mr. George Johnson	Assistant Chief, Statewide Planning
Ms. Katherine Trapani	Supervising Planner, Transportation
Mr. Bruce Vild	Supervising Planner, Economic Development

II. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order

In the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair, Mr. Rhodes called the meeting to order at 9:06 A.M.

2. Approval of November 8th Minutes

Mr. Murray moved to approve the Minutes of November 8, 2007, as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Prager, and carried unanimously.

3. Chief's Progress Report

In lieu of a full Chief's report Mr. Rhodes read a letter from Mr. Flynn explaining the reason for his absence was due to necessary eye surgery and expressing his best holiday wishes to the Council's members. The letter summarized Mr. Flynn's assessment of progress made by the Program over the past year, and indicated appreciation for the Council's support of the staff and for the time and effort Council members devote to the work of the Program. The letter also applauded the staff for its work, and noted that one long-time member of the staff, Mr. Bruce Vild, would be retiring next week. Mr. Flynn's letter recognized Mr. Vild's contributions to Rhode Island's economic development over his career, and indicated that he will be greatly missed.

Ms. Prager asked that the Council members' best wishes for a speedy recovery be conveyed to Mr. Flynn.

4. Draft Airport System Plan

Mr. Rhodes indicated that this item was initially proposed for Council action to accept the draft plan for a public hearing. This was based on staff revisions responding to Council comments at the last meeting. However, he noted that addition concerns had arisen over the past several days and requested that action on this item be deferred for a month.

Ms. Prager moved to defer consideration of this agenda item until the next meeting. This motion was seconded by Ms. Boyle, and it carried unanimously.

5. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy – Annual Update

Mr. Rhodes asked Mr. Vild to review this item. In his final appearance before the Council, Mr. Vild summarized the draft CEDS document, indicating that it follows EDA's format and content requirements. He noted that it contains a description of the state's CEDS process, and its link to the State Guide Plan, including such considerations as land use and energy. The second section provides an economic snapshot of the state utilizing data from RI Department of Labor and Training, the RI Economic Development Corporation, and a private group – Moody's Economy.com – to portray the status of the economy. He noted that the current conditions are mixed -- the health, education and professional services sectors are showing growth, while manufacturing and retail are down. Personal income in the state grew by 5.8% in 2006, but average manufacturing wages are the lowest in the region. He noted that the document includes unemployment data for the CEDS Project communities, as well as per capita income data for all Census tracts in those communities compared to the national level. Data presented on migration also indicate a recent downturn, but he noted that this indicator traditionally has been subject to fluctuations and inaccuracy.

The next section of the report provides an evaluation of the state's CEDS process, which Mr. Vild indicated he would grade as a "B" overall. Strengths are found in developing partnerships, but the process is weaker in demonstrating actual commitment of private funds to CEDS projects. Another strength is broad representation of the economic development profession in the CEDS process. The CEDS Committee structure includes the Council, the Technical Committee, and the CEDS Subcommittee, which Mr. Vild noted had been broadened to include representation by the Economic Policy Council staff, the Small Business Development Center, and the New England Economic Development Services organization. The Project list is also included – 8 out of 11 applications made the listing, Mr. Vild noted. Mr. Vild referenced the figure and table on page 36 as tracking EDA funding received by Rhode Island. This averages around \$1 million per year, although is lower in some years as projects may not be ready to proceed, in terms of design and permitting. He noted that the funds Rhode Island has received over the past two years relative to other states in the region is presented in the table on page 36. This indicates that Rhode Island is generally on a par with its neighbors under the CEDS program.

Mr. Vild reviewed the attachments to the CEDS Report, which include the CEDS Application and Scoring Criteria, membership lists of the CEDS Committee and its subcommittees, and the Minutes from the meetings of the various groups that acted on the CEDS.

Mr. Rhodes asked when the state would learn of EDA's reaction to the CEDS in terms of projects awarded funding.

Mr. Vild indicated that the timing of grant awards is dependant on the efforts of project sponsors to follow up with EDA on pre-applications and, if invited, applications for their projects. He noted that he expected at least one applicant to move quickly on its project.

Mr. Vild concluded his presentation by requesting formal Council endorsement of the CEDS Annual Report for 2007.

Mr. Schafer asked if more recent employment data could be used in the report. Mr. Vild noted that since the draft was published earlier this month, indeed more recent data may have been released by Moody's Economy.com, and/or the State DLT. He indicated that he could investigate more recent data and that they would be incorporated if it was the wish of the Council.

Ms. Boyle commented that Mr. Vild's assistance to the Council and to applicants on the CEDS process over the years had been very instrumental in getting grants. She also cited his background and experience in economic development and energy matters, and stated that his assistance and expertise will be missed.

Ms. Baxter moved to approve the 2007 CEDS Report, with the inclusion of more recent employment data if found to be available by staff. This motion was seconded by Ms. Conard Wells and passed unanimously.

Mr. Vild took the opportunity to comment on his 30 years of service with the State, 25 of which have been with the Statewide Planning Program. He noted that throughout his career with the Program, which has include such diverse assignments as planning for potential Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas exploration and the Greenhouse Gas Stakeholders Process to a variety of economic development reports and plans and the CEDS process, he has thoroughly enjoyed his time with the Program and his interactions with the Council and its Technical Committee. He stated his appreciation to the Council and Program for always being treated with dignity and respect.

Mr. Rhodes commented, on behalf of the entire staff, that Mr. Vild will be missed, and that he is wished all the best for his future endeavors.

Ms. Prager moved that the Minutes reflect that the Council thanks Mr. Vild for his service to Rhode Island and conveys its wishes for his future success. This motion was seconded by Ms. Conard Wells and carried unanimously.

Mr. Rhodes commented on the importance of the economic development function in the Statewide Planning process, and indicated that the staff has been meeting to insure a smooth transition. The work currently performed by Mr. Vild's section, which he noted also included Ms. Joyce Karger until her retirement this past August, includes EDA planning grant management, the CEDS process, the Intergovernmental Review, which includes review of Economic Development Corporation and Quonset projects, and maintaining the Economic Policies and Plan element of the State Guide Plan, a major update of which is underway. Mr. Rhodes noted that both internally and externally staff and cooperating agencies have stepped up to offer assistance to ensure that Statewide Planning's key functions in economic development continue to be performed. At least for the short term, Bob Griffith, and the Strategic Planning unit, have offered to assume the EDA grant management, CEDS, and IGR functions. Discussions are also underway with staff of the Economic Policy Council towards an agreement that will allow EPC staff with Program staff guidance to assist in keeping the update of the Economic Policies and Plan on track. In the longer term, the Program is hopeful that permission to fill at least Mr. Vild's position will be granted, but given the current budgetary situation that cannot be guaranteed, and other approaches in terms of organizational arrangements may be needed.

6. Committee Nominations

Mr. Rhodes reviewed this item, reminding members that at last month's meeting the Council took nominations for the Technical Committee and RIGIS Executive Committee appointments under advisement. The proposed 2008 compositions of these Committees, including the nominations for new members, are presented on the handouts in members' packets. He asked for action to appoint the membership of these Committees.

Ms. Baxter commented that Dr. Combs is listed as representing the Health Department on the Technical Committee even though he is retiring this week. Mr. Rhodes indicated that listing was

an error, but that the sense would be to continue the representation of the Health Department on the Committee, and that staff would like the ability to coordinate with the Department to ascertain an appropriate representative to replace Dr. Combs.

Mr. Rauh moved to appoint the membership of the Technical Committee as proposed, with the understanding that continuing representation by the Department of Health will be sought. The motion was seconded by Mr. Murray and carried unanimously.

Mr. Rhodes asked for Council action on the appointment of members to the RIGIS Executive Committee.

Mr. Trevor moved to appoint the membership of the RIGIS Executive Committee as proposed. This motion was seconded by Mr. Rauh and carried unanimously.

7. 2008 Meeting Calendar

Mr. Rhodes called members attention to the handout listing proposed meeting dates for 2008. These had been introduced last month. He noted that the dates had been established to continue the traditional meeting time of the second Thursday morning of each month, with the exception of the October meeting which would be moved to the third Thursday to avoid a conflict with Yom Kippur.

Ms. Baxter moved approval of the 2008 meeting calendar as presented. This was seconded by Ms. Prager and carried unanimously.

Ms. Boyle suggested that regarding the October meeting staff also consider the dates of the regional APA Conference, which will be held in Providence this year, to avoid possible conflicts which could impact a quorum. Mr. Rhodes indicated that this would be considered when the dates for the planning conference are established.

8. Other Business

On behalf of the Program and staff, Mr. Rhodes wished all members the best for the holidays.

9. Adjourn

There being no other business before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 9:52 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared L. Rhodes, II
Secretary