

Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program
STATE PLANNING COUNCIL
MINUTES

Thursday, June 12, 2008
William E. Powers Building
Conference Room A
One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI

I. ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Mr. Kevin Flynn	Representing Mr. Jerome Williams, Chair, RI Department of Administration
Mr. Jared L. Rhodes, II, Secretary	Statewide Planning Program
Ms. Susan Baxter	Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission
Mr. Daniel Berman	Representing Mr. Peter Osborn. Federal Highway Administration (Advisory Member)
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. Camilla Corte	Representing Ms. Rosemary Booth Gallogly, Budget Office
Mr. L. Vincent Murray	Town of South Kingstown Planning Department
Ms. Anna Prager	Public Member
Mr. Robert Shawver	Representing Mr. Michael Lewis, RI Department of Transportation
Mr. Henry Sherlock	Representing Mr. Steven Cardi, Public Member
Ms. Janet White Raymond	Public Member

Members Absent

Mr. Daniel Beardsley	RI League of Cities and Towns
Mr. Christopher Long	Representing Mr. Timothy Costa, Vice Chair Governor's Policy Office
Mr. Thomas Deller	Department of Planning & Development, City of Providence
Mr. B. Michael Rauh	Environmental Advocate
Mr. John Trevor	Environmental Advocate

Guests

Mr. Ames Colt	R.I. Bays, Rivers and Watersheds Coordination Team
Mr. Bill Clark	Town of Portsmouth
Mr. Bob Gilstein	Town of Portsmouth
Ms. Kelly Mahoney	R.I. Senate Policy Office

Staff--Statewide Planning Program

Mr. George Johnson	Assistant Chief, Statewide Planning
Ms. Katherine Trapani	Supervising Planner, Transportation
Mr. Robert Griffith	Chief, Strategic Planning
Mr. William McKenna	Principal Accountant, Strategic Planning
Ms. Maria Costa	Executive Assistant

II. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order

Mr. Flynn called the meeting to order at 9:12 A.M.

2. Approval of May 8th Minutes

Ms. Prager moved to approve the Minutes of May 8, 2008, as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Boyle and carried unanimously.

The Chair indicated, in sensitivity to maintaining a quorum and to the guests present, the action items would be dealt with first, out of order on the agenda.

5. FY 2009 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Project Priority List

The Chair introduced this item, noting that the staff scoring and Subcommittee work had resulted initially in 5 of the 8 project proposals being recommended for the list. When this was reviewed with the Technical Committee, the Town of Middletown, by happenstance of the Town Planner being on the Technical Committee, learned that its project had not made the listing, and requested an opportunity to make a case before the Committee. It made a compelling case for its project, and the Committee voted to add it to the listing. In doing so, it also asked staff to inform proponents of the other two proposals that were below the cut-off line so that they could pursue their opportunities before the Council. One of those two – the Town of Portsmouth -- has representatives present; the other, the Quonset Development Corporation, could not send representatives due to other commitments, but has provided a letter and attachments relative to its proposal. These are in the handouts for members. Mr. Flynn asked Mr. McKenna to summarize the Subcommittee's process and recommendation.

Mr. McKenna discussed the scoring criteria, indicating that they favor proposals that will provide well-paying jobs with health benefits; have partners identified as co-applicants; provide workforce

development in terms of job training or transportation to economically-disadvantaged populations; provide environmental benefits, such as Brownfields remediation or location within growth centers; and are “ready to go” in terms of permitting and studies, community support, and matching funding packages. Location in an Enterprise Zone is also a distinct advantage in the scoring. He noted that the Subcommittee had reviewed and discussed the staff’s scoring of the proposals using these criteria, and had arrived at a list with five projects. It decided by vote to go below the median to include a project from Cumberland for the former Ann & Hope complex because it was related to the Broad Street revitalization effort and provided benefits to disadvantaged communities. The Technical Committee reviewed the Subcommittee’s recommended list, and voted to include the Middletown project as well, after hearing the Town’s presentation. He noted that some on the Subcommittee had proposed including all 8 proposals on the listing, but that this view did not prevail at the Subcommittee meeting, and it specifically voted not to include the lowest three.

Mr. Flynn recognized the representatives from the Town of Portsmouth to present information to the Council on the Town’s proposal.

Mr. William Clark, Director of Business Development for the Town, and Mr. Robert Gilstein, Town Planner, addressed the Council. Mr. Clark told the Council that the Town recognized that demographics are against the Town’s proposal, and that it cannot qualify on some criteria; but he felt that it could be accorded more points under several criteria, and should be added to the list. These factors relate to the proposal’s support for the State’s policies as expressed in Land Use: 2025, such as improving environmental conditions, focusing growth in growth centers, and using the existing capacity of infrastructure to best advantage. He described the project for the Council. It derives from a 2002 study done by the Town that recommended creation of a Town Center. This study identified wastewater management as an issue to be addressed before a center could proceed. The Town Center plan is fully consistent with Land Use: 2025 in terms of providing new mixed-use commercial and residential centers, with shared parking, and traffic controls to promote walkability. He noted that the Town is pursuing a project with DOT to re-construct East Main Road to calm the traffic in the Town Center via a boulevard with three roundabouts. The CEDS proposal would provide a small area central collection and treatment system for wastewater. The area has a number of small parcels that will have to be redeveloped. Providing on-site waste treatment was deemed inefficient as it would consume land and defeat the ability to have more compact growth. The proposal is to provide a system that would collect wastewater from each lot and pump it to a centralized location for treatment on Town-owned recreation land nearby.

Mr. Flynn asked if this would be a septic discharge. Mr. Gilstein responded that the system would be a large-scale version of an advanced residential system. Wastewater would be deposited in a large leach field under the Town recreation fields. There would be no surface discharge.

Mr. Clark continued the presentation, noting that the Town Center concept is fully supportive of Land Use: 2025 in that it will mix housing with commercial uses, provide walkable environments, contain sprawl and create a dense center for the Town.

Mr. Gilstein indicated that the project applies Smart Growth concepts to a suburban community. It will show how to attain denser development in an area that lacks sewers. He noted that the Town had adopted commercial design guidelines that provide for buildings to be towards the streetline, with parking behind or on the side. There is local buy-in for this project. The proposal is not a big or expensive project, but it is essential for the Town Center concept to advance.

Mr. Flynn explained that the CEDS Criteria encompass a number of factors in addition to support for Land Use: 2025. It was on these other factors, including lack of funding commitment, that the proposal did not score as well as some others.

Ms. Baxter asked if the playground and park would be eliminated by the project. Mr. Gilstein replied that everything would be underground, and the playfields would be retained.

Ms. Prager asked if the system would be owned and maintained by the Town. Mr. Gilstein replied that would be the case.

Ms. Boyle asked if Land Use: 2025 consistency was only a threshold criterion. Mr. McKenna replied that consistency with the Guide Plan was a threshold factor, but that there was also an opportunity,

under the Environmental criteria, to score up to 10 points for support of the land use plan's policies. Ms. Boyle also sought and received clarification that the roundabout was not part of the CEDS proposal, and that no local funds had actually been committed to the project. Mr. Gilstein stated that funding commitment is a "chicken and egg" problem. It is difficult in tight budget times to have local funds committed until other sources are lined up. Mr. Flynn commented that EDA, from its perspective, often likes to see other funds committed before it pledges federal funds.

Mr. Murray asked if there was a downside to adding all the projects to the list. Mr. Flynn replied that staff had discussed that with EDA's representative and been informed that having all eight projects on the list would not harm the state's chances for getting a project funded. Mr. Murray also asked if there was a history of septic failures or water quality impacts in the project area. Mr. Gilstein stated that there was not, but the study report did cite poorly-drained soils as a potential constraint to using individual systems on-site.

Mr. Flynn asked if the Town had investigated using a Tax-Increment-Financing (TIF) approach to provide local matching funds. Mr. Clark replied that the Town is investigating TIFs for use in other projects, and they might be applicable here too. He noted that the build out study indicated a potential for doubling the tax base within the proposed Town Center area. He stressed again that the overall project is designed to provide local economic development, with local jobs providing local services. Commercial space would be combined with second and third floor housing. Financial, health and hospitality sectors would be sought. He cited a recent example of the Newport Hospital's locating an MRI Center in town as a type of facility that would be desirable for the Center.

Ms. Prager asked what the "endorse" column on the scoring sheet indicated. Mr. McKenna responded that this indicated that the proposal has the endorsement of the local chief elected official.

Ms. Boyle had some comments on the process overall. She asked if the CEDS Subcommittee had thoroughly examined the proposals. Mr. McKenna replied that members were provided with applications and staff scores in advance of the meeting. At the meeting staff presented each proposal, and reviewed its scoring, with an emphasis on highlighting areas of judgment. The Committee had an extensive discussion of 2 to 2 ½ hours and then voted its recommendations. A major decision was to include the Ann & Hope project, even though it scored below the median. The Committee voted to not include the other three proposals that were below the median.

Mr. Flynn commented that Technical Committee discussion had considered the fact that there were relatively fewer, but higher quality proposals this year than compared to past years. One Committee member had asked if it made sense to use the median score to arbitrarily cull half the proposals from the list when there are so few. Mr. Flynn also observed that the CEDS process has never provided an opportunity for proponents to present their projects at a public hearing. Holding a hearing, he suggested, may be looked into as a means to improve the process in future years. He also noted that all seem agreed that there is a need to re-assess the scoring criteria prior to the next cycle.

Ms. Boyle asked if the criteria are reflective of EDA's priorities. Mr. McKenna stated that, yes they generally are, but he noted that EDA has a recent initiative for global competitiveness that the state's criteria may have to respond to in the future.

Mr. Flynn noted that many of the criteria favor urban projects; the five of the eight that made the initial list this year are urban, or serve an urban population.

Mr. Gilstein addressed the readiness criteria, which gives up to 30 points for having all studies completed. Again, he stated, this can be a chicken and egg situation, where applicants are reluctant to invest in detailed studies and permits until there is some funding potential for a project. He suggested that this criterion should also factor in local buy-in. The Town proposal, he commented, has lots of local buy-in from residents and merchants. There have been many meetings.

Mr. Griffith stated that EDA likes to be the deal-maker. It wants its funding to be the last piece necessary to make the project happen. It wants all the studies and permitting to be done. He also recounted the staff evaluation and subcommittee review of the proposals. In the end, the Subcommittee decided that it did not wish to recommend all projects. It recommended the four above the median, and one below, that it voted to add to the list.

Ms. Boyle asked why the decision was made not to forward all 8 projects.

Mr. McKenna noted that there was two schools of thought on that point. Some members advocated sending all the projects to EDA since they were good projects that supported local economic development needs of the cities and towns. Others felt that the program's intent was to focus resources on distressed areas of greatest need. In the end, that view prevailed at the Subcommittee level. The Technical Committee seemed more sympathetic to the view that the program exists to help all the towns, he noted.

Ms. Prager stated that local funding will be needed to make this project a reality. If the funds are not committed in this year's budget, even if the project is recommended to the federal agency, there is no way the Town could provide its share this year. This should mean it is possible for the Town to reapply to CEDS next year when it has its funds committed.

Mr. Gilstein stated that the hope is that the project could be put on the eligible list this year, in contemplation of a possible federal stimulus program. It could be that this would be the type of local project that EDA may wish to fund this year, particularly if federal funding of the overall CEDS program is increased to boost the economy.

Mr. Shawver asked what harm there is in sending all projects. This, he suggested, could boost the state's chance of getting something funded. There could be a project on the list that might best meet EDA's particular focus. Why vote to exclude good projects, if that could limit the state's chances in the overall national competition. The same, he felt, should apply to the QDC proposal.

Mr. Flynn stated that there is no harm in sending a list with all the proposals, as long as they are all good projects that meet the state's criteria. He suggested a way to proceed would be to include all 8 projects on the list, but to show them in ranked priority order. He asked if there was a motion along those lines.

Ms. Wells objected that the listing should be based on leveraged funds and readiness to proceed, which are key criteria for the EDA. She also noted that there may have been a number of other proposals that were not submitted since potential applicants are familiar with the criteria and process, and felt it best to wait until their projects were more ready.

Ms. Prager moved to submit all projects in rank order and to examine the criteria prior to the next cycle. Ms. Raymond seconded this motion.

The motion was passed with eleven in favor, one opposed, and one (Ms. Boyle) abstaining.

4. Unified Work Program for Transportation Planning

Mr. Johnson reviewed this item, describing several minor changes to the draft that the Council had reviewed at the May meeting. These included language allowing the Program to consider using transportation planning funds to support qualified planning-related research projects via the University of Rhode Island's Transportation Center, and changes to the narrative in Part One relating to Water Supply Planning. Both of these changes respond to comments provided by Technical Committee members, he noted.

Mr. Johnson indicated that no other comments had been received which required changes to the draft. He stated that the action being requested is approval of the Work Program as the Unified Work Program for Transportation Planning. He called the Council's attention to the handout on Certifications, indicating that the Council's approval action should reference these certifications attesting that the state's planning process conforms to applicable federal criteria. Upon the Council's approval, the Work Program will be submitted to the Federal Highway and Transit Administrations for approval before the new fiscal year begins.

Ms. Raymond moved approval of the Fiscal Year 2009 Unified Work Program with the required certifications of the planning process. This motion was seconded by Ms. Wells and passed unanimously.

3. Chief's Progress Report

Mr. Rhodes presented a progress report including the following items:

- **Comprehensive Planning** – Mr. Rhodes reported that Comprehensive Plan Five-Year Updates for the towns of Narragansett and Charlestown had been approved by the Director. Reviews of the City of Providence's and Town of North Kingstown's Five Year Updates are also nearing completion; as is the staff review of the Town of Johnston's revisions to its initial plan submittal. An amendment from the Town of South Kingstown, and Five Year Updates to the Westerly and Tiverton plans continue under active review. Information concerning a draft amendment was recently received from the Town of South Kingstown, and, in an effort to respond to one of the recommendations from the Comprehensive Planning Assessment, this draft amendment will be reviewed and Program input provided prior to Town adoption.
- **Land Use Planning** -- Mr. Rhodes noted that the Land Use effort is constrained by the departure of Ms. Blanche Higgins for an opportunity in her hometown. Land Use section staff Kevin Nelson, Nancy Hess and Benny Bergantino are keeping the unit's projects moving ahead. Mr. Rhodes indicated that the Program would request authorization to fill the Land Use Section's Supervising Planner, and that it indeed currently is in the midst of recruitment for a Supervising Planner position that was previously authorized. The application period has closed on that, and interviews are scheduled for the coming week. The Land Use Section has a number of important projects underway, including some new ones such as coordination with the Narragansett Bay Coordination Team's draft Systems Plan for the Bay, and the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program's update of the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Bay. Staff also participated this week in the City of Providence's Waterfront planning charrette. The continuing assessment of the comprehensive planning process is another major effort, and an initial outline for the report on the Focus Groups held recently has been completed and will be shared with the Implementation Committee at a meeting in a week or two.
- **Transportation** -- Mr. Rhodes noted that the public review process for the draft TIP and Transportation Plan Update is underway, and that public hearings are scheduled for June 26th at 1:00 P.M. and 6:30 P.M. at DEM. The input received will be used to revise the documents in anticipation of final action at the August meetings. The Safe Routes to School Program is moving along well, with three National Workshops held recently in three program communities (Woonsocket, Central Falls, and Barrington), and staff now working to get Project Agreements in place with the cities and towns. Staff also continues to work with the Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) on the draft Airport Systems Plan, he noted, but this is not coming along as fast as planned.
- **Economic Development / Strategic Planning** – Mr. Rhodes reported that the CEDS process has been the focus for staff of the Strategic Planning section in recent weeks, but work on the update of the Economic Policies and Plan was also underway. A revised Master Plan for Quonset has also been received from the QDC for the Program's review. Given that the Review Procedures require Council action on this process, a special meeting in July may be needed. However, staff will contact the QDC to see if it will agreeable to an extension of the review period in order to allow the action to be brought to the Council at its scheduled August meeting.
- Lastly, Mr. Rhodes informed the Committee that the Program's RIGIS Coordinator, Mr. John Stachelhaus, will be retiring on June 20th. He noted that the Program is committed to re-filling the RIGIS Coordinator's position, but in the interim, Mr. Stachelhaus's duties would be split among Mr. Paul Jordan of DEM, and Program staff Christina Delage-Baza and Vincent Flood.

Mr. Flynn commented that members are welcomed to attend the public hearings on June 26th on the Transportation Plan or TIP if their schedules permit. He also noted that he has been participating with Rhode Island Housing in the Keepspace Communities Initiative, which is a direct outgrowth of Land Use: 2025. Although this is a difficult budget year, the program will offer funding to four projects: Westerly,

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along the river; Olneyville in Providence, the Print Works in Cranston, and surrounding the train station in Pawtucket. There is a meeting today in Pawtucket, he noted.

6. Other Business

There was no other business.

7. Adjourn

There being no other business before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 10:26 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared L. Rhodes, II
Secretary