

Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program
STATE PLANNING COUNCIL
MINUTES

Thursday, August 14, 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
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. Michael Lewis	Director, RI Department of Transportation
Mr. Christopher Long	Representing Mr. Timothy Costa, Vice Chair Governor's Policy Office
Mr. L. Vincent Murray	Town of South Kingstown Planning Department
Mr. B. Michael Rauh	Environmental Advocate
Mr. Henry Sherlock	Representing Mr. Steven Cardi, Public Member
Mr. John Trevor	Environmental Advocate
Ms. Janet White Raymond	Public Member

Members Absent

Ms. Susan Baxter	Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission
Mr. Daniel Beardsley	RI League of Cities and Towns
Mr. Thomas Deller	Department of Planning & Development, City of Providence
Ms. Anna Prager	Public Member

Guests

Ms. Diane Badorek	R.I. Department of Transportation
Ms. Heidi Green	Quonset Development Corporation
Ms. Meredith Holderbaum	R.I. House
Ms. Kelly Mahoney	R.I. Senate Policy Office
Mr. Robert Shawver	R.I. Department of Transportation

Staff--Statewide Planning Program

Mr. George Johnson	Assistant Chief, Statewide Planning
Ms. Katherine Trapani	Supervising Planner, Transportation
Mr. William McKenna	Principal Accountant, Strategic Planning
Mr. Paul Gonsalves	Senior Planner, Land Use Planning
Ms. Maria Costa	Executive Assistant

II. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order

Mr. Flynn called the meeting to order at 9:03 A.M.

2. Approval of June 12th Minutes

Ms. Raymond moved to approve the Minutes of June 12, 2008, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Murray and carried unanimously.

The Chair indicated, in sensitivity to maintaining a quorum and to the guests present, that the action items on the agenda would be dealt with first and that the Chief's report would be taken last.

4. Transportation 2030: Long Range Transportation Plan Update

The Chair asked Ms. Trapani to review this item, noting that the draft plan had undergone extensive review and public comment.

Ms. Trapani reviewed the status of the draft plan, noting that it had changed little since the Review Draft version that was recommended by the Council in May. She distributed copies of the color GIS mapping that will accompany the final report. She also reviewed a handout summarizing comments received through the public review process and presenting changes made in the draft to respond to the comments received. Most of these were recommended by the TAC following the public hearings on June 26th, she noted, but several were subsequently recommended by staff, and were not reviewed with the TAC. She also described a recent request from RIPTA staff that the Transit Performance Measure for ridership be updated to provide higher benchmarks for 2007 and 2010.

There were no questions or comments from members.

Mr. Rauh moved to approve Transportation 2030 as revised, as the State's updated Long Range Transportation Plan. This was seconded by Ms. Boyle and carried unanimously.

5. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): FFY 2009-2012

Mr. Flynn called upon Ms. Trapani to bring the Committee up to date on this item.

Ms. Trapani indicated that the TIP had undergone very few changes from the draft that the Council had approved for hearing. Narrative and analytical sections were added giving background information that is updated with every TIP. She noted that a number of comments were received from cities and towns requesting that their specific projects not be deferred, but that the TAC was generally not able to respond favorably to these, given the limited resources. There was also considerable comment supporting the CMAQ, bicycling and transit programs.

Ms. Trapani stated that staff had docketed a supplemental 20-day comment period for the narrative and analytical sections, since that portion was not available during the initial review period. One set of comments were received during this supplemental period. Mr. Johnson summarized these supplemental comments which came as an extensive (13 page) letter addressing the viability and readiness of the South County Commuter Rail project and its Warwick Intermodal and Wickford Junction stations. Issues including the need for additional rolling stock and track facilities, schedule conflicts, station design, community acceptance, and operations funding adequacy were raised. He referred members to a handout summarizing salient points from the commenter's letter, and providing a response from RIDOT on each point. He credited RIDOT's staff with meeting with the Program staff on short notice yesterday to review the comments and develop responses. RIDOT responded to each assertion indicating that the commuter rail project is properly funded and presented in the TIP as a viable and ready project, and that the issues of scheduling, station design, and community impact have been, and will continue to be, worked on with diligence as the project proceeds. He noted that RIDOT staff were available and could provide further details if members had questions.

Ms. Trapani also noted that as part of the public hearing, a letter had been received from DOT indicating that a TIP amendment would likely be needed in the near future to provide an additional \$35-40 million in funding due to expanding costs for the Warwick Intermodal Station project. She noted that the TAC had viewed this with concern and had directed that letters be sent to DOT and RIAC to express concern that taking additional funds out of the TIP for these two projects would impact other needs throughout the state.

Mr. Flynn commented that the State is committed to the Warwick Station project and will find a way to provide the necessary additional funding. He stated he was hopeful that the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Finance may develop recommendations for additional resources. If that does not happen, revisions to the TIP could be an option although not an easy one and finding the added funds could affect projects in the last two years of the Program. He asked Director Lewis if he would like to comment.

Mr. Lewis stated that the Intermodal project is not a new project. It has been a long-time in coming to fruition, but now is about to advance significantly. Agreements have recently been signed with Amtrak, allowing the project to move to construction. The Station is a project for the state's future, he noted, indicating that most people agree that the state has got to move away from single occupancy vehicles. He noted that the Governor strongly backs the project and is committed to its realization. The station will support the economic growth of the state and boost the State airport as an important regional facility. At the same time, he stated, the DOT recognizes that other needs – roads, bridges, and transit – also have to be met. The Blue Ribbon Panel is sensitive to the fact that the existing system's needs must be met, at the same time as new alternatives for the future are developed. It is not an either – or situation. We must do both. The Panel, he noted, hopes to carry this message to the public later this summer or fall.

Mr. Flynn asked if other members had questions on the draft plan.

Ms. Raymond asked if the cost increases in the Warwick station were attributable to delay. Mr. Lewis replied that a combination of factors are at play in this project – and in other big projects. Concrete

and steel prices have soared, due to world-wide competition. The delays that affect most big construction projects also means that they generally increase in cost over time. He noted that the Warwick station project had undergone value-engineering and cost containment reviews to cut some aspects and reduce costs.

Mr. Murray asked what the target date for the Blue Ribbon Panel's report was. Mr. Lewis replied that the commission expects to report by late fall. The first phase of its work was needs assessment. This was done in April and May, and was expanded to include the Bridge and Turnpike Authority and RIPTA's needs. The second phase is to examine funding options and possible revenue sources. This phase will recommend what is reasonable for Rhode Island to target. Public workshops to get input are being planned for September in four regional locations. Presentations to Chambers of Commerce and other civic groups are also being considered to get the message out, he noted.

Ms. Boyle asked if the Panel's needs assessment differed from the long range plan the Council just approved. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Shawver both explained that the panel began with the scenarios used in the plan, but customized and detailed them a bit. Ms. Trapani indicated that the plan must be fiscally-constrained, so it is limited to resources that are "reasonably available". The Panel's charge is to look for additional resources that are not available at present.

Mr. Shawver called the group's attention to a technical correction that needed to be made to the TIP summary of comments and responses addendum. He noted that the response to the last comment included information from an earlier draft and should have been stricken – the response on the final page referencing the high cost of constructing an additional platform is correct. Mr. Flynn noted that this correction would be made.

Mr. Lewis stated that the State sees the Warwick Station as providing an opportunity for the future. Nothing will preclude Amtrak from stopping there in the future, but the MBTA commuter service will attract the most ridership and is seen as the most viable option for Rhode Island.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Flynn asked for a motion.

Ms. Raymond moved approval of the Fiscal Year 2009-2012 Transportation Improvement Program(TIP) as presented. This motion was seconded by Ms. Boyle and passed unanimously.

6. Quonset Business Park Master Land Use and Development Plan 2008 Draft

Mr. Rhodes presented this item. He acknowledged the presence of Ms. Heidi Green of the Quonset Development Corporation (QDC) staff, and thanked her for the Corporation's cooperation in the review. He noted that the Program staff had met with Corporation staff and with members of its Strategic Planning Committee during the review process and had a good dialogue. The Program's review of the draft QBP Plan was conducted using the same process as it conducts reviews of QDC projects. However, he noted one important distinction – the 1979 Settlement Agreement provides for the Council's role to be advisory relative to review of Quonset Development Controls, as opposed to the more regulatory role prescribed for the Council's review of individual projects for Guide Plan consistency.

The draft report identified one issue of potential State Guide Plan inconsistency. This related to the Water Supply section of the Plan in which an inaccurate figure was used for the safe yield of the aquifer which supplies the Business Park's water system. The yield figure given in the report applies to the yield of the combined Hunt -- Annaquatucket – Pettasquamscutt aquifer, not the individual Hunt sub-basin of the aquifer from which the Business Park's wells draw their supply. The draft report recommends addressing this inconsistent data, as well as including actions in the plan for expanded cooperation with other suppliers within the aquifer, and water re-use and recycling requirements for the Business Park's tenants.

A second major area of comment addressed in the draft report is aimed at the draft Plan's Land Use Map, and possible inconsistencies between uses it prescribes for the park and what is described in detailed sections of the Plan dealing with sub-areas of the Park. The Land Use Map is a primary focus of the Plan, in that it sets the basis for controls on land use and development projects in the Park. It is therefore important that the Land Use Plan and its accompanying use definitions provide a clear understanding of what the Corporation's intent is, in terms of desired uses, for different areas within the Park.

Mr. Rhodes cited several specific examples of land use definitional inconsistencies that are commented on in the Program's review report:

- The Plan's narrative identifies a possible focus on recreation and tourism for some of the Waterfront District, but the definition of this district defines only industrial and commercial uses as suitable.
- The Plan's definition of Mixed Use areas is not consistent with traditionally-accepted definitions of mixed use areas in that it specifically excludes residential uses, which are recognized as an important component of most mixed use developments.
- The Plan's Development Initiatives Map identifies Mixed Use and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in several locations shown as Industrial and Commercial, Airport, and Waterfront use on the Land Use Map.

The Program's review report recommends that these possible inconsistencies be reviewed carefully by the Corporation prior to the Plan's finalization to insure that a clear land use intent is defined for each area of the Business Park. The report recommends that the section of the plan discussing the Waterfront District be reviewed to ensure consistency between what it proposes for future use and the uses allowed in the Waterfront District land use definition. Relative to "Mixed Use", the review report recommends that the Corporation consider an alternative title of "Commercial & Services" for such areas in order to more accurately define the uses that appear to be allowed in this district. It is also recommended by the review report that retail services be limited to the Gateway District where they have previously been approved.

Relative to the Plan's stated desire for a commuter-rail station anchored by Transit-Oriented Development in the West Davisville District, the Program's comment is that the objective of a rail station at West Davisville may be difficult to prove feasible given the commitment to a commuter rail station at Wickford Junction, in close proximity to the West Davisville site. In that regard, the Program report recommends that the Corporation consider providing flexibility in the Plan to allow the possibility of incorporating residential development as part of Transit-Oriented Development at West Davisville, if that component of development is deemed necessary to generate the ridership to make a commuter rail stop financially feasible. The report also recommends that the Plan include specific action items for the Corporation to work with RIDOT to investigate the potential for a commuter rail station in conjunction with TOD at West Davisville.

Mr. Rauh asked if he was correct that the Corporation had not wanted to include housing in the Gateway mixed use area when discussion of that project proposal was before the Council. He recalled that the Corporation felt, at that time, that housing needs should be addressed nearby, but outside the Park proper.

Mr. Rhodes confirmed that the Corporation has not favored allowance of residential use anywhere within the Business Park. This is a long-standing policy in order to maximize the land available for job-producing economic development. The new Plan proposes to continue this blanket prohibition, and the Program's review comments are that, in the specific instance of a West Davisville TOD, the Plan language should not close the door entirely to inclusion of residential component if necessary for a TOD to be viable. Mr. Rauh asked if the State was absolutely committed to going forward with Wickford Junction. Mr. Flynn and Mr. Lewis signaled that was the case. Mr. Lewis stated that West Davisville could be considered as a future station stop, but would have to be shown to be feasible. Mr. Rauh agreed that, if the decision to move forward with Wickford has indeed been made, then West Davisville will have to stand on its own merits.

Mr. Rhodes indicated that the Plan also identified a “Marina Village” in an area west of the Davisville Piers adjoining the southwest side of Allen Harbor. Ms. Boyle asked if the conversion of this port areas to non-industrial type uses is prudent in light of the study of port usage now underway. Mr. Rhodes identified this study as a statewide inventory of commercial and industrial land use adjoining CRMC-designated types 5 & 6 waters. It is being funded by the Program as a Challenge Grant Study and undertaken by the URI’s Coastal Resources Center. The study has not reached the stage of providing definitive recommendations, he noted. Given this, the Program report recommends that, if there is not a housing component contemplated, the Plan should use other terminology than “village” to avoid confusion and not connote to potential developers that housing is planned.

Mr. Murray suggested that the area in question may be identified for recreational or marina-type development, where folks could also reside on their boats.

Ms. Raymond asked if there would be an issue with the Town of North Kingstown by proposing residential usage in the mixed use areas of the Park. Mr. Rhodes replied that staff had not independently contacted the Town with that question, but the Town’s Comprehensive Plan does propose housing and mixed use for several specific areas within the Business Park. He also noted that Statewide Planning is not necessarily endorsing housing at all areas recommended by the Town’s Plan, but is suggesting that the Business Park Plan not precluding housing outright as a potential component of a mixed-use transit-oriented development at West Davisville.

Asked if retail was allowed in the Commercial – Services areas of the Park. Ms. Green replied that the Master Plan works in concert with the Development Controls adopted by the Corporation. Currently, these allow retail development only within the Gateway area of the Park. Mr. Rhodes indicated that the staff report on the review recommends that the Plan commit to limiting retail to the Gateway area.

There being no further discussion or comment, Mr. Rhodes indicated that staff would like a motion to approve the staff report on the review of the QDC Plan for transmittal to the Corporation.

Mr. Rauh moved to approve the staff review report and transmit it to the Corporation as the Council’s recommendations on the draft Quonset Business Park Master Land Use and Development Plan 2008 Draft. This was seconded by Ms. Raymond and approved unanimously.

3. Chief’s Progress Report (taken out of agenda order)

Mr. Rhodes stated that he would use the Progress Report this month to bring the Committee up to date on staffing transitions that are affecting the Program. He reported that approximately one year ago Statewide Planning had 21 FTEs (excluding the Division Associate Director, Chief and Assistant Chief), broken down as follows:

- Transportation – 5 FTEs
- Comprehensive Plans – 3 FTEs
- Land Use – 4 FTEs
- Economic Development – 2 FTEs
- Information and Support – 4 FTEs
- Administrative – 3 FTEs

Mr. Rhodes went on to report that since that time six positions had been vacated due to staff departures and retirements (a reduction of approximately 29%). These included:

- Retirements of Bruce Vild and Joyce Karger from Economic Development;
- Departure of Blanche Higgins, head of the Land Use section, to work in Westerly;

- Retirement of Michael Ahnrud, head of Comprehensive Plan section;
- Retirement of John Stachelhaus, RIGIS Coordinator; and
- Transfer of Pat Greene to DLT

He noted that 4 of these 6 departures were at the supervisory level.

To respond to these changes, the Associate Director assigned the Economic Development Planning Section's functions to Strategic Planning also located within the Division of Planning. The Program also sought and obtained permission to fill Bruce Vild's Supervising Planner position, but, given the intervening departure of Ms. Higgins, this opportunity was used to provide a replacement Supervising Planner for the Land Use Section. This has recently been completed with the promotion of Nancy Hess from Principal Planner in the Land Use Section. The gap left by Mr. Ahnrud's retirement is being addressed by assignment of Mr. Kevin Nelson to supervise the Comprehensive Plan Section on an acting basis, while approval to re-fill the position is sought. Mr. Stachelhaus's duties as RIGIS Coordinator are being divided up for now between Mr. Vincent Flood and Ms. Christina Delage Baza's with each of them taking on some RIGIS-related duties in addition to their other work. Permission to fill Mr. Stachelhaus's position is also being sought.

Mr. Rhodes indicated that the Division has submitted a draft Succession Plan to the Department Director that outlines a four-stage reorganization proposal based on the recent and anticipated future staff changes. The first stage of this requests permission to fill the vacancies of Mr. Stachelhaus and Mr. Ahnrud, as well as the Principal Planner position opened by the promotion of Ms. Hess. The second, third and fourth stages, Mr. Rhodes explained, address other potential staff realignments that may occur in response to the changes in the State's Retirement Health Coverage due to take effect in the very near future, but these stages are speculative until it is known which, if any, of the additional staff eligible and affected decide to retire. The third stage of the Plan, in particular could address an organizational re-alignment to elevate the Transportation Planning function to a separate program within the Division of Planning.

If all the changes proposed in the Succession Plan are effected, the functions previously performed by the Statewide Planning Program (excluding economic development) with 21 FTEs (including the Chief and Assistant Chief) would be carried out in the future by the Division with 19 FTEs. Mr. Rhodes stated that the Program feels the changes proposed would be workable, would provide additional opportunities for internal promotion and the hiring of new staff and potentially result in significant personnel cost savings.

7. Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Adjourn

There being no other business before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 10:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared L. Rhodes, II
Secretary