

Identifying Innovative Solutions to Guide Development Along the Providence River: *May 2007 SAMP Workshop Impacts*



Port of Providence

With plans emerging for significant redevelopment of the Providence and East Providence waterfronts, the Rhode Island Sea Grant Sustainable Coastal Communities and Ecosystems Extension Program/URI Coastal Resources Center hosted a two-day workshop, “Identifying Innovative Solutions to Guide Development Along the Providence River,” to address the competing demands on the area by a variety of stakeholders. Participants heard presentations from experts on urban coastal policy, planning, design, and development, and from city and state planners. A two-panel dialogue between local and national experts answered audience questions, and participants received a guided tour of the waterfront on board a Providence Piers tour boat. Complete workshop proceedings may be found on the Metro Bay Special Area Management Plan website: http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/metrosamp/prov_harbor_wkshp.html.

The workshop was co-hosted by NOAA and the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) as part of work on the Metro Bay Special Area Management Plan (see <http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/metrosamp>).

“The need to build a constituency for marine-related uses along the Metro Bay shores was never so convincingly established.”

— *Wil Gates, Gates, Leighton & Associates, Inc.*

Objectives met:

To enable participants to work together to develop policy and design recommendations to meet the unique needs of a diverse urban waterfront community. Participants: 1) Identified and absorbed major stakeholder visions and needs; 2) Examined challenges and opportunities for realizing those visions; and 3) Collaborated on proposing innovative policy solutions that will help guide development along the Metro Bay’s urban waterfront.

Major Outcomes:

- Participants recognized the need for Rhode Island's maritime, water dependent and port economies to achieve a higher level of prominence in official state plans, goals and policy documents.
- The Special Area Management Plan and Marine Resources Development Plan were validated as planning tools and frameworks for productive stakeholder dialogue.
- Property owners expressed interest in collaborating to create joint plans for neighboring parcels that can be submitted to the city and state for approval.
- General acknowledgement of the need for long-range plans that integrate maritime and non-maritime uses and bolster the municipal tax base.

- Discussed alternatives to the current tax-based revenue scheme – identified a need to compensate the “donor communities” of Providence and East Providence for uses that benefit the whole state.
- Marine-dependent businesses on Allens Avenue came to the table early in the planning stages.
- NOAA sees this as a possible national model for other communities.



Photo: E. Prov. Waterfront Commission

Other Issues Recognized:

- Rhode Island needs to make distribution of marine uses more equitable on a statewide basis
- Generating more revenue, preferably through increasing tax base, is imperative to the municipalities.
- Increases in maritime activity are expected on a state, regional, and national level.

Tools/actions discussed by workshop participants:

- Abutting property owners with potential land-use conflicts (Sprague Energy, Promet Marine Services, and Providence Piers) create joint plans that can be presented to city and state for approval. Lead: Property Owners
- Create a long-term agreement between cities and state for revenue sharing agreement in lieu of property taxes. Leads: Municipalities, Legislature, Governor’s Office.
- Create new coastal city/state zoning designations that allow for descriptions of both water and upland use – intermingling of uses. Create a design manual that makes recommendations on compatible marine and non-marine uses. Leads: Municipalities, Statewide Planning, CRMC
- Create a comprehensive plan for waterfront industry. Leads: Coordination Team, Statewide Planning, CRMC
- Create an education/marketing strategy on working waterfront issues for public/politicians. Lead: Maritime Industries.
- Create a waterfront alliance among waterfront stakeholders. Lead: Maritime Industries.
- Examine the benefits, limitations and feasibility of reinstating a Rhode Island Port Authority. Leads: CRMC, Economic Development Corporation (EDC).

“My understanding of the port uses in Providence – their impact, employment, and importance to the area - is much more comprehensive.”
 —Merlin Deconti, Johnson & Wales University senior vice president of facilities management

Workshop Sponsors

RI Foundation
 RI Economic Policy Council
 Sprague Energy
 Promet Marine Services
 Providence Piers

For More information Contact::
RI Sea Grant/URI Coastal Resources Center
Jennifer McCann Mccann@gso.uri.edu
Austin Becker abecker@crc.uri.edu
 401-874-6626

