Changing Organization
State government has made institutional changes that support work on quality of place. In February, Governor Carcieri elevated Planning to a division within the Department of Administration. This division includes the offices of Statewide and Strategic Planning, and a new Office of Housing and Community Development. This move was part of an effort to make government more responsive and efficient and should help the state address place issues with greater focus.

Measuring Quality of Place
Quality of place is an important outcome of economic development and a strong determinant of future performance. Of the four scores, assessing progress toward Rhode Island’s economic goals, this is the hardest area in which to compile a robust set of measures. Current measures fall to capture the essential qualities that make places meaningful, inspiring, and functional. Our measures cover different aspects of quality of place, but are still inadequate indicators of changes in a complex system.

The good news is Rhode Island is making progress on water quality and historic preservation. Rhode Island also scores well on measures of diversity & tolerance. The bad news is there is no evidence that we’ve turned the corner on land consumption, economic goals, this is the hardest area in which to compile a robust set of measures. Current measures fail to capture the essential qualities that make places meaningful, inspiring, and functional. Our measures cover different aspects of quality of place, but are still inadequate indicators of changes in a complex system.

The median single-family house in RI costs about six times the median household income. Housing affordability has fallen like a rock. Rhode Island households are worse off in Massachusetts, but our affordability advantage relative to incomes has nearly evaporated. The RPEC’s most recent report has made the case that supply is an important part of the problem. From 1995-2000 Rhode Island added population nearly twice as fast as housing supply whereas the national average was to add one unit of housing for every 2.1 new people. Rhode Island passed a Comprehensive Housing bill in 2004 which requires a new statewide strategic plan as well as specific plans for how affordable housing targets will be met in each community.

Rhode Island is 81% of the way to meeting the goal of 20,000 buildings listed on the historic register by 2010. Rhode Island is seeing an upswing in the number of historic commercial and industrial buildings being evaluated and being adapted for new uses with the creation of the Historic Preservation Tax Credit in 2002. The City of Providence and its commercial innovation projects in 2002 and 2003 were the initial beneficiaries. Projects in the pipeline for completion in 2004-2005 equal 837 million or 635 per year. The 2005 Grow Smart Rhode Island evaluation notes that the Tax Credit Program is especially effective at returning properties to the tax rolls, generating employment, and creating housing in locations where opportunities have been limited. The Historic Preservation Tax Credit has been one of the most effective economic development instruments in decades leveraging significant private investments that would not have occurred without the program.

Rhode Island’s lack of marketable commercial space is holding back job growth, particularly in our urban centers. We need buildings and developable sites, but our best competitive opportunity is using the demand for new space to create inspiring places. Place making demands a robust integration of economic, cultural, and environmental goals.

Rhode Island has these capabilities, but we need a collaborative approach to develop great places. The policies and programs to support quality of place are still in their formative stages. This scorecard highlights some of the most significant regional and state level initiatives. In the Blackstone, the Providence River Basin, and Pawcatuck Borderlands, diverse collaborative planning efforts seek to truly integrate environmental, cultural, and economic thinking.

The June 2005 Symposium on Urban Transformation at RISD is bringing together leading thinkers and doers from cities around the U.S. to help define guidelines for urban transformation and place making in general. This symposium can potentially set the agenda for the future of urban transformation.

The One River Vision
The One River Vision is a convergence of planning and design efforts for the Blackstone Valley and the river it variously called the Blackstone, the Pawtucket, the Seekonk and the Providence. Previous plans articulate a powerful vision for the Blackstone Valley as a distinctive region of urban centers, mill villages, and rural landscapes. A place where history is visible and the river is reimagined as a recreational and scenic asset. The One River Vision is about making this a reality.

Rhode Island is a city-state of distinct regions, vibrant neighborhoods, town centers and villages, of both dense places and open spaces, centered on the Narragansett Bay, where nature and history are not just beautiful and preserved, but part of every day life.
The Pawtucket Foundation’s Tidewater Plan epitomizes the kind of cross-disciplinary efforts that foster conservation. The collaboration of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, the Nature Conservancy, and the Policy Council, with the leadership of Washington Trust and Northeast Utilities, epitomizes the kind of cross-disciplinary efforts that foster creative place making.

Pawtucket Borderlands

Leaders from the forested communities on the Rhode Island, Connecticut border are working to preserve our last remaining area of relatively unfragmented forest, which the Nature Conservancy has dubbed the Pawtucket Borderlands. A Regional Clinic in May brought communities together to explore the potential for cooperative regional efforts to accelerate conservation. The collaboration of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, the Nature Conservancy, and the Policy Council, with the leadership of Washington Trust and Northeast Utilities, epitomizes the kind of cross-disciplinary efforts that foster creative place making.

The nighttime glow of lights reveals the pattern of urbanization in the New York-Boston region. The Pawtucket Borderlands stand out as the darkest portion of the “Lost Green Valley” stretching north-south along the Connecticut-Rhode Island border.


2005 QUALITY OF PLACE SCORECARD
This page discusses the economic and environmental aspects of the Providence and Blackstone River basins. It highlights the importance of investment in water quality improvement and the role of collaboration in promoting economic growth. The page also mentions the job sprawl and land consumption issues in the region, with a focus on urban-rural job growth disparities. The availability of design resources and the need for collaborative efforts to preserve land and water are also mentioned. The goal is to improve the quality of place and support the development of sustainable communities.
Changing Organization
State government has made institutional changes that support work on quality of place. In February, Governor Carcieri elevated Planning to a division within the Department of Administration. This division includes the offices of Statewide and Strategic Planning, and a new Office of Housing and Community Development. This move was part of an effort to make government more responsive and efficient and should help the state address place issues with greater focus.

Measuring Quality of Place
Quality of place is an important outcome of economic development and a strong determinant of future performance. Of the four scorecards assessing progress toward Rhode Island’s economic goals, this is the hardest area in which to compile a robust set of measures. Current measures fail to capture the essential qualities that make places meaningful, inspiring, and functional. Our measures cover different aspects of quality of place, but are still inadequate indicators of changes in a complex system.

The good news is Rhode Island is making progress on water quality and historic preservation. Rhode Island also scores well on measures of diversity & tolerance. The bad news is there is no evidence that we’ve turned the corner on land consumption quality and historic preservation. Rhode Island also scores well.

Housing Affordability
Statewide, 23% of households with incomes < $15,000 are affordable. Rhode Island falls short of the generally accepted affordable housing ratio of 30%.

Housing Affordability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>Nº</th>
<th>Median Household Income</th>
<th>Median Rent</th>
<th>Median Home Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heading for Crisis</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>&lt; $15,000</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>&gt; $15,000</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The median single family house in RI costs almost six times the median household income. Housing affordability has fallen like a rock. Rhode Island’s housing market has fallen in Massachusetts, but our affordability advantage relative to incomes has nearly evaporated. The RHAF-Fast report had our market the best in the country as an important part of the problem: from 1995-2000 Rhode Island added population nearly four times faster than housing supply whereas the national average was to add a new unit of housing every 2.1 new people. Rhode Island passed a Comprehensive Housing bill in 2004 which mandates a new state-wide strategy plan as well as specific plans for how affordable housing targets will be met in each community.

Measures of Quality of Place 

Quality of place is an important outcome of economic development and a strong determinant of future performance. Of the four scorecards assessing progress toward Rhode Island’s economic goals, this is the hardest area in which to compile a robust set of measures. Current measures fail to capture the essential qualities that make places meaningful, inspiring, and functional. Our measures cover different aspects of quality of place, but are still inadequate indicators of changes in a complex system.

The good news is Rhode Island is making progress on water quality and historic preservation. Rhode Island also scores well.

Housing Affordability


Commercial Historic Preservation Projects

Commercial Historic Preservation Projects

PERFORMANCE: EXCELLENT

Rhode Island is 81% of the way to meeting the goal of 20,000 buildings listed on the National Register by 2010. Rhode Island is seeing an opening on the number of historic commercial and industrial buildings undergoing renovation and being adapted for new uses with the creation of the Historic Preservation Tax Credit in 2002. The Rhode Island Historic Preservation Tax Credit was a key component to the historic commercial renovation projects in 2002 and 2003 and was key to the 1990-2000 economic recovery. Projects in the pipeline for completion in 2002-2009 equal $375 million or $65 million per year. The 2005 Grow Smart Rhode Island Evaluation states that the Tax Credit Program, along with federal grants, is one of the best local and federal programs benefiting historic properties along the tax line, generating employment, and creating housing in places where appropriate tax credits had been offered. The Historic Preservation Tax Credit has been one of the most effective economic development incentives in decades. Rhode Island has high potential for economic development and must act now to leverage the tax credit. The Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Society have been working together on a new plan to support historic preservation projects in the state. The new plan will include a comprehensive inventory of historic properties in the state and a strategy for protecting and preserving these properties.

Place Making

Quality of place is about the lived experience of place—the built environment, landscapes, and activities. It will function, how it feels, and what it means. We are just beginning to ask the right questions and envision the possibilities of place making.

Rhode Island has a lack of marketable commercial space is holding back job growth, particularly in our urban areas. We need buildings and developable sites, but our best competitive opportunity is using the demand for new space to create inspiring places. Place making demands a robust integration of economic, cultural, and environmental goals.

Rhode Island has these capabilities, but we need a collaborative approach to develop great places. The policies and programs to support quality of place are still in their formative stages. This scorecard highlights some of the most significant regional and state level initiatives. In the Blackstone River Valley, the Providence River Basin, and Pawcatuck Borderlands, diverse collaborative planning efforts seek to truly integrate environmental, cultural, and economic thinking.

The June 2005 Symposium on Urban Transformation at RISD is bringing together leading thinkers from cities around the U.S. to help define guidelines for urban transformation and place making in general. This symposium can potentially set the agenda for the future of urban transformation.

The One River Vision

The One River Vision is a convergence of planning and design efforts for the Blackstone Valley and the river valley called the Blackstone, the Pawtucket, the Seekonk and the Providence. Previous plans articulate a powerful vision for the Blackstone Valley as a distinctive region of urban centers, mill villages, and rural landscapes. A place where history is visible and the river is reclaimed as a recreational and scenic asset. The One River Vision is about making this a reality.

The Blackstone Valley exemplifies the need to approach land use planning on a watershed basis, crossing town and state lines. In the Blackstone, the economic, historical, and environmental geographies coincide. Market demand for commercial and residential development is building in the Blackstone. It could overwhelm communities, or conversely, it may enable them to achieve their goals. The projected pace of development creates urgency to execute on the vision before generic market forces eliminate the opportunity.