NOTICE OF DETERMINATION OF THE STATE PLANNING COUNCIL:
PROJECT PROPOSED BY THE RHODE ISLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

September 20, 2007

Mr. Saul Kaplan
Executive Director, Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation
Chairperson, Quonset Development Corporation
315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101,
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

RE:  PRF-05-07-II /The Quonset Gateway Project

Dear Mr. Kaplan:

Please be advised that on Thursday, September 20, 2007 the State Planning Council reviewed the above referenced project as required by Section 42-64-14 (a) of the Rhode Island General Laws, adopted the final Conformance Report dated September 20, 2007, and found the project in Substantial Conformance to the applicable provisions of the State Guide Plan. In making this determination, the Council adopted the Findings of Fact and Suggested Improvement Measures documented below while noting the following Criteria for Further Review.

Findings of Fact

1. The proposal’s utilization of fully-infrastructured urbanized land is efficient.

   The mixed use development now proposed for the initial site with its 20% increase in developable floor area, 70% increase in office floor space, 50% increase in office related employment opportunities, and 16% reduction in parking provision per square foot of floor area makes for efficient use of this fully-infrastructured area. The uses proposed are more diversified and the retail component, while still substantial, has taken a secondary role in the overall development. Many of the buildings have been converted to multi-story structures and, although the current proposal still contains two “big box” retail platforms that are often synonymous with traditional patterns of suburban sprawl, the project as a whole is no longer defined by that form. As such the related nonconformities previously identified with State Guide Plan Element 121, Land Use 2025: Rhode Island’s State Land Use Policies and Plan (See pp.14-21), Element 110: Goals and Policies (See pp.21-22), and Element 112:
Resources Management in the Reuse of Surplus Naval Land (See pp.22-25) are no longer relevant and this aspect of the current proposal is therefore considered consistent with these elements.

2. The proposal’s layout is relatively compact.

The inclusion of an additional 143,660 SF of floor area, reduction in parking provision per square foot of floor area and the resulting intensification of the employment opportunities provided on the initial site results in a relatively compact development proposal which uses the State’s limited land resources efficiently. As such, the related nonconformities previously identified with State Guide Plan Element 121, Land Use 2025: Rhode Island’s State Land Use Policies and Plan (see pp. 14-21) are no longer relevant and this aspect of the current proposal is therefore considered consistent with these elements.

3. The proposal more fully embraces multi-modal transportation, walking and transit usage.

The proposal’s sprawling layout has become denser, and therefore more compact with a more efficient use of parking. Transit and pedestrian circulation to and within the site have been significantly improved. As such the related nonconformities previously identified with State Guide Plan Element 611: Transportation 2025 - Rhode Island’s Long Range Transportation Plan (See pp. 29-32) and Element 211: Rhode Island Economic Development Policies and Plan (See pp. 27-28) are no longer relevant and this aspect of the current proposal is therefore considered consistent with these elements.

4. The proposal as a whole utilizes prime economic development property to good advantage, and does not include uses that could produce impacts detrimental to the Business Park’s full economic potential.

The employment profile of the current proposal has shifted significantly and now calls for 55% of its permanent jobs to be in the office sector. These office related jobs are considered to be of higher value than retail jobs, as they are less subject to seasonal variations and tend to generate higher wages. The employment opportunities to acreage ratio for the current project, as calculated by QDC, is also 6 times higher than the average ratio for the business park as a whole and is nearly double that of Electric Boat, the current leader in this statistic. Recent professional traffic impact assessments have also shown that the proposal can be constructed without detrimental impacts on the larger Business Park. As such the related nonconformities previously identified with State Guide Plan Element 112, Resources Management in the Reuse of Surplus Naval Land (See pp. 22-25), and Element 211, Economic Development Policies and Plan (See pp. 27-28) are no longer relevant and this aspect of the current proposal is therefore considered consistent with these elements.

5. The current proposal’s big box components do not constitute “restricted or ancillary” retail sales formats and when analyzed outside of the context of the larger proposal, do not represent an efficient use of fully serviced land.

The conformance report submitted in response to the initial proposal documented numerous references to the role that big box retail played in its overall finding of project ‘non conformity’. From the perspectives of job creation and an efficient use of fully serviced land
capable of higher density development, the continued inclusion of big box retail is still a less than optimal use of this important land resource. As noted within the report, it also places this part of the overall development in conflict with the Quonset Park Mixed Use Development District (QMUDD) as it is currently written. Revisions to the original plan reflected in this submission reduce the dominance of the retail component in the overall development. The office component of the project (a conforming element) has now become the dominant land use for the project. Still, it would be incorrect and disingenuous to suggest that the inclusion of big box retail development in this plan represents an area where the staff can now find conformance. As such the inclusion of ‘big box’ retail components in the project leads to a finding of non conformity with the applicable Elements of the State Guide Plan that relate to this land use type: Element 112, *Resources Management in the Reuse of Surplus Naval Land* (see 04 Strategy, 5 Land use on pp. 24), and Element 211, *Economic Development Policies and Plan* (see Objective B, Policy 5 on pp. 28). Several recommendations that may assist in bringing this aspect of the current proposal into greater conformance with the State Guide Plan have been included in the suggested improvement measures that follow (see Section V, C).

6. The current proposal as submitted is found to be in substantial conformance with the State Guide Plan.

State Planning Council Rule of Procedure III.3.07 provides the Council with the ability to make one of three conclusions in reviewing such projects for conformance with the State Guide Plan. These include a finding of full conformance, a finding of non conformance and a finding of substantial conformance. According to the Rule, a finding of substantial conformance is appropriate when “a proposed project would contribute to achievement of one or more goals, policies or recommendations of the State Guide Plan, but would be inconsistent with or conflict with other goals, policies or recommendations.” In this instance, a finding of substantial conformance is put forth as the current proposal’s overall consistency with the goals, policies and recommendations of the State Guide Plan now outweigh the inconsistencies associated with the “big box” retail component (see findings 1-5 above).

**Suggested Improvement Measures**

1. Reduce the ‘big box’ component. Reconfiguration of the site’s design to reduce the big box retail component would improve the proposal’s conformance on all counts. Deletion of the free-standing retail center proposed for the eastern portion of the site, in particular, would remove a significant contributor to the proposal’s non-conformance, as this site element is the most disconnected.

2. Improved façade and roof treatments for ‘big box’ components. If elimination of ‘big box’ retail is not feasible, we recommend improved design and architectural treatment of the proposed Kohl’s and Lowe’s. The current plan for the Kohl’s shows a single level design that does not integrate well into the rest of the substantially improved design of the retail/office component of Parcel 1. The proposed location of the Lowe’s, although substantially removed from Parcel 1, reveals a standard design not reflective of the improved design treatment of the rest of the project.
3. The commercial recreation and fitness center also presents design and aesthetic challenges. Not unlike the Lowe’s, it would essentially be visible from all sides. Current plan elevations reveal large expanses of blank walls facing the adjoining streets. These need to be broken up through such means as architectural and material details, murals, landscaping, and/or reorientation of the building.

4. Additional commitment for office space construction within Phase 1. The current plans call for the construction of 40,000 square feet of office space within Phase 1. While this represents an improvement over the previous version of the proposal, it accounts for only around 10% of the total office construction envisioned in this project. By contrast, all of the retail (333,960 sq. ft.) is constructed within Phase 1 (along with the first phase of the hotel and the indoor sports complex). Since the increase in overall office space for the project, and the resulting higher wage employment, is one of the major factors in the staff’s recommendation of substantial conformance, a greater commitment to office construction within the first phase is recommended.

5. Relocation of parking proposed for NW corner of Parcel 4. Current plans call for the elimination of part of the heavily treed area adjacent to the SeaBees property to provide approximately 30 parking spaces. These parking spaces are poorly located considering the location of the proposed office building that they would primarily serve on Parcel 4. Reconfiguration of the parking area may allow for spaces closer to the building and the preservation of this heavily treed area.

6. Further demonstration of shared parking. Parcel 4, which would include one of the park’s signature office buildings, also has one of the lower parking ratios within the project. Opportunities would appear to exist for shared parking between Parcel 4 and Parcel 5A, which includes two proposed restaurants. This opportunity for shared parking, and others, should be more fully explored and documented.

7. Design guidelines for office buildings. It is understood that the current plan only offers a conceptual design for office buildings that helps to provide some dimension related to issues of location, height and mass. Still, design guidelines need to be developed and applied as the office uses are built out (likely over time) in the second phase. These should help to promote a cohesive and integrated overall appearance to the park, while not being so strict as to encourage sameness in design.

8. Encourage LEED certification. The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) green building rating system has been developed by the U.S. Green Building Council to provide a recognized standard for the construction industry to assess the environmental sustainability of building designs. Points for LEED certification are awarded for such attributes as development density, public transportation access, stormwater management, water efficient landscaping, renewable energy, recycled building materials, use of natural daylight, and innovation in design. Local examples of more environmentally friendly ‘big box’ design include a Kohl’s distribution center in Killingly, CT., and a BJ’s Wholesale Club in Middletown, RI, each constructed with a solar panel roof. Since there are numerous aspects of the project design that would already appear to be well-positioned for the awarding of LEED certification points, it is recommended that, as detailed design proceeds on the project, it be done with the goal of achieving LEED certification for buildings within the
project at the ‘silver’ level. Governor Carcieri’s Executive Order 05-14 directs that this level of certification be the goal for all new ‘public buildings’. Although this project would not qualify under the definition, staff feels this is a reasonable goal for the project, and one that would bring some of the ‘nonconforming’ aspects of the development into a greater level of conformance.

9. Detailed landscaping plans. The current concept plan show areas of green and some representation of trees and other landscaping treatment in some of the elevation drawings. These need to be fully developed into a detailed landscaping plan for the project. Such a plan would include a detailed listing of planting materials and sizes, tree types, spacing and caliper, parking lot island treatment, etc. Although most of the site is level and fairly devoid of larger trees, there are several examples of substantial trees within the Gateway property. These should be included in a ‘present condition’ review of the site, and preserved wherever possible. Drought resistant species that would minimize outdoor watering, should be preferred in areas to be newly planted.

10. Drainage design. The revised plan indicates water features along Gate Road, which could be a signature amenity for the park. It is presently unclear as to whether or not these are aesthetic improvements, or related to a drainage plan, or possibly both. As with the needed landscaping plan, a full drainage plan has not yet been done at this stage of the project development. Such a plan will need to address the goals of minimizing impervious surfaces, and providing opportunities for coordination of landscaping, irrigation and drainage design, along with retention/detention ponds that could be attractive as well as functional.

11. Sea Bees Museum and Chapel upgrade. The Sea Bees Museum and Chapel is not part of the Gateway development proposal, yet it, and the day care facility, sit at a central location within the project. While the revised plan offers some level of improvement in terms of the integration of this ‘green amenity’ into the design of the project, more needs to be done. The goal should be to establish a working partnership between the Sea Bees and the developer on issues such as maintenance and public access to this central parcel within the development, so that it can serve as an important project centerpiece and amenity.

12. Improved bicycle connections from the Gateway to the Davisville (Quonset/Calf Pasture Point) Bike Path, especially near the sports complex; and provision of bicycle racks at the sports complex, office buildings, as well as in and around the square in Parcel 1.

13. Median Installation on Gate Road. The Gate Road intersection with Post Road, recently rebuilt, presents a somewhat barren entrance to the development. While sidewalk trees may help, the placement of an attractively planted, treed median boulevard would provide a more distinctive entrance to the development, and be functional as well. It could provide for a ‘safe haven’ for pedestrians between the hotel and the Parcel 1 retail and restaurants. The results of detailed roadway design work, currently underway, may allow for the inclusion of this amenity into the project design.

14. Roadway design issues. As noted in item 13, detailed highway design is currently underway. Issues that will need to be resolved include the design attributes of the rotary, signal design and improvements at the intersection of Gate Road and Post Road, the necessity of the right turn in and out access to Post Road, pedestrian safety throughout the project and particularly
crossing Gate Road, along with the number and location of curb cuts throughout the project generally. All such revisions and improvements will need to be coordinated through RIDOT.

15. RIPTA review for appropriate bus pull-off and shelter design. Division of Planning staff has initiated discussions between QDC staff and RIPTA to provide for a comprehensive plan for bus transit service throughout the project. Some of these issues may be related to construction improvements along Gate Road. A revised transit plan is anticipated in the near future.

16. DOP participation in QDC Design Review Committee. Staff recognizes and appreciates the many improvements that have been made to this version of the Gateway plan compared to earlier submissions, and also recognizes that many of the items noted above are by their nature, the subject of more detailed planning than has been done at his conceptual stage. EDC/QDC has requested that Division of Planning staff be involved as a member of the QDC Design Review Committee, along with a representative of the Town of North Kingstown, so that these matters, and possibly others (such as signage, lighting, trash removal etc), can receive the diligent deliberation that is needed to make this a project of the highest quality.

Criteria for Further Review

Project revisions that would increase its non-conforming aspects (such as increased retail floor area) or decrease the project’s conforming aspects (such as a decrease in office floor area) will require further review and deliberation on the part of the State Planning Council.

The proposal, its associated State Planning Council Conformance Report, the determination of the Council thereon, and all supporting documentation which are part of the record are available for review at the offices of the Statewide Planning Program.

Chairperson, State Planning Council

Cc: K. Flynn, J. Rhodes, B. Vild, and S. King