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Contact: Scott Wolf (401) 273-5711, Ext. 4

Grow Smart Rhode Island Asks Army Corps of Engineers to Explore Major Gaps in Planning for Quonset/Davisville's Future

Planning Gaps Cited At Quonset/Davisville EIS Scoping Session Among those Highlighted in Recent Grow Smart Report

PROVIDENCE, RI (JUNE 4, 2002) – Grow Smart Rhode Island today asked the Army Corps of Engineers to address several key unresolved infrastructure and planning issues that threaten orderly and sustainable growth at Quonset/Davisville (QD). Scott Wolf, Grow Smart's Executive Director, raised these issues in testimony (see attached) delivered today at the "Scoping" session for preparation of the Army Corps' Quonset/Davisville Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Wolf emphasized Grow Smart's conviction "... that Quonset/Davisville can be one of the prime engines of economic growth for Rhode Island, but neither the funds, the infrastructure, or the plans appear to be in place right now to capitalize on the facility's economic potential, and to do so in a way that will protect the quality of life for the State of Rhode Island, and particularly for the Southern Rhode Island area where Quonset is located." Wolf added that Grow Smart hopes "...the EIS can clarify many of these issues and help to develop a more systematic and practical vision for Quonset/Davisville's future."

Topping the list of Grow Smart's concerns, identified in a report by former State Planning Director Dan Varin that was released by the organization last week, are a lack of planning to help neighboring communities handle the impact of major growth at QD and inadequate funding for transportation improvements critical to QD's development. Wolf also cited a potential gap between available and necessary freight rail service for QD as well as the absence of a comprehensive stormwater management plan for QD and a lack of planning for the expansion of QD's wastewater treatment facility.

To highlight concerns about inadequate planning for the impact of QD's growth on neighboring communities, Grow Smart's testimony noted that "... the latest State Master Plan for Quonset/Davisville projects 15,000 new jobs by the year 2021, but provides little analysis of the impact of this kind of growth on the numerous rural and suburban communities that are in close proximity to Quonset/Davisville." To fill this gap, Wolf called on the Army Corps of Engineers through the EIS process to "... identify strategies and mechanisms that could direct growth to centers within these communities, centers possessing adequate infrastructure and zoning for compact development."

In addressing transportation funding issues, Wolf cited indications from RIPEC and other veteran analysts of the state's finances that Rhode Island lacks the funding to handle existing transportation projects, and that a real transportation funding crisis is on the horizon. Given this, Wolf requested "... that the EIS look at the adequacy of current funding plans for the critical, projected improvement in Route 403, and the construction of the I-95/Route 4 Interchange, as well as new funding options that might be pursued for these projects."

Regarding freight rail service for QD, Grow Smart noted that the number of freight rail cars considered necessary to service QD under a container port scenario exceeds by four the number of freight rail cars that are projected to be available on a daily basis for QD under the State's Freight Rail Improvement Project study. The organization recommended that the EIS explore why this gap exists and determine whether there is a feasible way to eliminate it.

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The report that served as the primary basis for Grow Smart's EIS testimony updates a similar report done three years ago for Grow Smart by Dan Varin. Sources for the latest report range from various state QD master plans to state and local planning officials, state transportation officials, the Record of Decision for the Rhode Island Freight Rail Improvement Project, and minutes of the November 8, 2001 meeting of the Joint Business Development Subcommittee of the Quonset/Davisville Management Corporation and Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation. Copies of the full report are available upon request.

Testimony of Scott Wolf, Executive Director, Grow Smart Rhode Island, Before the Army Corps of Engineers EIS Scoping Session for Quonset/Davisville, June 4, 2002

A report recently completed for Grow Smart Rhode Island by Dan Varin, the former head of the Office of Statewide Planning and Municipal Affairs, demonstrates that there are many unresolved infrastructure and planning issues that pose barriers to major future development of Quonset/Davisville, with or without a container port. We believe that effective planning for Quonset/Davisville's future requires a focus on these issues. That's why we are requesting that several of the key planning gaps identified in our report be pursued in the Quonset/Davisville Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that you are developing.

While we recognize that there have been many plans developed and refined for Quonset/Davisville, we don't think that any of them have taken several key issues into account. For example, the latest State Master Plan for Quonset/Davisville projects 15,000 new jobs by the year 2021, but provides little analysis of the impact of this kind of growth on the numerous rural and suburban communities that are in close proximity to Quonset/Davisville. We think the EIS should focus on the impact of Quonset/Davisville's projected growth on these communities, particularly impacts on consumption of open space and increased traffic on roads in the region. We are also requesting that the EIS process identify strategies and mechanisms that could direct growth to centers within these communities, centers possessing adequate infrastructure and zoning for compact development.

Another concern we have is whether adequate funding exists for the transportation improvements needed to accommodate Quonset/Davisville's projected growth and to make it a first class, marketable facility for large companies. The indications we have received from RIPEC and other veteran analysts of the State's financial structure are that Rhode Island doesn't have enough funding in place to handle existing transportation projects, and that a real transportation funding crisis is on the horizon. Given that, we would request that the EIS look at the adequacy of current funding plans for the critical, projected improvement in Route 403, and the construction of the I-95/ Route 4 Interchange, as well as new funding options that might be pursued for these projects.

The number of freight rail cars considered necessary to service Quonset/Davisville under a container port scenario exceeds by four the number of freight rail cars that are projected to be available on a daily basis for Quonset/Davisville under the State's Freight Rail Improvement Project study. We recommend that the EIS explore why this gap exists and determine whether there is a feasible way to eliminate it.

We are also concerned about the absence of a comprehensive storm water management plan for Quonset/Davisville and a lack of planning for the expansion of Quonset/Davisville's wastewater treatment facility. These planning gaps need to be filled to ensure orderly growth of Quonset to the level projected by the State's Master Plan. Consequently, we are asking you to address these issues as well in the upcoming EIS.

Grow Smart Rhode Island appreciates the opportunity to present our views to you today and we would like to supplement our testimony by providing you the full report on Quonset/Davisville's future referenced earlier. We think that Quonset/Davisville can be one of the prime engines of economic growth for Rhode Island, but neither the funds, the infrastructure, or the plans appear to

be in place right now to capitalize on the facility's economic potential, and to do so in a way that will protect the quality of life for the State of Rhode Island, and particularly for the Southern Rhode Island area where Quonset is located. We hope that the EIS can clarify many of these issues and help to develop a more systematic and practical vision for Quonset/Davisville's future.