

For Release: 12:01 A.M., Friday, May 31, 2002
Contact: Scott Wolf (401) 273-5711, Ext. 4

Grow Smart Rhode Island Releases Report Demonstrating Growth at Quonset/Davisville Threatened by Major Planning Gaps and Lack of Funding for Critical Transportation Improvements

Organization Insists that Full Economic Potential of Quonset/Davisville and Protection of State's Quality of Life Can't be Realized Without Addressing these Planning and Infrastructure Issues

PROVIDENCE, RI (MAY 31, 2002) – Grow Smart Rhode Island today released a report concluding that major unresolved infrastructure and planning issues must be addressed in order to generate and accommodate the 15,000 new jobs at Quonset/Davisville (QD) projected by the state's most recent (2001) QD Master Plan. Topping the list of Grow Smart's concerns are inadequate funding for key transportation improvements and a lack of planning to help neighboring communities handle the impact of major growth at QD. Other issues cited in Grow Smart's 26 page report include the absence of a comprehensive stormwater management plan for QD, a lack of planning for the expansion of QD's wastewater treatment facility, the need to pinpoint potential traffic bottlenecks in QD's vicinity, and clarification of how to meet potential dredging needs.

Scott Wolf, Grow Smart's Executive Director, emphasized that "finding solutions to these issues is critical because QD has the potential to be one of the most significant engines of economic growth for Rhode Island over the next few decades." But Wolf cautioned "whether or not a container port is sited at QD, the facility can not grow in an orderly, environmentally responsible and sustained manner unless a commitment is made to pursue systematically many of the key planning gaps highlighted in our report."

KEY PLANNING GAPS

Overall the Grow Smart report cited 11 gaps in planning for QD's future (itemized in the attached "Executive Summary and Conclusions") that must be addressed by various state and local agencies to realize QD's significant economic potential and preserve a high quality of life in Rhode Island. Details of key gaps highlighted in the Grow Smart report, authored by Dan Varin, the former head of Rhode Island's Office of Statewide Planning and Municipal Affairs, include the following:

1. Critical road access and infrastructure for future development at QD is far from assured because there isn't a reliable funding stream for the re-location of RI 403 and the I-95/RI-4 interchange project. This potential funding shortfall is part of a looming transportation funding crisis for Rhode Island documented by RIPEC and others.

-----**MORE**-----

2. According to the Grow Smart report, “The growth in employment at QD (with or without a port) can overwhelm many of the communities most likely to house these new employees if ‘business as usual’ continues.” To avoid this scenario areas most suitable for more intensive use must be identified in communities most directly affected by continued growth at QD, and necessary infrastructure (schools, utilities, transportation) needs to be provided to support higher density housing and concentrated commercial development.
3. Grow Smart’s analysis raises serious doubts about whether the proposed freight rail system servicing QD can handle the volume of containers and other materials to be shipped by freight rail under the new container port scenario outlined in the Master Plan. Projections are that 14 trains will be required daily to service QD if the container port proposal becomes a reality. However, only 10 trains will be serving QD daily based on the maximum traffic assumed in the state’s Freight Rail Improvement Project study. Moreover, The State’s 2001 Master Plan for QD also accepts the possibility of future commuter rail operations on the Amtrak main line, but does not account for these or evaluate their effect on the capacity of the third track project to handle the total demand for rail service.

To expedite the resolution of several critical issues pinpointed in the Dan Varin report, Grow Smart is urging that they be analyzed as part of the proposed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for QD’s future development. Grow Smart will be elaborating on this during the EIS scoping session scheduled for June 4th in Providence.

In releasing the Varin report, Jim Dodge, Grow Smart Rhode Island’s Board Chairman, urged State and community leaders to capitalize on the opportunity to do economic development right in this strategic and environmentally sensitive area. While acknowledging that QD has attracted some good niche employers, Dodge noted that a much more comprehensive and coordinated vision for QD is required both to capitalize fully on Quonset’s potential contribution to the Rhode Island economy and maintain South County’s quality of life. To ensure that Grow Smart’s positive vision for QD becomes a reality, the organization urged several additional steps beyond addressing the planning gaps identified in the Varin report:

1. Establishing as clear state policy the recommendation of the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council that Quonset/Davisville be used only for enterprises that can not be feasibly sited elsewhere in Rhode Island. Steering companies to QD that could just as easily stay or locate in urban and town centers doesn’t add to the State’s economic growth and could hinder recent progress on urban revitalization.
2. Establishing mass transit funding mechanisms and routes that will enable all Rhode Islanders, including those of modest means living in our cities, to have access to the new jobs projected for QD. The Master Plan’s call for public transportation to be servicing 1300 QD employees at buildout is highly unrealistic under current funding constraints and under current pedestrian and transit proposals for the site. That’s why we encourage the additional planning work the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation is undertaking to improve transit options at QD.
3. Providing adequate input for communities near QD in deliberations about QD’s future.

The current Grow Smart QD report 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.

A copy of the Executive Summary and Conclusions of Grow Smart’s report is attached to this press release. Copies of the full report are available upon request.