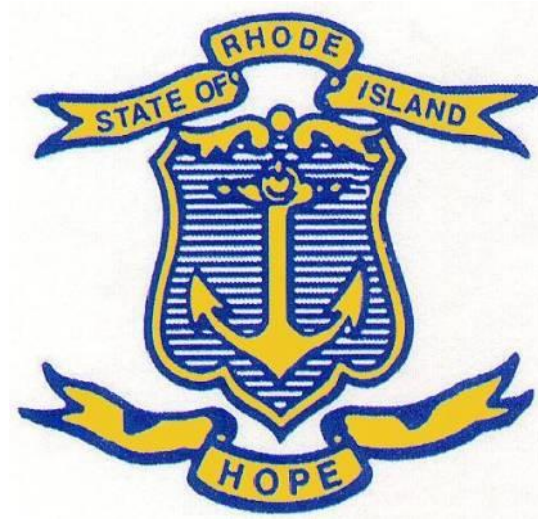


Rhode Island Planner's Education Committee



Authorization:

House Resolution 2024 – H 7977 Substitute A

- House determined there are challenges to development including time to obtain local permits, environmental challenges and restrictive and outdated zoning and planning regs.
- 13-member commission to study the ability of the Rhode Island educational system to offer degree or certificate programs within the State to provide a pipeline of planners.
- Commission to undertake a comprehensive study and broad review of the ability of the Rhode Island educational system to offer degrees or certificate programs within the State to provide a supply of planners, planning technicians and planning staff and provide recommendations that will enable the State to provide such educational opportunities.

Membership

- 13 Committee Members
- Member from the RI Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner – Charon Rose
- University of Rhode Island President or designee – Dr. Jane Buxton, Landscape Architecture Program Director
- Rhode Island College President or designee – Jenifer Giroux, Vice-President of Corporate relations & professional Studies
- Community College of Rhode Island President or designee – Matthew Ulricksen, Associate Professor of Political Science
- Statewide Planning Associate Director – Meredith Brady
- Rhode Island Department of Housing Secretary or designee – Joshua Berry, Chief of Strategic Planning

Membership cont.

- RI-APA President - Roberta Groch, President
- Municipal Planner – Thomas Deller, Johnston Planner
- Municipal Planner – Mark Carruolo, North Smithfield Planner
- Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns Executive Director or designee – Charles J. Donovan, Jr., Senior Policy Advisor
- Career Technical Education Representative – Henry S. Young, EdD Assistant Provost, New England Institute of Technology
- Public Member with Housing Experience – Joseph Garlick, NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley
- Public Member – Brenda Clement, Executive Director, HousingWorks RI

Process

- Committee met seven (7) times between September 2024 and March 2025
- Each month included a specific presenter and relevant subject matter:
 - Presentations from each of the educational institutions on program offerings including, URI, RIC, CCRI, NEIT, and Charette High School Providence.
 - Presentation from RI-APA on the state of Planning/Planners in RI
 - Presentation from a local Municipal Planner – Thomas Kravitz, Warwick Planning Director
- Committee also developed a survey for local communities to determine need and desire to hire additional planning support.

Survey Results

- 24 of 39 communities responded
- Three major takeaways
 - Majority departments are understaffed with 2 or fewer professional staff
 - Shortage of qualified candidates to fill open positions
 - Funding and pay ranges problematic
- Majority of departments believe they are understaffed
- 15 departments have 2 or fewer professional staff
- 25% or 6 departments had unfilled planning positions

Survey Results cont.

- 8 departments attributed lack of staff to funding and 6 departments stated a lack of qualified candidates
- 33% or 8 departments stated that they expect to be hiring within 3 years
- 81% or 18 communities believed a bachelors degree, or an associates degree is adequate for entry level planning positions
- 18% or 4 communities believed a MCP was necessary for all planning positions

Survey Conclusions

- There is a current need for qualified planning professionals in Rhode Island
- There appears to be a future need as several communities are expecting to be hiring within the next 3 years
- That varying education/degree levels may be appropriate for entry and mid level planning positions
- Rhode Island needs to focus on the short, long, and medium term for creating a pipeline of planning professionals
- Work with the State's public and private educational institutions to develop tiered levels of education/training for entry, mid, and upper-level planning positions

Colleges as Assets



NEW ENGLAND
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

- Short term – Current AS & BS programs in Architectural & Building Engineering Technology, Civil Engineering Technology. AS in Building Construction Technology. BS & MS in Construction Management
- NEIT provide AS & BS student interns to local planning departments for introduction to planning field
- NEIT provides various technological training to upskill current employees
- Long term - NEIT to work with URI to develop a pathway to the University's Graduate Certificate in Community Planning program
- Joint Admissions Agreement (JAA) – Develop JAA with RIC and URI for Community Planning Programs

Colleges as Assets



- Short term - Promote awareness of community planning as a career path. Collaborate with RI-APA and RILCT to design and implement development opportunities for municipal planning staff and education and training programs for Planning Board members
- Long Range – Create Associate of Science in Community Planning & Development. Civic Analytics Certificate – Professional credential combining civic technology and data analytics for government and nonprofit sector professionals
- Joint Admissions Agreement (JAA) – Develop JAA with URI and RIC for Community Planning Programs

College as Assets



- Short Term – Undergraduate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Public Policy. Develop new courses that focus more directly on Community Planning history, theory, methods and practice
- Long Range – Minor and Major Programs in Community Planning and Sustainable Development. Adjunct professors drawn from Rhode island's professional planning community to teach or co-teach existing and prospective planning courses
- Joint Admissions Agreement (JAA) – Develop JAA with CCRI and URI for Community Planning Programs

College as Assets

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

- Masters in Community Planning at URI began in 1963 and was discontinued in 2006
- Short Term – URI launching fully asynchronous Graduate Certificate in Community Planning Program in Fall 2025. In person Graduate Certificate in Community Planning began in 2015. Minor in Community Planning currently available
- Long Term – reestablish the Master in Community Planning Program, first as an unaccredited, then working toward a fully accredited online program
- Joint Admissions Agreement (JAA) – Develop JAA with CCRI and RIC for Community Planning Programs

Recommendations

- The General Assembly may consider enacting legislation that would:
 - Request the Council on Post-Secondary Education to facilitate the creation of a working group of representatives of secondary and post-secondary education institutions including, but not limited to; the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, the University of Rhode Island, and New England Institute of Technology.
 - Request this workgroup develop a Joint Academic Agreement between the participating educational institutions to create an appropriate course of study for urban planning and ensure content compatibility and course credit transferability between institutions.
 - Request this workgroup also collaborate to design education and training programs for planning, zoning, affordable housing, economic development, environmental conservation, and historic preservation.
 - Request this workgroup delineate the appropriate academic offerings for the different levels of degrees available, which shall include certificate, associates, bachelor's, and master's degrees, and identify the appropriate institution or institutions to offer such degrees as well as correlate the degree level appropriate to entry, mid-level, and advanced urban planning positions with consideration for allowing urban planning candidates to capitalize on current scholarship opportunities (i.e. The Rhode Island Promise Scholarship).
 - Establish a potential grant program with a combination of private and public funding, if available, or potentially amend an existing grant program (e.g. P-Tech), to support partnerships among education institutions and municipal planning departments including internship opportunities.
 - Organize potential incentives to foster collaboration on issues of planning between municipalities based on regional and historic partners.

Recommendations cont.

- The Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, in association with municipal planning departments and the American Planning Association, Rhode Island Division, should coordinate with elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions to raise awareness of urban planning careers and programs including:
 - Develop a strategic plan that aligns educational offerings with current and expected workforce gaps;
 - Advertise existing certificate and degree programs in planning through social media as well as traditional media;
 - Establish new, and support existing, internships, fellowships, job shadowing, and other experiential learning opportunities; and,
 - Explore models by which municipalities may support existing staff pursuing mid-career upskilling.
- The Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns and the American Planning Association, Rhode Island Chapter, and the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning in association with municipal urban planning departments, should coordinate with Rhode Island higher education institutions to build out academic offerings appropriate to current and projected municipal urban planning needs.
- The Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns and the American Planning Association, Rhode Island Chapter, and the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning in association with municipal community planning departments, should review current staffing levels and job descriptions for planning positions and consider revising such descriptions to include certification and associates (and minor degrees) for entry-level planning positions, bachelor degrees for mid-level positions and master's degrees for the upper-level and director positions and/or equivalent education and experience.

Recommendations cont.

- The General Assembly may consider methods to encourage collaboration between elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education institutions and Rhode Island's professional planning community to identify potential professors, adjunct professors and guest speakers in such academic offerings who can perform direct outreach to the community and communicate the importance of urban planning career pathways
- Higher education institutions shall pursue any and all private, public, and federal financial resources to support and sustain these initiatives including building on existing capacities and programs and utilizing existing resources
- The General Assembly may consider providing funding for the purpose of incentivizing the Rhode Island public institutions of higher education to initiate or restructure academic programs to support urban planning career pathways and degrees

QUESTIONS