

**F – ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT**

F. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

F-1.0 Introduction

North Smithfield's industrial heritage has been well documented. Located in the Blackstone Valley, North Smithfield, along with its various villages, played a prominent role in our nation's early industrialization. This history is an important factor to what makes North Smithfield unique. Nevertheless, North Smithfield, like so many other small New England communities is caught between its industrial heritage and a rapidly evolving, global economy. Entire industrial sectors have experienced significant decline or extinction, new industries have emerged demanding better educated and trained employees, and the location patterns and factors for these new industries have negated the importance of water power and access to a low cost immigrant labor force. The economic success of North Smithfield is now influenced not just by local resources and actions but is also dependant upon regional, state and national factors. North Smithfield must define the role it plays in these larger communities.

For decades, the goal of economic development has been the creation and retention of jobs. Historically, labor markets were more local in nature. Therefore, job creating activities primarily benefited local and regional residents. Increasingly, job markets are now regional, stretching north to Boston and Worcester, south and east to Connecticut. This is particularly true in industrial sectors that are technology and information intensive, requiring a better educated labor force. This type of labor force is more mobile and is willing to travel greater distances from home to work. Therefore, the job creating and retention economic development activities in North Smithfield benefit residents in the greater Rhode Island, southeastern Massachusetts and eastern Connecticut region.

Another important goal of economic development activities is the expansion of the nonresidential tax base. The expansion of this tax base is critical to a community's success in stabilizing residential tax rates, controlling the cost of living for its residents, and generating new tax revenues to fund quality municipal services, the most demanding of which is public education. The dependency of local government on property taxes necessitates that all communities include economic development programs as an important element to their overall community development efforts. Competition among and between Rhode Island's communities has the positive effect of promoting innovation in the design of economic development initiatives, investing in critical infrastructure, creating and protecting industrial land and building resources, and managing the local business climate. In other words, the sum of the economic development activities of all Rhode Island communities has a direct, critical impact on the business climate of the State.

Much discussion has occurred regarding suburban sprawl and urban reinvestment. As general concepts, all can agree that unbridled commercial, industrial and residential sprawl and the concurrent loss of open space, traffic congestion and pollution need to be controlled. Efforts to promote reinvestment in existing buildings, reclaim and reinvest in contaminated buildings and land, locate development in close proximity to transportation and utility infrastructure, and better

utilize limited land resources are goals that most can agree to. Nevertheless, the economic health of Rhode Island and North Smithfield necessitates that additional quality land resources be made available for business investment. According to the Rhode Island Division of Planning's State Guide Plan Element 212, Industrial Land Use Plan (May 1990), there is a statewide goal to set aside 20,000 acres of industrially zoned land to meet future employment needs. With a State inventory of about 10,000 acres of occupied industrial land and 2,000 acres of vacant "prime" industrial acreage, 8,000 additional acres must be reserved for future development in industrial areas.

F-2.0 Goals, Policies and Actions

1. ESTABLISH THE LOCAL CAPACITY TO EFFECTIVELY DEFINE AND MANAGE A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.

- A. Undertake a local economic development strategic planning initiative to define a community economic vision and strategies to achieve this vision.
- B. Develop ongoing working partnerships with various regional and state economic development entities including the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce, New England Economic Development Services and the Economic Development Foundation of Rhode Island and all other regional and statewide entities with human and financial resources to assist the Town.
- C. Establish appropriate means to communicate periodically with community stakeholders regarding internal and external economic development threats and opportunities, as well as, progress with respect to the implementation of the economic development strategic plan.
- D. Reconstitute the North Smithfield Industrial Development Commission as the North Smithfield Economic Development Commission and empower the Commission to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the economic development strategic plan.

2. FOSTER REINVESTMENT/INVESTMENT IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY AREAS TO OFFER A DIVERSITY OF QUALITY LOCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION.

- A. Develop a strategic infrastructure investment program targeted to high priority business development opportunity areas.
- B. Develop quality land-use and design policies and standards as a basis for communicating and negotiating with prospective investors.
- C. The Town should consider developing a good business practices program to encourage the significant redevelopment and/or development of industrial, commercial and mixed-use properties that reflect high quality land use and design policies and standards.

- D. Aggressively pursue State and/or **Federal** **grant** funds for economic development.
- E. Initiate a business retention strategy **involving** periodic contact between the North Smithfield Economic Development Commission **members** and Town employers to determine nature of any Town-related problems or needs.
- F. Prepare development/redevelopment **visions** for the Town's existing commercial areas. Based on these visions, prepare strategies **to** enhance the visual and economic quality of these areas.
- G. Revise zoning regulations and **districts** **as** proposed in the Land Use Element; consider special provisions for adaptive reuse **of older** mill structures.
- H. Review the Zoning Ordinance as it **pertains** to industrial and commercial zoned areas and investigate the feasibility of **implementing** **greater use flexibility** in these zones along with design standards.
- I. Based on access, proximity to **infrastructure**, topographical and environmental constraints, assess the realistic development **potential** of existing industrial zoned parcels and those parcels previously identified in the North Smithfield Industrial Site Survey (Maguire Group Inc., 1991). Based on the results of this **assessment**, amend the zoning map to accurately reflect appropriate use for those parcels.

3. ENCOURAGE OTHER FORMS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WHICH WILL PROVIDE JOB OPPORTUNITIES, TAX BASE SUPPORT AND INCREASED REVENUES FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

- A. Provide opportunities for mixed-use **development** including compatible office parks, light industry and multifamily housing.
- B. Encourage historic area rehabilitation **programs** which will generate revenues for local tradesmen.
- C. Utilize the concept of **Heritage Economics** when considering an economic development strategy for revitalization of the villages.¹
- D. Support the community's agricultural based **businesses** by providing technical assistance for available grants for purchase of **development** rights and investigate tax incentives for landowners who maintain active agricultural pursuits.
- E. Establish a Development Plan Review section within the Land Development and Subdivision Regulations that incorporates design review standards based on sound site planning

¹ Heritage Economics is a phrase used in the Slatersville Area Plan to describe how the town could capitalize on the Town's heritage and historic features to promote economic development and tourism.

principals and best management practices and that incorporates the principals of village enhancement found in the Slatersville Area Plan.

- F. As part of the Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor and the related Regional Comprehensive Tourism Planning Component prepared by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Inc., support historic preservation and regional recreational development activities which will enhance the area as a tourist destination.
- G. Limit retail and commercial expansion to areas where traffic congestion, noise and light will not impact unfavorably on local businesses or residences.

F-3.0 Plan Description

F-3.1 Economic Profile of North Smithfield

F-3.1.1 Current Employment

In Rhode Island, employment data is available for each municipality for business establishments subject to the Rhode Island unemployment insurance tax. The most recent data, as provided in Table F-3.1.1, is for those employed in North Smithfield regardless of their place of residence.

Table F-3.1.1 Covered Private Employment — North Smithfield, RI 2001

Industry Group	# of Establishments	Average Employment
Agriculture/Forestry	12	79
Construction	51	247
Manufacturing	27	675
Transportation/Commun./Electric/Gas/ Sanitation	15	201
Wholesale Trade	35	191
Retail Trade	57	1095
Financial, Insurance and Real Estate	22	78
Services	109	1101
Government	11	486
TOTAL	339	4113

Source: RI Department of Employment and Training

Not included in the table are those who are self employed workers.

**Table F-3.1.1.a Change in Covered Private Employment – North Smithfield, RI
1990-2001**

Industry Group	Percent Change
Agriculture/Forestry	14%
Construction	15%
Manufacturing	(60%)
Transportation/Commun./Electric/Gas/ Sanitation	112%
Wholesale Trade	(32%)
Retail Trade	66%
Financial, Insurance and Real Estate	63%
Services	(5%)

Similar to national and state trends, for the 10 year period of 1990 to 2000, North Smithfield witnessed a significant loss in manufacturing employment. Similarly, over the same period, North Smithfield experienced significant increases in non-manufacturing employment. The one exception was the loss of employment in wholesale trade. This loss of employment more than likely reflected the loss of jobs at the Holsom Burnes Company.

As stated earlier, being located in an increasingly larger, regional labor market area reduces the linkage between locally created job opportunities and jobs filled by community residents. Based on US 2000 Census data, 77.7% of people who live in North Smithfield work in Rhode Island, 21.4% work in Massachusetts, .6% work in Connecticut, and .3% work elsewhere and abroad. Of the 77% of people who work in Rhode Island, over 44% work in either Woonsocket, North Smithfield or Providence.

F-3.1.2 Employment Projections

In Technical Paper 127, *Rhode Island Employment Forecasts, Year 2010-The State, Cities and Towns, and Analysis Zones* (August 1987), the Rhode Island Division of Planning projected total local employment (both covered and uncovered for unemployment insurance) for the cities and towns of the State. For North Smithfield, the projections showed virtually no change between 4,556 in 1990 and 4,505 in 2010.

Considering the proposals of the Land Use Plan Element and those of this Element to aggressively attract new industry and business to the community, the State's projections appear to be too conservative and may have been influenced by the significant drop from 1980 employment levels due to the departure of Tupperware Corporation. As discussed in the Land Use Element, population projections based on the 2001 BRVNHC analysis, and updated with current housing projections, also appear to suggest a more aggressive growth rate in housing unit production. Nevertheless, based on current employment levels and the lack of readily developable, prime industrial acreage, these employment projections may be accurate. If the recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan are implemented, there will be steady growth employment over the next 5 to 10 years.

F-3.1.3 Real Estate Tax Base

Table F-3.1.3 and Table F-3.1.4 summarize real property tax assessments in North Smithfield for the periods of 1990 and 2005 respectively. These tables exclude assessments on tangible property and real property assessments on non-tax paying uses such as government owned properties, churches and hospitals.

Table F-3.1.3 - Summary Of Real Estate Tax Assessments*
North Smithfield, RI Dec. 31, 1990

USE	TOTAL	PERCENT
Single Family	\$145,882,010.	68.
Multi-Family	4,354,960.	2.
Commercial	16,472,880.	8.
Industrial	17,579,600.	8.
Farm	641,840.	0.**
Utility/Railroad	11,769,760.	5
Miscellaneous	304,320.	0.**
Vacant Land	6,164,080.	3.
Total	\$216,281,690.*	100.0

Source: Tax Assessor, Town of North Smithfield - Totals as of 12/31/90

* Does not include personal property or motor vehicle assessments.

** Farms and Miscellaneous add up to less than one-half of one percent.

TABLE F-3.1.3.a - SUMMARY OF REAL ESTATE TAX ASSESSMENTS*
NORTH SMITHFIELD, RI - DEC. 31, 2004

USE	TOTAL	PERCENT
Single Family	\$840,592,608.	77.
Multi-Family	78,290,233.	7.
Commercial	61,989,510.	6.
Industrial	43,915,600.	4.
Farm	502,010.	0.**
Utility/Railroad	32,818,660.	3
Miscellaneous	415,600.	0.**
Vacant Land	30,878,228.	3.
Total	\$1,089,402,449.*	100.0

Source: Tax Assessor, Town of North Smithfield - Totals as of 12/31/04

* Does not include personal property or motor vehicle assessments. Also excludes "Other Improved Land".

** Farms and Miscellaneous add up to less than one-half of one percent.

In 1990, residential real property assessments in North Smithfield comprised 70% of total real property assessments. In 2005, this percentage increased to 84%. This fact is particularly troubling given that the 2005 assessments did not include the Silver Pines and Rock Cliff residential developments. Therefore, the lack of diversification in the North Smithfield property tax base portends future difficulties in controlling property tax rates and underwriting important investments in "public goods" such as schools, roads, recreation facilities and open space.

The North Smithfield Industrial Development Commission commissioned an Industrial Site Survey in 1991 (Maguire Group Inc., 1991). The North Smithfield Planning Board accepted most of the study recommendations and incorporated same in the Economic Development and Land Use Elements in the 1992 Comprehensive Plan. One of the sites identified in the Industrial Site Survey has recently been identified for a large scale commercial development. The Town is also taking proactive steps to rezone several other sites for more flexible, mixed-uses. These zoning steps are more responsive to market realities and should expedite the industrial and/or commercial development of these sites.

F-3.1.4 Existing Industrial and Commercial Zoning

North Smithfield's Zoning Ordinance provides for one Manufacturing (M) District which allows a variety of industrial and heavy commercial uses by right or by Special Use Permit from the Zoning Board of Review. A review of the zoned areas reveals most of the land is developed, excessively steep or located within the floodplains or wetlands along the Branch and Blackstone Rivers. Two usable parcels totaling about 60 acres are found between North Smithfield Industrial Drive and the Providence and Worcester Railroad tracks. A 1974 RI Department of Community Affairs study recommended that this area be developed to take advantage of the availability of rail services. Approximately 30 acres of these 60 acres will be rezoned for office/commercial land development projects. This change in zoning will eliminate the use of these 30 acres for heavy industry and will encourage more compatible mixed office and commercial uses. Additional land currently in the Manufacturing District on Quaker Highway and Central Street will be rezoned for mixed office and commercial uses.

The Town has two business zones. The Highway Business (BH) zone is located along the non-limited access portion of Route 146 and at the intersection of Main Street and Route 102. Most of the land in the zone is developed; interestingly, there are still numerous single family homes within the highway strip along Route 146.

The Neighborhood Business (BN) zone is found throughout the community. Substantial portions of the zoned areas adjacent to Route 146A and Victory Highway have been developed with retail, service or office uses. Several zoned sites in outlying areas are undeveloped or only partially used for business purposes. An area on the west side of Eddie Dowling Highway currently in the BN district will be rezoned to the BH zone to more accurately reflect the types of businesses that have developed over the years and the general character of the roadway.

A Professional Service (PS) zone and Limited Commercial (LC) zone are located along portions of Eddie Dowling Highway. Uses such as office space for persons in professional and related fields are allowed in the PS zone. Commercial establishments, light industry and office uses are allowed in the LC zone.

F-4.0 The Plan

The Economic Development Element calls for an aggressive program to attract new, quality industrial and commercial development to North Smithfield. In addition, it suggests measures to assure the retention of existing business and industry. This Economic Development Element encourages a type, scope and scale of industrial and commercial development that will result in the creation of quality job opportunities and expansion of North Smithfield's tax base while at the same time preserving North Smithfield's unique character and environment.

F-4.1 Land Use Proposals

The Land Use Element supports new economic development in North Smithfield. Major proposals are as follows:

Establish a Mill Rehab District at and between the Branch River Industrial Park and Premisy Hill, and at the Blackstone Smithfield Industrial Park (former Tupperware facility) to allow mixed uses and to facilitate the rehabilitation of these underutilized historic mills. This mixed-use zone will allow for a greater variety of uses including light industry, service, commercial uses and residential.

Continuation of the existing Manufacturing (M) District on an approximately 30 acre site located along North Smithfield Industrial Drive and the establishment of an office/commercial zone along North Smithfield Industrial Drive at the exit ramp to Rte. 146 and along Quaker Highway and Central Street.

Support of the planned historic rehabilitation of the Slatersville Mill site as a Mixed-Use development including housing, live/work space, municipal library and public space.

Rezoning of a section of Quaker Highway as it borders Massachusetts to recognize the existing and likely business highway uses.

Make use of the proximity of one of North Smithfield's largest industrial areas, by rezoning the Homestead Farm area to a Mixed Office/Commercial use.

Rezone a 200 acre area between the Landmark Medical/Fogarty Unit and Booth Pond to Mixed Use-Office Commercial/146A that could include medical offices, research and development activities, office space and limited retail of up to 40% of the built structures.

Facilitate the economic viability of North Smithfield's remaining farms by creating an Agricultural Business District.

Although the Land Use Plan eliminates some areas currently located within the Manufacturing (M) District, virtually all of the land so removed has serious constraints for industrial purposes such as heavy manufacturing. Furthermore, the Land Use Plan designates various key business opportunity areas for mixed-use development; a more flexible and market sensitive designation that affords the Planning Board the ability to work with prospective developers/investors to optimize the economic, fiscal and aesthetic value of projects.

F-4.2 Infrastructure

The Services and Facilities Element calls for the implementation of the Water System Plan completed in 1992 by the Maguire Group and the updating of the long-range Wastewater Facilities Plan for sewer services. Priority is assigned to extensions of sewer and water services to the economic development sites described above. All new developments should be required to install the wiring necessary for access to communications technology.

Experience elsewhere has shown that new industry generally is looking for sites which are ready for development without long delays for the necessary infrastructure.

F-4.3 Zoning Changes

The Land Use plan Element call for a series of zoning changes to be carried out within the 18 months following the States approval of the Comprehensive Plan. Those major changes directly relating to the Economic Development Element include:

Revisions of the Zoning Map as described in the Land Use Element of this Plan Update.

Adoption of new Zoning Ordinance use districts and related regulations that encourage the reuse of mill buildings, the development of additional land for commercial and industrial purposes, the maintenance of the mixed use character of mill villages, and improved economic viability of working farms.

Review of the District Use Table for Manufacturing (M) and possibly other districts in regards to uses that generate unacceptable noise, odors, dust, lighting and other waste products of industry. Design standards should also be implemented. This combined approach recognizes that many industries formerly considered to be obnoxious can be compatible neighbors with the use of modern environmental control technology.

Continuation of existing Neighborhood Business (BN), Highway Business (BH), and Professional Service (PS) Districts. A modest expansion of the Highway Business District is proposed.

Improvement of Development Plan Review (site plan review) procedures and standards as part of the Zoning Ordinance.

F-4.4 Public-Private Partnerships

North Smithfield has limited internal human resources to effectively manage economic development issues and initiatives. It is critically important that North Smithfield forge and maintain working relationships with the various regional and statewide economic development entities including the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce, New England Economic Development Services ("NEEDS") and NEEDS' parent company, The Economic Development Foundation of Rhode Island. Each of these organizations has niche strengths that could be invaluable in North Smithfield's various proposed economic development initiatives. Other organizations such as the John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission and Grow Smart Rhode Island can also serve as important sources for technical support and even funding support in North Smithfield's efforts to manage and nurture growth that reinforces North Smithfield's sense of place and community while strengthening the community's fiscal base and contribution to the regional and state job base.

F-4.5 Blackstone River Natural Heritage Corridor

The Town of North Smithfield, through various proposals in this Comprehensive Plan, will be implementing elements of State Guide Plan Element 131, *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor* and the related *Regional Comprehensive Tourism Planning Component*. Element K of this Comprehensive Plan, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, gives special attention to coordinating local programs with those of the surrounding region. Activities such as historic district and structure rehabilitation and conservation, adaptive reuse of historic mill structures and creation of the Branch River Park will have economic benefits for North Smithfield. The benefits include:

North Smithfield will be enhanced as a good place to live -- an important consideration in attracting new industry.

Work will be generated for local tradesmen participating in rehabilitation programs.

Increased tourist interest will generate revenue for local business such as restaurants, motels, movies, gas stations and convenience stores.

F-4.6 Retention of Existing Industry

Often overlooked in the zeal to attract new industry is the need to be continuously in touch with the major businesses and industries already in Town. All too often, communities are not aware of issues which may cause a business to leave town.

One solution is to have a Town official maintain contact with the management of key industries on an annual or more frequent basis. A brief meeting at the company's offices will let local businesses know they are important. If there are problems the Town or State can address, prompt attention may not only be good public relations, but also may help to make local businesses more profitable and keep industry in Rhode Island.

The various public and private economic development organizations identified above are also valuable sources of information regarding company and industry specific problems and opportunities. By forging partnerships with these organizations, North Smithfield enhances its capacity to get early warning of emerging problems and opportunities and respond accordingly. A quality economic development program begins with a heightened awareness of North Smithfield's existing business community and strategies to retain and grow these businesses.

F-5.0 Consistency Statement

The Economic Development Element of the North Smithfield Comprehensive Plan supports the goals of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act and is consistent with the overall goals and policies as included in applicable State Guide Plan elements.

The following sections summarize the relationship of the North Smithfield Comprehensive Plan to state policies.

State Guide Plan Element 212, *Economic Development*

Land being set aside for new industrial and related economic development is designed to be attractive to industries which will have a steady employment pattern.

Through a careful analysis of available sites, North Smithfield proposes to encourage public and private investment in "prime" areas with a reasonable expectation of being developed.

Initiatives for strengthening and extending sewer and water facilities to "prime" business opportunity sites are presently underway.

The adaptive reuse of historic mill structures is encouraged; such facilities often can serve as "incubator" space for start-up businesses and industries requiring more flexible space and affordable rents. These historic mill structures can also serve as ideal locations for flexible, mixed-uses that are congruent with market realities and contemporary growth management strategies.

Commercial and retail development is encouraged within the limits of suitable sites, current land use constraints, community planning objectives and a need to serve local residents.

North Smithfield supports quality, well planned economic development. The North Smithfield Industrial Development Commission has coordinated the preparation of industrial land studies and the design and adoption of local property tax incentives that have been important to the Town's success in facilitating the development of limited, prime land resources. A reconstituted

North Smithfield Economic Development Commission will coordinate the Town's next phase in economic development by developing a more strategic economic development vision.

State Guide Plan Element 131, *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley, National Heritage Corridor*

Rehabilitation and conservation programs are proposed for historic districts, individual historic structures and historic mill sites.

North Smithfield is participating with neighboring municipalities and the state in furthering Corridor goals.

Business generated from tourism is recognized as an important part of the economic development equation. "Quality of life" enhancement through the Corridor's revitalization is considered to be a significant benefit to North Smithfield's economic growth and attractiveness to the next generation of businesses and workers/residents. The Comprehensive Plan includes a special Element entitled Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.