

**RHODE ISLAND COMMERCE CORPORATION**  
**MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING COUNCIL**  
**PUBLIC SESSION**

**May 17, 2023**

The Rhode Island Economic Development Planning Council (“EDPC”) met on May 17, 2023 at the Department of Administration (1 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908) pursuant to notice of the meeting to all Members and public notice of meeting, a copy of which is attached hereto, as required by applicable Rhode Island Law.

The following Members were present and participated throughout the meeting as indicated: Elizabeth M. Tanner, esq./Daniela Fairchild (Chair); Channavy Chhay; Andrew Cortes; Pamela Cotter; Rilwan Feyisitan Jr.; Shannon Gilkey; Lori Giuttari; Philip Gould; Russ Griffiths; Roberta Groch; Elizabeth Lynn; Bernadette MacArthur; Carol Malysz; Jason Martesian; Oscar Mejias; Lisa Ranglin; Chelsea Siefert; Loren Spears; and Larry Warner. Not attending were: Meredith Brady, Mario Bueno, Liz Catucci, Dave Chenevert, Jane Cole, Travis Escobar, Krystafer Redden, Michael Sabitoni, and Kira Wills.

Chair Tanner opened the meeting before handing off to Daniela Fairchild to preside over the meeting, assisted by Adam Isaacs-Falbel and Patrick Duffy of RI Commerce as well as Rachel Selsky, Dan Gundersen\*, Lindsay Johnson\*, and Tom Dworetsky\* of Camoin Associates.

\*via Zoom

Members of the public consisted of Christian Cowan and Lisa Carnevale.

The meeting was called to order at 8:40am.

Secretary Tanner gave opening remarks via Zoom. Secretary Tanner’s remarks focused on the work completed on stakeholder engagement and data collection since the last meeting of the Council. She said that the goal of the day’s Council meeting was to highlight key takeaways from the CEDS data collection, summarize the priorities heard from Rhode Islanders, and collect the Council’s thoughts on those priorities as the RI Commerce and Camoin teams move into the next phase of drafting strategies. Secretary Tanner then asked Daniela Fairchild to serve as her proxy for the meeting, as she had to step away for a concurrent public meeting.

Daniela Fairchild asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the prior meeting of the Council. Upon motion duly made by Carol Malysz and seconded by Channavy Chhay, the Council voted unanimously to approve the meeting minutes from the meeting of the Economic Development Planning Council on April 19, 2023.

Rachel Selsky of Camoin Associates presented an overview of the previous plans and reports that were reviewed by the CEDS team in preparing to develop the new strategy. She then presented the analyses that Camoin completed to submit as part of the final CEDS document.

This included six reports: Economic Base, National Indicators, Targeted Industries, Workforce, Sustainable Growth and Economic Resilience, Small Business, and Community Development and Placemaking. She also mentioned that a separate analysis focused on the Blue Economy was being incorporated into the CEDS. Ms. Selsky invited questions throughout the presentation.

Andrew Cortes asked how the targeted industries were selected and who was completing the separate blue economy report. Ms. Selsky answered that Camoin worked with Commerce to identify these industries, which have been the areas of focus in the past for Rhode Island. She additionally said that a difference consulting firm called Fourth Economy was responsible for conducting the analysis of the blue economy. Daniela Fairchild added that the blue economy work is being completed in coordination with the University of Rhode Island Research Foundation and that it is tied to the Grow Blue initiative that grew out of the Build Back Better Regional Challenge application. The Grow Blue initiative included seven different sprint team gatherings talking to over 300 stakeholders. Mr. Cortes asked if there was any update to the Grow Blue plan, as his organization had been involved in the development. Ms. Fairchild recognized Christian Cowan, who attended the meeting as a member of the public and who leads the URI Research Foundation, and said that a draft of the plan's executive summary has been released at [GrowBlue.org](http://GrowBlue.org). Additional action steps from that process will be forthcoming.

Rachel Selsky shared the key findings from the economic base analysis, including declining population growth, growing racial and ethnic diversity, opportunity to increase educational attainment, low unemployment rate and low labor force participation rate compared to neighboring states, slower job recovery than expected given national competitive advantage and constraints, strength in employment in service industries, diverse emerging industries/occupations and export opportunities, strong overall growth (showing strength in smaller businesses and start-ups, despite lack of associated job growth), and lower labor costs compared to neighboring states (which can be a pro or con depending on the perspective). Ms. Selsky invited questions from the Council.

- Elizabeth Lynn asked about the opportunities to increase educational attainment – is our system not producing people with high educational attainment or are we not retaining those people who do have high attainment?
  - Ms. Selsky answered that it is probably a combination of both – the team heard in focus groups that retaining talent is a big challenge.
  - Shannon Gilkey added that the state has 52.3% of the population that has some credential beyond high school (not including certificates or apprenticeships). Have about 123,000 with some educational attainment beyond high school with about 65,000 that have one year of education but no credential. The state is doing well getting people into higher education, but preparation coming out of K-12 is a challenge. Rhode Island is a destination state for higher education – importing about 65,000 students – with URI, Brown, Providence College, and Bryant responsible for many of those students. We have trouble keeping that talent in Rhode Island after they graduate, especially when we also have an aging workforce and declining birth rates.

Ms. Selsky moved on to the National Indicators analysis that Camoin has developed based on the “six ‘I’s” (Innovation, Infrastructure, Intellectual Capital, Interest, International, and Investment). Overall, Rhode Island ranked 15<sup>th</sup> among all states based on Camoin’s analysis. Rhode Island performed particularly well in knowledge creation and technology diffusion, average STEM degree creation, broadband infrastructure and adoption, and patent technology diffusion. The state performed particularly poorly on roads percent acceptable, general aviation and commercial flights, average new foreign direct investment (FDI) share of GDP, and the ratio of establishment births to deaths. Rachel continued to highlight RI’s ranking across all 6 categories. Ms. Fairchild reiterated how important this analysis is, as rankings tend to get a lot of media attention, and this analysis is far more in depth and provides more of the background data.

- Pamela Cotter asked about what year the roads data is from, mentioning that DOT has been focused on fixing bridges in the last eight years and only recently transitioned focus back to roads, so those rankings should be on the way up.
  - Ms. Selsky answered that she wasn’t sure but would get back to her. Later in the meeting, she clarified that the data was from 2020, so there may have been significant improvement since then.
  - Ms. Fairchild agreed that even a small bump in the indicators, which has been seen in the last several years, can be very meaningful. Ms. Cotter also said that it depends what the indicator is measuring and that there are different things that you can measure.

Ms. Selsky said that Rhode Island ranked 51st in infrastructure, which measures roads, water, telecommunications, public transportation, housing, energy, railroads, and other sectors. In innovation, which measures birth of new industries, idea generation, research labs, commercialization of products, and more, Rhode Island ranked twelfth.

- Elizabeth Lynn asked for clarification about how the rankings were calculated.
  - Ms. Selsky answered that states were ranked based on the average ranking of all measured indicators in a category.
- Channavy Chhay asked how the rankings were balanced when comparing RI to other larger states like California. She pointed out that for instance Silicon Valley in California is a hub for innovation and STEM.
  - Ms. Selsky answered that indicators were weighted per capita where possible.

Ms. Selsky said that Rhode Island ranked 18th in intellectual capital, which looks at education, skills of the workforce, job training programs, and life-long learning opportunities. The interest category looks at things like tourism, vibrant downtowns, placemaking, creative capital, outdoor, history, and heritage; Rhode Island ranked 12th in this category. The international category looks at global trade and export, foreign direct investment, cultural amenities, ethnic influences, languages spoken, and ease of travel; Rhode Island ranked 32nd in this category. Finally, in investment, Rhode Island came in 12th, which includes public investment in infrastructure, venture capital investment, commercial lending, philanthropy, human capital, and more.

- Lori Giuttari asked that reports get to council members earlier before meetings so that the conversation can be more focused on solutions rather than what is in the reports.
- Elizabeth Lynn mentioned that she feels that the broadband numbers overrate Rhode Island's actual situation. The state must be thoughtful about what we are focusing on with high-quality broadband.

Ms. Selsky moved on to the targeted industry analysis, mentioning that advanced manufacturing and bioscience are growing industries (with advanced manufacturing identified as leading and bioscience identified as emerging). Within the advanced manufacturing subsector, defense manufacturing and food products & processing are the largest subsectors. Within bioscience, the medical devices subsector is seeing growth in concentration and jobs. Within retail, Rhode Island is a leader in food and beverage at home retailers and home improvement & furnishing. Rachel pointed out that the total percent change in retail establishments was positive from 2018-2021 while many other states in the region were negative. Camoin also analyzed the walk scores of various commercial districts in the state, with those communities with the highest walk scores having more opportunities for growth as a downtown district. Within the tourism subsector, transportation and lodging are the two largest and leading subsectors. Additionally, the team has received input through focus groups and conversations about the importance of outdoor recreation and recreational opportunities in the state.

- Lori Giuttari asked Daniela Fairchild for her reaction on the identification of the food subsectors. Daniela mentioned her surprise at the meat processing and other agricultural-focused subsectors as that is not something Rhode Island is typically known for. She said that this demonstrates a benefit of data-driven analysis, which is that it can challenge previous assumptions.
  - Chelsea Siefert mentioned that there is a large meat-processing facility based in Quonset which employs about 600 people.
- Christian Cowan mentioned that the defense subsector is very hard to quantify and includes many different areas and said he would like to see additional information on how different aspects of the defense supply chain were categorized.
- Lori Giuttari pointed out that the online marketplace for retail stores that her company developed had helped with the growth seen in retail establishments. She also noted that while small business and retail do go together, the terms should not be used interchangeably.
  - Oscar Mejias agreed that small business is the larger sector, while retail is a subsector within that.
  - Daniela Fairchild pointed out that Camoin has completed a separate small business analysis in addition to the targeted retail industry analysis. She also noted the nuance within data analysis with how businesses and industries are classified and how that must be considered so that the analysis is not double- or triple-counting.
- Elizabeth Lynn said that she wasn't sure if Airbnbs were counted under tourism, and asked to have a conversation about the intersection of housing and tourism within the data analysis. There is more work to be done to look at the dynamics of how these two

sectors interact. Additionally, it is important to look at the intersection of all of the different data within these analyses.

- Channavy Chhay said that analysis needs to focus on the vibrant diverse small stores like mom and pops that anchor communities. These businesses need to be counted within the data, even within the tourism sector in that these communities can draw people to the state.
  - Oscar Mejias agreed and noted that every larger industry has a huge support system of small businesses within the ecosystem (including those that in most cases are owned by minorities). He asked that these smaller businesses be incorporated into the larger retail and small business data analyses.
  - Lori Giuttari mentioned that those types of jobs are the ones that allow children and families to go to college and create a better foundation.
  - Lisa Ranglin asked whether the team is drilling down to the level of the smallest/micro-businesses (<5 employees) in the data analysis? She said that there needs to be a conversation about this component of small businesses and the drivers and factors of how they grow and scale as well as barriers that they face. These businesses are foundational to the communities being discussed today and it is a big missing piece if they are not covered in the data.
    - Rachel Selsky mentioned that much of the analysis of the smallest businesses was focused on conversations (through subcontractor & Access) about barriers but used data where it is available.
- Elizabeth Lynn mentioned that it would be helpful to know where things have been working or not working in these targeted clusters, since they have been focus of the state for a long time.

Lindsay Johnson recapped the stakeholder engagement process which included thirteen in-person focus groups, two public workshops (one in-person and one virtual), and about a dozen one-on-one interviews. She also mentioned that Commerce has been working to meet stakeholders where they are at, including a BSO meeting and more. The team has made sure to reach across stakeholder groups with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion and has been looking at past reports and public input processes to leverage earlier work. Findings from the stakeholder engagement process were organized into three different buckets: Strong Communities, Sustainable Growth, and Increased Prosperity. Within the three buckets, Camoin organized themes through the lens of implementation: Capacity Building, Partnership Building, and Policy Development.

- Carol Malysz asked if there was a way to see the results of the focus groups (especially the bioscience one) or if they would be incorporated into the report.
  - Ms. Selsky answered that the team is not sharing the specifics of any focus groups, but that the feedback and themes will be incorporated into the final report.

Daniela Fairchild asked the committee to consider whether these buckets of strategies seem to be the right ones to continue the analysis.

- Rilwan Feyisitan Jr. commented that it is hard to know without being able to see the individual themes and background data.
  - Ms. Selsky said that all the themes with additional details will be sent to the Council so that they can respond and react to the proposal. Ms. Johnson added further details about what would be sent to the Council.

Lindsay Johnson kicked off the discussion of themes with the Strong Communities bucket, which covers the broadest and most diverse group of themes. She highlighted a number of themes heard from focus groups, including the capacity needs throughout different levels of government and community organizations, a multidisciplinary economic development approach, and policy needs to mitigate of the fear of losing state benefits for Rhode Islanders.

- Roberta Groch commented that capacity building needs to be broader to include small businesses – more support for small businesses is needed so that they can build enough capacity to break into new supply chains or industries.
  - Lisa Ranglin agreed and said that capacity building needs to be a much deeper category. The report needs to think holistically about these items and that the Council needs additional time to digest the materials and formulate thoughts.

Daniela Fairchild added that she wants to speak more in depth with individual committee members about the reach of the stakeholder engagement and their thoughts on these priorities.

- Larry Warner commented that nonprofits should be a focus of the long-term economic development strategy, given that many of the representatives on the council are from nonprofits. He asked whether this thought was heard through the focus groups.
  - Ms. Fairchild agreed and said to make sure that nonprofits are captured in the data analysis – Ms. Selsky answered she was pretty sure that they are currently included.

Lindsay Johnson moved on to the Sustainable Growth category, highlighting industry and technology helping to advance sustainability, environmental sustainability, and investments in infrastructure and access. She pointed out that these are not specific policy recommendations, but rather themes that were heard throughout the stakeholder engagement process. She ended with increased prosperity, highlighting resource awareness for businesses, succession planning, translation of research into commercial ventures, more coordinated approach in sector development, and other small business themes in policy development.

- Rachel Selsky said that following this meeting, Council members will get a form to help prioritize and provide feedback on which themes are most important or may be missing.
  - Oscar Mejias commented that he feels the work so far is missing commitment and enforcement mechanisms. The Council wants to make sure that we get beyond words that sound good and get to actual action with mechanisms to make these things happen. There is a need to get more than policy to do something serious – need to implement those mechanisms and enforce commitments.
    - Daniela Fairchild agreed that we have to focus on the ways to get to desired end points, not just the desired end points themselves. She said

that a common question that the team asked was about how focus groups would measure success from the plan.

- Roberta Groch added that the state has to submit an annual report to EDA on progress on the items that we put in the CEDS.

Rachel Selsky said that Council members have until May 26th to submit feedback on the proposed priorities and themes. The next meeting will be on June 21st starting at 8:45am and will focus more on specific proposed strategies.

Daniela Fairchild added that the CEDS will be submitted for public comment later in June, and that will be an opportunity for additional feedback on the plan. She also said that she would follow up with further communication for the Council regarding participation in the focus groups so far as well as how to have further conversations about feedback on themes and strategies.

- Elizabeth Lynn asked for clarification about the role of the Council – whether the group is designed to provide conversation and feedback, or to come together with consensus and alignment around the plan? She mentioned that the group is not currently set up ideally if the goal is the latter given that it requires a lot more dialogue within the Council, but that there is a lot of commitment at the table.
  - Daniela Fairchild mentioned that the setup of the Council requires balance and is complicated by state administrative rules. The team is also on a really aggressive timeline due to both EDA's expectations and state statute. The team is looking not for consensus on every individual piece, but rather on the whole, given that there needs to be balance and commitment from partners.
- Oscar Mejias asked about ongoing commitments from the Council with regard to the annual report.
  - Daniela Fairchild responded that it depends on the role of the people on the council, but that the team wants to get folks together regularly (required to be annual from EDA).
- Andrew Cortes said that he was still hung up on targeted industry clusters. For instance, registered apprenticeships have a role to play across solutions, but especially through the construction industries (which have strong job potential) and don't see construction in the targeted industry analysis. There is big growth in the construction industry, should it be in the targeted industry list?
  - Daniela Fairchild responded that this is a good question and that she wants the process to be driven by the Council and wants strong input from the council on whether the proposed approach from this meeting is the right one.

Daniela Fairchild thanked the Council for their commitment and for leaning in.

Meeting adjourned at 10:05am.

RHODE ISLAND  
Executive Office of Commerce

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING COUNCIL**  
**PUBLIC NOTICE OF MEETING**

A meeting of the Economic Development Planning Council will be held on May 17, 2023 beginning at 8:30 a.m. at the Rhode Island Department of Administration, 1 Capitol Hill, Room 2A, Providence, RI 02908. The meeting will be held for the following purposes:

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks
2. Approval of Meeting Minutes
3. Recap of Findings from Data Analysis and Stakeholder Engagement
4. Discussion of Proposed Strategic Priorities
5. Preview of Upcoming Work and Milestones
6. Adjourn

This location is accessible to the handicapped. Those requiring interpreter services for the hearing impaired must notify the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation at (401) 278-9100 forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the meeting. Also, for the hearing impaired, assisted listening devices are available onsite, without notice, at this location.

This notice shall be posted at the Office of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, the Executive Office of Commerce, the State House, and by electronic filing with the Secretary of State's Office.

Posted on May 12, 2023

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