

Portsmouth Town Council

For Discussion: 2019 Rhode Island General Assembly Legislative Priorities in the order they were voted on not by priority.

1) **Improve Safety on State Roads**

Clearly, there are safety problems on state-owned East and West Main Roads. Although Portsmouth staff and elected officials have tried to deal with countless accidents by putting items on the State Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) priority list and otherwise communicating with the state DOT and Traffic Commission, safety issues are often scheduled to occur in the distant future. We urge state legislators to help us to advocate more strongly that current TIP priorities, including the East Main Road, road diet test program and light at Oakland Farms, be scheduled to occur sooner than currently scheduled.

2) **Fix the broken legislative process**

Our broken legislative process has allowed our residents to be harmed. See, e.g., the [2017 month-long standoff](#) delaying budget. We urge our state legislators to advocate for changes to fix problems such as rushed and last-minute legislation review and passage, failure of bills with majority support to leave committees for floor votes, and other procedural problems identified by the Democratic Reform Caucus.

3) **Amend the general laws to clarify the tax appeal procedures**

Legislation should be introduced to clarify that real estate property taxpayers are not entitled to appeal the valuation of their property each year but may only challenge the value in the year of the last update or revaluation, as indicated in the 2001 amendments to § 44-5-15 and § 44-5-26. See attached resolution.

4) **Seek infrastructure funding that can help local businesses**

We ask our legislators advocate for the state to provide funding to help maintain Stringham and Burma Roads. The marine trades have been identified by the Governor and countless elected officials as a key economic sector deserving support and these roads are vital to the ability of such businesses to survive in Portsmouth.

Although RI Commerce Corp. seems to prefer awarding large corporations tax breaks and other incentives with relatively no obligations to the state, these handouts have not been justified by benefits to Rhode Island's economy. See <http://www.rifuture.org/failed-economic-policies/> Instead, the state should invest in public infrastructure and move towards a program like MassWorks. See <http://www.providencejournal.com/opinion/20161011/sam-bell-mass-has-better-plan-than-ri>. While MassWorks is not perfect, it is a model whose better qualities RI should consider adopting and could definitely benefit Portsmouth.

5) Support improvements to State roads and encourage implementation of "Complete and Green Street" principles, including:

- Safety measures: stop lights, turning lanes, sidewalks, bike lanes, etc.
- Assess and implement safety measures for East Main and west Main Road
- Burma Road situation – what can RIDOT do?

6) Support initiatives that improve alternative transportation on Aquidneck Island, specifically projects related to the State's TIP and aim at improving bike safety in Portsmouth.

(Mill/Stringham, Union/Sandy Point, etc.)

7) **Protect our citizens' health and welfare**

a) **Do not cut Medicaid funding.**

Currently in RI, federal Medicaid covers about 1 out of 4 children and 3 out of 5 nursing home residents. <https://www.kff.org/interactive/medicaid-state-fact-sheets/> Federal cuts of Medicaid severely threaten these vulnerable populations, as well as low income and disabled people. RI legislators must not vote to further cut Medicaid funding.

b) **Support single payer improved "Medicare for all" health insurance**

We urge our state legislators to support federal and state legislation creating a single payer improved "Medicare-for-all" type health insurance program. Under this program, Rhode Islanders would pay less for more comprehensive coverage by eliminating the inefficiencies created by the current system of multiple health insurance providers. Rhode Island's economy would be significantly improved as current burdens on employers and employees are reduced and government entities are relieved of Other Post Employment Benefit (OPEB) debts (largely due to health insurance costs). Every industrialized nation in the world, except the United States, offers guaranteed universal health insurance under a "single payer" type system and enjoys better health outcomes for about one-half the cost. In 1962, Canada's successful single payer program began in the province of Saskatchewan (with approximately the same population as Rhode Island) and became a national program within ten years. For more information, see: www.pnhp.org.

8) **Help close RI budget deficits by reversing past failed "trickle down" tax cuts to the wealthy**

Recognizing that the enormous state budget deficit will continue the state's past practice of severely cutting the amount of tax money returned to municipalities and our schools, we ask our legislators to reverse failed "trickle down" policy tax cuts to the wealthy, e.g., the 2006 50% tax cut for people who earned over \$336,550 annually. See <http://www.rifuture.org/ris-tax-cuts-for-the-rich-were-2nd-biggest-of-decade/> We are not arguing that no cuts are necessary or proper in the state or town budget. We are simply asking that this failed policy be reversed.

While it was argued that these cuts would improve the RI economy in some "trickle down" fashion, there was no evidence of that. In fact, states who have tried sweeping tax cuts on the

wealthy have suffered catastrophic economic problems (e.g., Kansas).

<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-10-19/trump-models-u-s-economy-on-kansas-that-s-a-mistake>. It is tax cuts to low/middle income residents that would truly spur the economy because they will quickly spend and drive up demand for goods and services. See <http://www.forbes.com/sites/taxanalysts/2015/04/24/tax-cuts-for-the-rich-dont-create-many-jobs-but-what-about-tax-hikes/#7d168f874ed5>

Although there is anecdotal “evidence” that some people leave RI because taxes are lower elsewhere, other factors likely have far more influence on where people choose to move (e.g., weather, house prices, job opportunities, family, quality of life, etc.). See <http://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/8-4-11sfp.pdf> Moreover, in those states without income tax, higher costs are imposed on their residents in other ways (e.g., sales taxes) and research shows such states are not enjoying promised economic growth. See <http://www.bankrate.com/finance/taxes/state-with-no-income-tax-better-or-worse-1.aspx>

While some tout our low unemployment rate and occasional stock market gains, these are clearly outweighed by stagnant wages and vanishing job benefits. The typical American worker now earns around [\\$44,500 a year](#), not much more than what the typical worker earned in 40 years ago, adjusted for inflation. While the US economy continues to grow, most of the gains have been going to a relatively few, and our state must not contribute to this problem.

9) Support initiatives that encourage and fund food composting efforts - expanding work happening in Newport/Middletown and possibly piloting municipal level food scrap composting in Portsmouth, including residential, commercial, and school food waste.

10) Increase efforts and funding to support projects that address the impacts of sea level rise on coastal communities and increase resilience of municipal infrastructure in the face of climate change and work with our Federal Legislation to secure proper funding for infrastructure projects.

11) Work on economic development programs to help integrate Portsmouth into Aquidneck Island tourism programs. (i.e. Waterfront redevelopment - West Side master plan, including dealing with the Navy property? Bike paths and other recreational infrastructure?)

12) Work with DEM to understand results of State's SCORP survey and how recreational deficiencies should be addressed in Portsmouth.

13) No matter what one’s opinion may be on the advisability of legal recreational cannabis, it is foreseeable that it will be legal in Rhode Island at some point as our neighboring states adopt such laws. It is also foreseeable that a legal cannabis selling facility may be situated in Portsmouth, such as the now-existing medical cannabis facility Greenleaf Compassion

Center. Any legal recreational cannabis sales business operating in a given municipality may have a financial impact on that municipality in the form of increased traffic, policing, and so on. In light of these foreseeable impacts, any recreational cannabis legalization structure should include a taxation element dedicated to the local host municipalities. By way of example, RI law now has a 1% local hotel tax, the revenue of which goes to the local municipalities where the tax is assessed. Portsmouth requests that our state legislators support such a local tax in any recreational cannabis legislation.

14) School Aid Formula

The Town wants the State Legislature lives up to its promise as expressed in RI General Law §44-45 and also to reinstate State Aid to individual Cities and Towns.