

Town of Portsmouth  
Town Council & Staff Recommendations  
2021 Legislative Priorities

## Town Council Recommendations

***Recommended by Vice President Linda Ujifusa & Councilor J. Mark Ryan:***

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***1) Support legislation making Portsmouth more resilient***

Climate change is an existential threat. We urge legislators to support legislation to establish a permanent fund to help Rhode Island adapt to the impacts of climate change. Cities and towns throughout the state need help dealing with problems like sea level rise, coastal erosion, increased storm intensity and flooding and storm surge. The Ocean State Climate Adaptation and Resilience Fund (or “OSCAR”) would be funded through a new five-cents-per-barrel fee on petroleum imported into the state by ship. OSCAR would provide direct grants to cities and towns to adapt infrastructure on public lands and enhance natural systems and habitats to improve resilience. See, e.g., [here](#).

***2) Support funding RI Municipal Infrastructure grants***

The General Assembly passed a bill (H-7102 / S-2239) creating the framework for a RI Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program, but without funding in the FY19 State Budget to implement it. The program is modeled after the very successful MassWorks Program in Massachusetts that has stimulated significant private investment in the revitalization of urban and town centers across the Commonwealth. Portsmouth needs this kind of help funding our infrastructure needs and we urge our legislators to advocate for annual funding, as recommended by GrowSmart RI and RIIB.

***3) Help shift the tax burden off Portsmouth homeowners by reversing past failed “trickle down” tax cuts***

In 2006, the RI General Assembly passed legislation to cut taxes for the wealthiest Rhode Islanders, and basically helped only the wealthiest Rhode Islanders. See <http://www.rifuture.org/ris-tax-cuts-for-the-rich-were-2nd-biggest-of-decade/>

While it was argued that these cuts would improve the RI economy in some “trickle down” fashion, there is no evidence of that nor is there evidence of “millionaire flight.”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/12/23/tax-cuts-rich-trickle-down/> and

<https://itep.org/no-need-for-the-mythbusters-the-millionaire-tax-flight-myth-is-busted-again/>

All that has happened is that the tax burden has shifted to the middle class. See

<https://upriseri.com/2018-10-17-who-pays/> and <https://itep.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/whopays-ITEP-2018.pdf>

We urge our legislators to work to reverse the 2006 tax cut legislation and raise taxes on the wealthiest Rhode Islanders so they can begin to pay their fair share.

***4) Protect our citizens’ health and welfare***

- a) **Audit the private insurance companies running RI’s Medicaid program**

Medicaid covers approximately 1 in 4 Rhode Islanders, including 1 in 5 adults, 3 in 8 children, 3 in 5 nursing home residents, 3 in 5 individuals with disabilities, and 1 in 5 Medicare beneficiaries. <http://files.kff.org/attachment/fact-sheet-medicaid-state-ri>. 91% of all RI Medicaid recipients are in a "managed care program," meaning private insurance companies are paid about \$1.7 billion/year to "manage" their care. Despite overcharging RI \$50 million in 2015, and despite the state Auditor General for the past several years citing inadequate state MCO oversight, RI continues not to audit or properly monitor MCOs. Connecticut did an audit in 2009 and found their MCOs were overcharging them \$50 million/year, tossed MCOs out in 2012, and restarted its state-run Medicaid fee-for-service program - saving hundreds of millions of dollars, achieving the lowest Medicaid cost increases in the country, and improving access to care. Please support MCO audit and Medicaid de-privatization bills. See research [here](#).

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

Rhode Island's economy would be significantly improved as current burdens on employers and employees are reduced and government entities (such as the Town of Portsmouth) are relieved of Other Post Employment Benefit (OPEB) debts mainly 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. Even the most conservative analyses have found that Medicare for All would cost less than the current inefficient multi-payer health insurance system. See, e.g., <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/56811>. For more information, see: <https://pnhp.org/>

5) **Amend the general laws to clarify the tax appeal procedures** - Legislation should be re-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 RI General Laws § 44- 5-15 and § 44-5-26. In Spring 2018, the Rhode Island Supreme Court issued a 3-2 ruling that opened the door to plaintiffs contesting their values more frequently than every three years. The decision could open the door to numerous costly appeals and must be clarified.

**Recommended by Councilor Keith Hamilton:**

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- 1) **Recreational Marijuana** – It is no secret that RI will be heading down the path of legalizing recreational marijuana to attempt to close budget holes. Portsmouth currently has one of the three medical marijuana facilities in RI and they are sure to change to full service once recreational is approved. Portsmouth and other host communities need help in anticipated expenses from policing activities related to legalization of recreational marijuana. Each hosting community should receive a tax associated from each sale to help offset future expenses. The Massachusetts Statute provides 3% payments to communities plus the ability to apply a local sales tax not to exceed 3%. The Portsmouth Town Council would like to request these fees be the minimum included into any bill. We would also like to limit the number of facilities by population and suggest that a maximum of one (1) facility per 50,000 residents per host communities.
- 2) **Paiva-Weed Tax Cap** – The past year was a difficult year for all of our citizens. The Portsmouth Town Council struggled with keeping taxes as low as we could while still providing high performing schools and services. The general complaint from citizen was the Town should not have raised taxes at all but we

raised them and kept in compliance with the 4% limit as prescribed by the Paiva-Weed Tax Cap Law. The Portsmouth Water & Fire District, however, installed a tax increase that was over 9% this year. The Portsmouth Town Council would like to request that the RIGL §44-5-2 be amended to include all entities that have the power to levy property tax, including Water & Fire Districts.

- 3) ***Special March Election*** – The State and not the Towns should pay for the costs of the special March election given the delay was caused by the GA’s failure to act earlier.

## Staff Recommendations

### ***Recommended by Town Planner Gary Crosby:***

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- 1) Promote State takeover of Defense Highway / Stringham Road from the Navy.
- 2) Update the Low / Moderate Income Housing Act (R.I.G.L. §45-53) to remove impediments toward compliance by municipalities and those wanting to develop LMI housing.

### ***Recommended by Fire Chief Paul Ford:***

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- 1) Funding assistance for COVID-19 vaccine distribution.
- 2) Advocacy for additional federal funding for “Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG)” and “Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER)” grant.

### ***Recommended by HR Director Lisa Puglia:***

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- 1) Pay equity/minimum wage to remain competitive with Massachusetts
- 2) Expand plastic ban from bags to other consumer products

### ***Recommended by Business Development Director Rich Talipsky:***

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- 1) High Speed Internet improvement and accessibility
- 2) Advocacy for State Office on Electronic Connectivity, eCommerce and Cybersecurity