Aquidneck Island: An Exercise in Micro-Regionalism

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AQUIDNECK ISLAND: AN EXERCISE IN MICRO-REGIONALISM

BY

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UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
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ABSTRACT

Aquidneck Island is an island with a unique set of circumstances contributing to its growth. At present it is poised on the brink of undertaking major development projects in the industrial, commercial, and residential sectors without any cohesive island-wide body coordinating the various activities. This paper briefly describes the evolution of the island historically, geologically, and politically. It explores the process by which a micro-regional approach could take towards the common problems now facing the three island communities.

This paper assumes the merits of planning. It concerns itself more with the political problems of developing and marketing a planning movement at the micro-regional level (island-wide). The hypothesis that I will attempt to prove is that Aquidneck Island could become an example in good land use and resource planning through the cooperation of the three island communities. The island by, taking unilateral action, could become an example for the rest of the state. Several different perspectives are offered each of which are critical to the future development of the island. Possible planning alternatives are briefly sketched. Apart from the more conventional research works available, I conducted a series of interviews with the area's political leaders and drew heavily on my own experiences. Planning in terms of political goals, the micro regional approach, as opposed to political reality are differentiated.
be profitable enough to mine. Secretary Berglund of the Department of Agriculture has focused increasing attention to the plight of the small farmer of which New England still has an abundance. The oceans and estuaries are the regions most visible natural resource. Offshore oil and gas has already been mentioned. The enactment of the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 has led to an increased awareness of the importance of the commercial fishing industry. Marine recreation has become an important source of income. The Northeast and New England in particular is a region which grew very rapidly at first, peaked in the late nineteenth century and slid downhill from there. The very same "Yankee" ingenuity that spurred the growth in the first place coupled with wave after wave of immigrants is showing itself again in the new growth that is now occurring. Adversity is again forcing inventiveness.

SECTION II RHODE ISLAND BACKGROUND

The small state of Rhode Island is both a mirror and a magnifying glass for many of New England's problems and potentialities. The aging manufacturing plants constructed in the last century are in the process of being recycled. Rhode Island is at the heart of the New England market for which the Providence area is a key wholesale distribution center. Warehousing facilities, offices and laboratories are recycling the old plants.
The Port of Providence is a major distribution center for petroleum products, scrap iron and automobiles in southern New England. Several key statistics are that the area within 75 miles of Providence includes 66% of New England's total population, 75% of its plastic products manufacturers, 73% of its chemical products manufacturers, 69% of its communications equipment manufacturers and 66% of its electrical machinery manufacturers. The population within 75 miles is greater than that of either Chicago or the Los Angeles-Long Beach Metropolitan areas. The state itself measures only 48 miles from north to south and 37 miles from east to west. A high density of population and per capita income has given it the second highest income per square mile in the nation. The population estimate for the state in 1978 was 935,000 which was a slight decline from the 1970 census due to the phasing out of the bulk of Navy operations and personnel in the first half of the decade. As in most New England states education plays a large role in Rhode Island. The state spends over 50% of their property tax revenue on education. Each year three public and eight private colleges graduate over 6,000 students. Taxes are raised in the standard manner – gasoline tax, sales tax, piggy back state income tax, etc. From a transportation point of view the state is very well integrated. With the added incentive of gasoline shortages and price increases the state is rapidly expanding its rapid transit network. Good highways, bridges and the general upgrading of the railroad beds have
made the state readily accessible to both intra and inter-state travel.

Rhode Island has many of the same problems that face other New England states. The general business climate has been colored somewhat by the state's proximity to Massachusetts and thus suffers sometimes unfairly from the perception of many of being uncooperative to business. The state's stand on unemployment compensation for striking workers makes Rhode Island stand out as a beacon for the union shop. Two other significant problems have also plagued the state. The first is the general pollution of Narragansett Bay, the bulk of which comes from an overloaded Providence sewer system. The second problem is behind the state for the most part now and that was the dramatic dismantling of the Navy presence in the area.

Apart from the usual problems the state has many advantages. I would like to mention what I consider to be the most important. When the Navy left, a great deal of industrial developed land was left behind. It is now in the process of being excessed and recycled into state and private lands. The potential, for instance, of the former Quonset Point Naval Air Station is enormous. It has been estimated that as oil and gas exploration operations begin on the George's Banks that up to 6,000 jobs will be created at that facility alone. The City of Providence is at the beginning of a major face lift. The downtown areas are having a renaissance and the major corporate entities have combined with municipal officials to bring a new
vibrance to the city. The state transportation network is better than adequate. Currently the railroad beds are being upgraded in order to provide faster rail service to New York City. Along the same lines the railroad tracks are being moved in Providence for easier access and visual aesthetics. At the present time the state has a major drawing card in its university, particularly in the marine related areas. There is potential for a major addition to the present program through the Sea Grant Act by the possibility of establishing a doctoral program in commercial fisheries as well as building a flume for testing purposes.\(^3\) Obviously the major advantage and drawing card that Rhode Island has is in the omnipresence of Narragansett Bay. The Bay was, is, and will be the focus for development for as long as man needs access to the sea. It has long been recognized as one of the finest natural harbours on the eastern seaboard. In turn, the position of Aquidneck Island at the mouth of Narragansett Bay has also been recognized for its commercial, military and aesthetic values.

SECTION III   GEOLOGY OF AQUIDNECK ISLAND

Geographically, Aquidneck Island is located in Narragansett Bay 22 miles southeast of Providence, Rhode Island and 210 miles northeast of New York City. It is the largest island in the Bay being 49.9 square miles in size. It has long been known for its mild climate with mean temperatures in January
and July of 28.4 and 70.1 degrees Fahrenheit respectively. It is presently serviced by three vehicular bridges and one railroad bridge for freight only. Air and bus service is readily available. The approximate population at this writing is 70,000. There are three communities, Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport running from north to south geographically and in density. Boundary lines between them are arbitrary and follow no natural borders. Aquidneck Island sits in what is geologically known as the Narragansett Basin. The Narragansett Basin is within the Appalachian Mountain System which extends from Alabama northward through New England and the Canadian Maritime Provinces and then out to sea. It is a complete record of the Alleghenian Orogeny. It was formed on the Avalonian Platform, a distinctive suite of Upper-Precambrian to Lower Paleozoic rocks. All the New England Carboniferous Basins were once part of a micro-continent in the proto-Atlantic Ocean. Parts of Rhode Island and particularly Aquidneck Island dramatically show the geological evolution of this system better than other areas. The Narragansett Basin is a structural depression and topographical lowland which contains several types of rock formations: 1) Pondville 2) Wamsutta 3) Rhode Island 4) Dighton Conglomerate and 5) the Purgatory Conglomerate. There are four basic rock formations in the area as well: 1) the Blackstone Series of metamorphic rocks 2) older granite rocks of considerable variety and various ages 3) Pennsylvanian (Coal Age) sedimentary rocks and 4) younger granite rocks of which we are
only concerned with the first three on Aquidneck Island. By far and away the oldest rocks are the Blackstone Series which are prevalent in the Newport Neck area at the southeast tip of the island. These rocks include volcanic and volcaniclastic rocks, porphyrite granite, mafic dikes and clastic sediments which include maroon, green and gray sandstone, slates and siltstones. They have had enormous pressures put on them over time and the resulting folds have metamorphosed them into what we see today. On Aquidneck Island at least three generations of folds, two generations of thrust faults and one generation of kink banding and normal faulting have been identified. The second group of older granite rocks is represented by an area near Lands End in Newport. Much work has been done documenting the third group of Pennsylvanian sediment and rocks. This group covers most of the island, particularly Middletown and Portsmouth. The Middle to Late Pennsylvanian rocks are clastic sediments consisting of sandstone, conglomerate, siltstone, shale and coal. Most of these sediments were deposited in a fluvial environment. These rocks rest unconformably upon a basement of 600 million year old rocks cutting older volcanic, volcaniclastic and plutonic rocks. The Pennsylvanian or coal-bearing strata are particularly important in Portsmouth where coal was mined intermittently from 1808 to 1959. Over two million tons of coal was mined over the nineteenth century. When the British ran out of trees and houses to burn during their occupation of Newport (1776-1779), coal was used as a
The coaling station established at Melville was a direct result of the presence of the coal mines. The most prominent mines were the British Lustre Pits in 1841 and the Case Mine whose products were used for raising steam, blacksmith forges, and domestic heating and cooking. This coal is reasonably high in ash content and low in sulphur putting out 13,000 to 14,000 BTUs. As we can see the Narragansett Basin was the result of the usual building up of a mountain system and its erosion over time to the gentle topographical slopes that we have become familiar with. The last great geologic event occurring in the area was the Great Ice Age. About 10,000 to 12,000 years ago a huge glacier drifted down from Canada covering all of New England as well as much of the northern part of the Mississippi Valley. The glacier did not move the bedrock as much as it shoved around the preglacial soil. At about the same time the whole Narragansett Basin sank leaving only the hills which became islands. As the glacier moved along it worked the soil up on the ice. The bedrock underneath became somewhat grooved and scratched from the cutting movement of the ice. In some cases bedrock was actually cut away, particularly on southerly slopes. As the glacier progressed, stopped and then receded, deposits of all the preglacial soil and cut away bedrock were left. This glacier probably did not recede all at once. It may have stopped and then gone forward again before it finally began a final melting process. Block Island was more than likely formed this way. Along with the
ice there were many glacial rivers and streams which carried much soil and small rocks. When the ice melts and deposits its load directly on bedrock, the resulting cover is called glacial till. Much of Rhode Island has at least several feet of glacial till. The material carried away by the melting streams is glacial outwash. Outwash is also fairly widespread in the state. However, there are places in the Narragansett Basin which, due to the eroding action of the sea or other natural forces, have not been covered. These stark outcroppings of bedrock are particularly significant on Aquidneck Island. These outcroppings are the prominent Blackstone Series and older granite rocks of Newport Neck and Lands End.

The geomorphological effects of the evolution of the Narragansett Basin have made Aquidneck Island very interesting. Each of the three towns developed in such a manner as to take advantage of the particular topography of the area. As a result of its being at the northern end of the island and therefore further away from the direct pounding forces of the Atlantic, Portsmouth has very good soil conditions. Because of the island's proximity to the sea and yet its comparative safety from its more violent eroding effects, agricultural conditions have always been known as excellent. Both Portsmouth and Middletown exemplified this fact. Portsmouth, as mentioned earlier, was the first area of the island settled. The agrarian tone was set at that time and it has only been in the last twenty years, that significant changes have been made in the town's
demographic statistics. In 1970 the population was 12,521 and it has grown very rapidly since then. Much of the farm-land is being subdivided and sold into single family home lots. An industrial park is in the process of being developed. The release of a portion of the former Navy lands at Melville have resulted in the development of the Bend Boat Basin. Another marina is being planned at Commonfence Point as well. The proximity of the town to Bristol over the Mt. Hope Bridge and Fall River over the Tiverton Bridge have put increased pressure on developing the agricultural land. Coal is being considered again as an alternative fuel to oil. This is very important considering the recent announcement of the conversion of the electric utility at Brayton Point, Mass. from oil to coal. If environmental standards are relaxed even further, the Portsmouth coal mines may well find themselves back in production. Over 45% of electricity is produced by coal nationally and only 7% in New England. Before coal can be mined again the legal, economic, environmental and societal effects will have to be studied carefully. The anthracite found in this area is typical of the coal utilized in the past by utilities, space heating, and iron and steel manufacturers. Total anthracite tonnage has dropped to 6 million tons a year and has traditionally emanated from small operations such as those in Portsmouth. The legal problems consist of a land acquisition problem and subsurface mineral rights. There are several landowners in the vicinity of the old mines who are
not terribly excited by the prospect of adjacent working coal mines. The economic problems are also substantial but could be overcome. Today the price of coal is not high enough to warrant mining, but with the price of oil going higher every day coal prices will rise particularly as the United States government has now come down four square on the side of the industry. The old railroad bridge over the Sakonnet River is not geared for coal today and trucking or barring the material may be necessary. Initially there would be a lack of a local experienced labor force. Road transport is hardly adequate as well. Environmentally the three problem areas are air pollution (which with proper investment in clear air smokestack devices can be remedied), water pollution and land use impacts. The major problem would be in the area of water pollution with mine drainage and refuse pile run off. The social problems would be legion. Population patterns, housing, taxes, public services and income distribution would all be severely affected. As we can see the development of coal would have major impacts not just on Portsmouth but on the whole island. The township also includes the islands of Prudence, Patience, Hope, Despair, Dyer and Hog on the west and Gould Island in the Sakonnet River.

Middletown has many of the same geomorphological characteristics of Portsmouth with some outstanding geological formations. For instance Hanging Rock is a classic example of a glacier
breaking off a large section of bedrock on the southern slope. Purgatory Chasm is an area made up of several conglomerate beds with elongated pebbles which have been compressed into folds. Weathering and marine erosion have caused a crack about 10 feet wide, 120 feet long and 50 feet deep. Many years ago there was a working quarry off of Paradise Road. Sachuest Point at one time was an island and ocean currents have since carried the sand in such a manner so as to connect it to the main island. Middletown's population in 1970 was 29,621 but almost one half of the population left with the withdrawal of the Navy in 1973. The Navy had built various installations over a long period culminating with Pier 1 and Pier 2 with the surrounding breakwater. Huge amounts of housing and operational facilities were constructed as well. Much of this land has been declared as excess and is now waiting for proper disposition by the General Services Administration. Farms are rapidly disappearing to the development of single family homes. There are several large wholesale nurseries located in the town. Again due to the glacial till and mild climate nurserymen find the soil extremely conducive to their intensive use requirement. There are several reservoirs within the town that are used by the Newport Water Works. Newport's sewerage facility also services Middletown. Much of the town's identity has been lost to the Navy and to Newport. Both Portsmouth and Middletown are struggling with trying to develop land use plans and more effective zoning ordinances.
The city of Newport is still the focus of Aquidneck Island both geomorphologically and socially. The population in 1970 was 34,562 and this figure also dropped substantially when the fleet pulled out; but nowhere near as drastically as Middletown. The economic effects of the withdrawal were enormous with unemployment skyrocketing to over 15%. By looking at a map one can see that the metamorphic outcroppings on Newport Neck form in effect a groin for Aquidneck Island. They are not easily susceptible to erosion and oceanic action. Meteorological conditions have contributed mightily to the soil conditions on the rest of the island which attracted the first pilgrim settlers. It must be remembered that Newport was first discovered because of its excellent location which could not exist without the Blackstone Series. Newport consists of four physically different areas 1) the harbour front, 2) the town, 3) Bellevue Avenue and the Cliff Walk, 4) and Newport Neck (Ocean Drive). The harbour has probably changed more in the last three hundred years than in the previous three thousand. When the city was first settled Long Wharf was literally that, a man-made long wharf sticking out into the harbour with shallow water between it and what is now the Point section on the north. Over time the wharf became part of the land and the small shallow bay became filled in as the railroad was brought in. Today one would be hard put to say that the landfill had not always been there. The causeway out to Goat Island was only built recently as was the Newport Bridge. The town
surrounding the harbour front was built on a hill and has grown steadily. It is a mixture of colonial, victorian and modern dwellings with many varieties of trees interspersing them. The town grew from the harbour up the hill and out. The Bellevue Avenue and Cliff Walk areas were once prime farmland. At various points on the Cliff Walk due to erosion by the sea, one can see almost all the geological history in the various exposed strata. Many of the 300 species of megaflora have been found fossilized along the Cliff Walk. The Newport Neck area is a mass of bedrock consisting of irregular and variable fine-grained schist and shale, quartzite, conglomerate, and weakly metamorphised volcanic rock. The glacial till is present over some areas. Much of the original bedrock has been covered through man-made efforts such as that of Arthur Curtis James late in the nineteenth century on Telegraph Hill. Prior to the purchasing of his estate the land consisted of open bedrock outcroppings. Under the direction of Frederick Law Olmstead, James blasted, filled, and covered acres and acres of land to the point where today much of the area is covered with 60 and 70 feet of exotic hardwoods and softwoods. One area where much of the bluestone for the estate had been quarried was developed as a miniature Swiss village. The shoreline is extremely irregular due to sea erosion along weak zones in the bedrock. Much of the glacial drift and pieces of rock eroded from the bedrock have been deposited in small beaches around the Neck.
The major assumption that I am making in this paper is that land use and resource planning is a necessity and in fact has been mandated by increasing national environmental concerns. The hypothesis that I will attempt to prove is that Aquidneck Island could become an example in good land use and resource planning through the cooperation of the three island communities. The island, by taking unilateral action, could serve as an example for the rest of the state. Land use planning legislation has failed on a state-wide basis and perhaps now Aquidneck Island could serve as a role model. The enactment of local property tax incentives, local bottle legislation and zoning restrictions all within the scope of an island-wide plan could serve to stimulate the state to provide the same kind of protection, enhancement and logical uses for the mainland. A micro-regional plan is an attainable and reasonable goal for the betterment of Aquidneck Island.

By striving for this overall objective and through proper publicity an awareness of the island as a whole should develop. The three island communities should be able to define their individual attractions and plan according to how these attractions may complement each other rather than competing to the point of brutalizing their natural resources.
There are seven different perspectives that need to be outlined and understood before one can come to grips with the problem. The first perspective that requires illumination is that of agriculture. Presently there are very few farmers left on the island. Farmland in Middletown has been swallowed up by the demand for new housing and commercial developments. There are very few working farms left in this town. Portsmouth is experiencing many of the same problems in terms of a disappearing farm community as Middletown. Newport has no farms other than those run as hobbies. However, there is still substantial acreage left in Portsmouth and Middletown. A classic example representing the current land use conflicts is now occurring in the Maidford River area of Middletown where a sewer line has just been completed. As a result of the new sewer line, all of the abutting landowners face an increased property tax burden. Several developments are already being planned on what has been agricultural property. The only obstacle to these developments is that the Maidford River is in a flood plain zone and that some form of insurance will be necessary. The latest press reports indicate that the projects will continue. One of the suggestions offered by the City Council to help alleviate the financial burden of the new sewer line on the farmer was a deferral of the tax increase to the date when the property was sold. As farms tend to have the greatest amount of road frontage, the proposal did seem attractive. However, as a result of rising agricultural costs and
taxes, most of these farmers will receive a substantial premium for their property. We can see that the farmer is being squeezed out of his land. Enticements of large prices easily overcome the dubious priviledge of back-breaking work. As the pressure builds to extend water and sewer lines in Portsmouth and Middletown, agriculture will come under even more pressure.

The second perspective of the island is that of the tourist. The tourist has become an important element of island life particularly during the summer in Newport. In August, 1973 there were 5,864 "walk ins" at the Newport County Chamber of Commerce. In 1978 that figure had swollen to approximately 190,000 for the same month. The tourist has been a much maligned figure who none the less has provided the backbone of the local economy since the fleet withdrawal. Considering the number of visitors, the communities provide few services. There are no centrally located public facilities. Traffic patterns are ancient and attractions are difficult to locate. On any given morning the tourist is faced with a sea of broken bottles and litter. Parking is totally inadequate with the exception of major facilities such as the Jai Alai Fronton. The city of Newport is now billing itself as a point of destination as opposed to a stop-over due to the gas crisis. As a result during the high season there is a shortage of hotel rooms. On the plus side Newport is probably the best place today of studying a well preserved cross-section of architectural heritage. The beaches are crowded but excellent and there are a variety
newer ships were being decommissioned. The remaining commands are: Naval Education and Training Center, Naval War College, Naval Regional Medical Center, Naval Underwater Systems Research Center, Naval Legal Services Office, Naval Tel Communications Center and Destroyer Squadron 28.

Aquidneck Island from a commercial point of view is made up of many small businesses. Up until 1973 the Navy was the major source of livelihood for three communities either directly or indirectly. After 1973 there was a great desire to have something fill the vacuum left by the Navy. Tourism seemed to be the answer and Newport has had a great promotional success. Also in 1973 the Jai Alai Fronton was established in order to generate more revenue from this form of legalized gambling. Recently efforts have been made to open up the city of Newport to casino type gambling. Thus far the pro gambling forces have not been successful. Examples of major employers on the island today are Weyerhauser and Raytheon. A new addition is the Robert E. Derecktor Shipyard which slated to employ up to 800 by 1985. An industrial park has been successfully developed in Middletown and another is in a start up phase in Portsmouth. Due to the resort-like atmosphere of Newport and the proximity of the ocean to the rest of the island, the real estate market has been very active. High interest rates will slow this activity; but it is still somewhat better insulated than when the Navy pulled out in 1973. There appears to be a perception on the part of off-islanders that Aquidneck Island is a good
Newport in late 1979. On Aquidneck Island the primary environmental concerns are the solid waste disposal of garbage, the aging Providence sewer treatment plant and the seasonal "residue" from Fall River. All three of those issues affect or will affect the quality of life on the island and it is the environmentalist who has made the island aware of the potential problem.

SECTION V POLITICAL HISTORY

There are no natural boundaries separating the three towns on Aquidneck Island. The lines drawn on the maps are purely arbitrary. Politically, the City of Newport operates under a home rule charter. In the past Newport has operated under the "strong Mayor" form of government. Several years ago the City adopted a city manager form of government as it was felt that the Mayor's office, being highly politicized, was far too partisan to administer the City fairly. Today there is a City Council made up of seven members, three at large and one from each of the four wards, presided over by a Mayor who is elected by his peers. All terms are for two years and are not staggered. Technically elections in the city are non-partisan. All powers of the City and the determination of all matters of policy are vested in the council and administered by the City Manager who serves at the pleasure of the council. The Newport Charter grants to the City Manager
the authority to appoint and remove all officers and employees unless specifically prohibited in the Charter, to prepare and submit to the council the annual budget, and advise the council of the financial condition and future needs of the city. The general administration of the City's school system is somewhat autonomous. It is directed by a seven-member school committee who are all elected at large for four year terms. The School Committee is charged with providing an annual budget estimate. Then estimates are considered by the council as a total and not line by line. By state law the city is not allowed to appropriate any amount less than the amount appropriated the year previously. This creates some hardship as capital needs are required. The city is forced to go to the municipal bond market to raise these funds or be faced with an even larger increasing annual school budget. The City of Newport Water Department is a self-sustaining utility that services the towns of Middletown, Portsmouth and the United States Naval Base. It is under the control of the Rhode Island Public Utilities Administrator. Newport also has over 150 miles of sewer with a current capacity of over 12 million gallons daily with an average flow of 1.45 million gallons. The City is in the process of separating drains and sewers with substantial aid from state and federal government (90% funded). The Navy and Middletown use the sewer system and are billed on their pro rata use.10

Middletown is also governed by a seven member Town Council
and has an appointed Town Administrator. Local elections are held every two years on a partisan basis. In addition there is an elected five member School Committee and an appointed School Superintendent. These members are elected on a staggered basis. Middletown is also the home of much of the United States Naval Complex and many of the lands that are being declared excess by the General Services Administration.

Portsmouth is governed by a seven member partisan town council headed by a council chairman and an appointed administrator. Its school system operates in a similar fashion to Middletown.

SECTION VI HISTORICAL COOPERATION

The three communities have cooperated historically on several items. There are mutual aid agreements for police and fire aid including ambulance service (Jamestown as well). Middletown and Newport have the same type of agreement with the Navy. However, the actual departments are all very definitely separate and each supported by their own revenue sources. Newport piggy backs on to the state bid for salt and gasoline to take advantage of volume discounts. Newport buys its oil by itself. However the City Manager stated that Portsmouth and Middletown were welcome to piggy back onto Newport's oil bid. Newport appears to be more sophisticated in its
municipal purchasing by ordering goods in bulk (such as a year's supply of toilet paper) at considerable savings. Newport has its own computer and many will have enough excess computing power to allow other towns access to it. Several years ago there was a suggestion that Newport would handle all of Middletown's financial department at no increase in cost. Nothing came of it. There have been preliminary talks with Jamestown and Barrington for use of this computing power. 

Newport has more than 150 miles of sewer lines which service Middletown and the bay. The city also provides water to the whole island. Portsmouth and the Navy have their own meter and bill individually from it while Middletown residents are billed directly from Newport. Portsmouth retains its own legal counsel to assail any water increases. The municipal unions on the island do not act in concert as far as town to town goes. Their philosophy appears to be divide and conquer.

At the school department level there is some regional cooperation in the purchasing of school supplies. Portsmouth, Middletown, Tiverton and Little Compton have a group Special Education Program. There has been consideration of a regional high school from time to time. Newport is the island center for high school equivalency through the Aquidneck Island Adult Learning Center. The three island communities and Little Compton cooperate on oil purchases. There have been some efforts to get a regional bi-lingual program started. Two years ago Middletown and Portsmouth voted down an island-wide
adult education program.\textsuperscript{13}

The three communities have cooperated in the formation of the Aquidneck Island Development Corporation which has as its mission the attracting of new industry to the island. To date it has been successful in the development of the Middletown Industrial Park. Portsmouth is currently threatening to withhold its share of the funding. The three towns are also all members of the Newport County Chamber of Commerce.

SECTION VII POSSIBLE PLANNING ALTERNATIVES

Land use planning has been an idea that has been with us for a long time. Prior to the passage of the Coastal Zone Management Act in 1972, the Nixon Administration came very close to having a National Land Use Policy Act. The fact that the proposed legislation went as far as it did has focused attention on the need for sound land use. The United States has had a natural resource based economy since colonial days and it has become apparent that few of these resources are renewable. Most states have some form of zoning to regulate development and many states have taken the process one step further by analyzing their projected needs, directions and growth rates and have come up with policy in the form of legislation (Vermont Act 250). There has been a movement in Rhode Island for several years to enact such legislation. To date it has not met with much success.\textsuperscript{14} The State-Local
Land Management Bill appears to have support in the Rhode Island House of Representatives but cannot get out of committee in the State Senate although a series of hearings on the latest revision are in the process of being held in selected areas around the state by State Sen. Joseph Bevilaqua.\textsuperscript{15}\textsuperscript{*}

Even though the state is one of the most densely populated states in the nation, over 70\% of its land area is considered farm, meadow or timberland. These numbers are dropping rapidly as urban sprawl and the general onward crush of the population towards the sea have already changed the topography in rural locales. Programs such as readily accessible federal flood plain insurance have also served to spur development. Aquidneck Island is a classic example of a separate geologic entity that is perceived to be an ideal place to live and work. Development on the island has been steadily growing (with the exception of the Navy pullout) and has picked up pace in the last three years. This development is taking all forms - urban renewal and recycling of older buildings, condominiums, single family dwelling and commercial properties. Many aspects of the bill proposed by State Representative Mary Kilmarx would be particularly applicable to Aquidneck Island. Ideally in a micro-regional or island-wide plan many of these principles would be adopted.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{*} There does exist a Joint Committee on the Environment chaired by Rep. Mary Kilmarx of Barrington. It is made up of 6 Senators, 5 Representatives, and three members from the Executive Branch.
1. Provide sufficient space in appropriate locations for a range of uses and intensities of use appropriate to the character and needs of the island and the communities within it.

2. Relate the use of land to its physical characteristics and capabilities and to the availability of public facilities and services.

3. Promote the conservation of open space, natural resources, and significant natural features and prevent scattered development and wasteful land development practices.

4. Control air, water, and noise pollution, soil erosion, and sedimentations.

5. Preserve the cultural and historic character and visual quality of the island.

6. Facilitate the adequate and economic provision of transportation, water sewerage, solid waste disposal, schools, recreation, open space, and other public requirements.

7. Promote choice of housing opportunities for all economic and social groups.

8. Secure safety from fire, flood, and other changes from natural or man-made disaster.

Aquidneck Island would have to establish a planning board in order to prepare a community guide plan with active citizen participation that would include a land management plan. A method of enforcement of land management regulations and an administrative review which would encourage prompt resolution of disputes would also be necessary. Aquidneck Island would have to set uniform standards from which to work on such things as steep slopes, flood hazard areas, rocky soils, imperfectly drained and slowly permeable soils, coastal wetlands and physiographic features, agricultural land, and excessive
permeable soils. Areas of limited development potential, areas of major public investment and areas of major economic development potential will have to be identified. There has been a great deal of discussion of what exactly constitutes farmland. Middletown's June Gibbs believes that one acre of cleared land could be a farm lot and at the same time that could be considered excessive by other political leaders. Any land management ordinances should be consistent with the community guide plan using both specifications type criteria and performance standards. The regulations would have to cover such things as sub-divisions and land development projects, non-conforming development and the management of historical areas. Any island-wide regional land use plan would have to act in concert with some sort of standardization of the property tax as a revenue collecting method. The use of tax incentives (or disincentives) may be the only method available to ensure green belts or agricultural belts and the retention of low income housing in the face of a rising affluent island. A separate but related issue from a regional land use plan is a regional attempt at a "Bottle Bill." By virtue of being an island, local bottle legislation may well be easier to adopt, encourage and enforce. Results would be immediate as unsightly bottles and cans are the single greatest form of visual pollution on the island. As a great percentage of the local economy is derived from tourism, the incentives are obvious. Both a land use plan and a bottle bill
adopted unilaterally on a micro-regional level could serve as a role model for state government due to the relative isolation of the island. Monitoring would be simple.

Many of the problems the island has in terms of planning relate to or have been caused by Newport, which is logical as the island's largest urban area. Over the years many people have had a number of ideas as to how growth should take place. Frederick Law Olmstead's father in a report to the Mayor of Newport in 1883 stated:

"It was not fashion that first brought people of luxurious tastes, with means for indulging them to Newport. It was a satisfaction found in its air and scenery by people of a rather reserved, unobtruding, contemplative, and healthily sentimental turn, little troubled by social ambition .... Whatever is to the disadvantage of the air or the natural scenery of Newport .... is disadvantageous to the prosperity of the City."18

Olmstead the younger presented a proposed plan for the City in 1913 that suggested better plantings, the proper use of setbacks, the establishment of more parks and public access to shore scenery. However he also stated that "A city is not justified in withholding these lands from private revenue-producing occupation unless it develops and maintains them in such a manner that they are constantly producing an adequate amount of public recreation per square foot of area."19 A couple of interesting notes are one, that he recommended the lengthening of Washington Street to the Naval Base. This was
done as a major traffic artery. Over time this happened and worked efficiently. It was not until the Newport Bridge was completed in 1969 that Washington Street was cut in half. The bridge originally was to be located much further to the north (which made economic sense) but the plans were changed at the urging of local merchants. As a result the off ramp creates a bottleneck in downtown Newport. This is an example of poor planning and local short range goals taking precedence over a more soundly based long term traffic plan. The second road that Olmstead recommended was an alternative thoroughfare to Thames Street. This actually was built as the present America's Cup Highway. However he also recommended that the commercial buildings to the west be retained. Urban renewal did not see fit to keep those buildings. Now the buildings that were retained further south on Thames Street are being recycled and becoming a revenue producing area of the City.

There have also been several recently completed studies on the sewer and water capacities of the city. The general thrust is that they are already being strained at current development levels. The proposed Maidford River developments in Middletown may actually reduce the amount of watershed available for public water supply. This is an example of the very visible inter-island effects that one community may have on another.
SECTION VIII  POLITICAL REALITY

Cooperation on an island-wide basis has been of little significance historically. Any such plans as outlined in the previous section will be exceedingly difficult to gain acceptance, much less implement. A classic example of these difficulties has been the evolution of the Aquidneck Island Development Corporation. (AIDC) Portsmouth residents feel that the AIDC has been overly partial towards the development of the industrial park in Middletown. There has been a constant funding program which has been exacerbated by personality conflicts which tend to be magnified in a small town atmosphere. However, there seems to be little doubt that the AIDC has accomplished several portions of its mission. The Newport promotional package has been successful as has the Middletown Industrial Park. The pressure is now on to develop the Portsmouth Industrial Park (with no contribution from Portsmouth this year). The AIDC was born in a crisis atmosphere when the fleet pulled out. The driving force of one man, Robert Silva, was the mechanism that put the three towns together. It would have been extremely doubtful if the AIDC would have come about without Silva. He managed to subjagate the various fears and animosities of the players involved through great political skill. There is no question in that any regional plan would require a great selling job. One issue that has been
raised is whether the present forms of local government are capable of functioning efficiently. Silva was very successful with the AIDC because of his individual effort. The present City Manager - Town Administrator forms of municipal government may not be conducive to a regional plan because they preclude a strong leader by definition. The Mayor in Newport is strictly a titular role and the non-partisan city council is not a disciplined political force. The Middletown and Portsmouth Town Councils have much the same problem in that the Town Administrator is responsible to the Council rather than the voters. This political buffer zone insulates him. On the one hand it allows the City-Manager - Town Administrator to manage day to day problems efficiently; but on the other he generally does not have the political authority to make truly dramatic or far reaching decisions. This is the trade off that is made when a town gives up the "strong" mayor form of government for a city manager. Assuming that the present form of island governments are here to stay, how can a governmental regional process be implemented? One method might be to enact some form of joint planning committee. Newport has a full time city planner and Middletown a part-time one. Mayor Humphrey L. Donelly made this proposal in 1974 but it was rejected. The AIDC would not be a positive vehicle to use as a result of past conflicts and the possibility of differences of opinion between economic, environmental, and political goals. Perhaps a more appropriate form might be the
Newport County Chamber of Commerce. A Long Range Goals Task Force already exists within this group. Any discussion of the prospects for regional government in Rhode Island immediately brings to mind the advantage of strong county governments. This would require some easing of local autonomy and there are strong questions of whether or not this would be possible. Unfortunately, anytime the issue of centralization arises, someone inevitably points to Newport as the logical head. This does not set well in the other communities. Portsmouth bears a reasonably strong antipathy towards Newport. Portsmouth and Middletown are much closer in outlooks. There have been legitimate historical reasons for this as Newporters in the past have looked at the northern communities as little more than a group of farmers and therefore of no consequence. In Middletown there is currently some feeling of responsibility for Newport as the latter bears a disproportionate amount of the island low income housing and housing for the elderly. It is also the site of Newport Hospital which is tax free as well. Portsmouth, on the other hand, has been made up of people who have fled the cities in the last two decades whether that city was Providence, Fall River or Newport. There is a feeling of smugness on the part of those who have fled urban areas because they do not have the same problems and yet they for the most part commute into those areas.
Some steps have been taken at the state level to encourage towns to plan. One example would be that in 1979 an act was passed to standardize methods of evaluation for property tax purposes. This is a step in the right direction. On Aquidneck Island there will be a need for many incremental steps to move towards island-wide planning. The role of the Portsmouth Industrial Park will help to lessen hostilities between the AIDC and that town. Hopefully any good will generated from that will carry over to other areas. Unfortunately, political good will has always been ephemeral.

SECTION IX CONCLUSION

Aquidneck Island is an island with a unique set of circumstances contributing to its growth. At present it is poised on the brink of undertaking major development projects in the industrial, commercial and residential sectors without any cohesive island-wide body coordinating the various activities. Presently the island is made up of three distinct communities each offering band-aid solutions to areas where major surgery is needed for the proper utilization of resources. The island has been affected by all the major federal legislation in the last decade. In particular it is within the coastal zone and has been deeply affected by the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act of 1976. With the existance of over 45 million
people within 300 miles with a cumulative personal income of over $325 billion, the island has come under tremendous pressures to accommodate varying development interests. The problem has been exacerbated by the high cost of energy which has focused attention on nearby areas for vacationers and by the removal of the bulk of the Navy presence which traditionally has acted as a buffer. The fundamental question to be answered is whether or not to Manhattenize the island. The similarities between the two islands geologically are very similar and it was only chance and politics that allowed New York to grow and not Newport. If Newport had not been blockaded and occupied early in its history (when it was even larger than New York) skyscrapers could well have towered over Newport Harbour. Making the assumption that this is not the direction that the island wishes to pursue, other problems have to be addressed. For instance, the boundaries that separate the three communities are purely political and not natural. It becomes folly to have three different governing bodies arriving at varying conclusions. Transportation is easy enough today to reverberate the effects of any major development in one community to the others. Regional planning has become a necessity. The preservation of what little farm-land that is left in all three communities must be addressed as it becomes more and more expensive to import food products from other states due to high transportation costs. The island has excellent soil conditions and their use is not being
maximized. The fishermen's and aquaculture needs have to be met as well. The concept of the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) will spawn many new industries along the coast. The development of the George's Banks area as a possible site for natural gas and oil will bring increasing pressures on the local shipyards as well as increase the demand for housing. The possible development of the coal resources will have to be carefully considered before any risk of further pollution of the Bay. The development of the Port of Providence as a container port and the general renaissance of its downtown area will cause further vessel traffic to move up and down the Bay. It is a modern day political phenomenon that the average American can step back and regard dispassionately at what directions are necessary for a large political entity, nation or state, to function. However, when it comes time to vote, he or she will cast a vote along traditional lines by voting for present day self-interest. We see this at the national level as incumbents are returned to office year after year. The general paralysis of government at the federal level has now begun to seep down to the local levels. These governments need strong leaders to effect any kind of change. With discipline these leaders can make a difference. Americans used to be encouraged by their political leaders to participate in the political process with the tacit understanding that great changes would occur. Today young people should be encouraged, but without any false hopes. It is no longer a priviledge to
participate but a duty. Micro-regionalism has great validity with the realization that the successful conclusion of what is inherently a political process begins at the grassroots level. Until local hostilities can be overcome perhaps the best method to promote micro-regionalism would be a strong county government which could at least coordinate essential services. Whether or not any effective changes in direction can occur quickly enough will depend on at what rate the Navy excesses and disposes of its land, the economic situation and the level of general avarice.
FOOTNOTES


5. Quinn, Alonzo W., Rhode Island Geology for the Non-Geologist, Rhode Island Department of Natural Resources, Providence. 1976, p. 63.

6. Ibid., p. 59.


11. Interview with Paul Steinbrenner, Newport City Manager March 7, 1980.

12. Ibid.


15. Ibid.


19. Ibid. p. 22.


21. Ibid.

22. Interview with Humphrey J. Donnelly, Mayor of Newport, February 18, 1980.

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