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RWU Students Map Out R.I. Locations Primed for Transit-Oriented Development

Edward Fitzpatrick
Roger Williams University

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RWU Students Map Out R.I. Locations Primed for Transit-Oriented Development

Grow Smart Rhode Island partnering with RWU and HousingWorksRI to identify opportunities along rail corridors and bus routes in Rhode Island



May 7, 2018 | Edward Fitzpatrick

BRISTOL, R.I. – On May 14, Roger Williams University students will exhibit Geographic Information System maps identifying the spots in Rhode Island that are ripe for transit-oriented development.

Since January 2018, Grow Smart Rhode Island has been working with RWU and HousingWorks RI at RWU to pinpoint the opportunities and challenges of development along Rhode Island's rail corridor and high-frequency bus routes. The research group is collaborating with the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning and other state agencies to find ways to spur housing and job creation in locations with the capacity to best accommodate growth through access to robust transit.

"Finding the opportunities for and implementing transit-oriented development represents a triple win for Rhode Island," said John Flaherty, deputy director of Grow Smart Rhode Island. "It can provide a significant boost to our economy, accommodate our need for substantial new housing development and do so in a way that's good for the environment. The business and residential market has shifted in favor of 'walkable urban' neighborhoods, so pursuing these opportunities plays to our strength and makes Rhode Island a more competitive place for investment."

"Transit-oriented development is a mixed-use community that encourages people to live near transit services and decrease their dependence on driving. From a sustainability point of view, the focus on walkability, shared modes of transportation and compact development can reduce our carbon footprint and preserve vulnerable ecological areas in Rhode Island," RWU Assistant Professor of Architecture Ginette Wessel said. "In the course, the students are not only learning methods of spatial analysis with the Geographic Information System software but are gaining professional experience working on real-world planning issues."



Students' GIS map.
Click image to enlarge
map.

The GIS mapping represents the first of three phases of a project that will analyze potential locations for transit-oriented development in Rhode Island, a state with a robust system of bus transportation but a rail system lacking sufficient frequency, Wessel said. Communities that have expressed an interest in future collaboration include Providence, Cranston, East Providence, South Kingstown, North Kingstown, Westerly, Woonsocket and Cumberland, she said.

Students will help to identify and evaluate priority districts and conduct an in-depth review of existing conditions, zoning, development capacity and the availability of utilities. Teams of graduate students will focus on the four most promising districts and prepare a series of case studies to illustrate the opportunities within these districts.

This semester, 18 students conducted research as part of a course titled "GIS in Planning, Design and Conservation," and they will exhibit a total of 40 to 50 maps on May 14. The exhibit will run from 7 to 8 p.m. in Room 131 of the School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation, on RWU's Bristol campus. The exhibit is free and open to the public.

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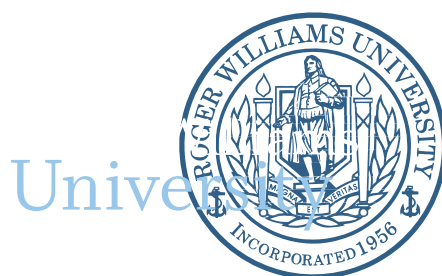
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