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Feature of the Month: RI Ready is poised to be the Ocean State's next great success story

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Quonset Business Park - North Kingstown, RI

Providence, RI RI Ready is a \$40 million initiative that will bring jobs and revenue to Rhode Island. Using funds overwhelmingly approved by voters in 2021, RI Ready will pave the way for new businesses to grow by creating an inventory of industrial properties ready for development and new companies to support future job growth.

This approach is based on Quonset Business Park's successful site readiness model, that provides pre-permitted, pre-engineered sites that are shovel-ready. That model has generated more than 3,500 jobs and \$664 million in private investment at Quonset across 14 developed sites and 36 companies over the past decade. RI Ready will help to eliminate uncertainty and red tape from the development process, keeping the focus on moving businesses forward.

Shown (from left) are: Chelsea Siefert, program manager of RI Ready/director of planning and development for Quonset Development Corp.; Rhode Island governor, Daniel McKee; Steven King, managing director of Quonset Development Corp.; and Stefan Pryor, secretary of R.I. Commerce.

Working with partners in government—Rhode Island Commerce; the Department of Environmental Management; Coastal Resources Management Council; Department of Business Regulation; Rhode Island Department of Transportation; Department of Administration, Division of Statewide Planning; and Rhode Island Department of Health—the Quonset team will lead the effort to get sites “RI Ready” and reinvest money back into the community.

RI Ready officially launched in January with a ribbon cutting attended by governor Dan McKee and RI Commerce secretary Stefan Pryor. Their support has been critical to RI Ready’s quick start, with governor McKee recently publishing a piece in the New England Real Estate Journal highlighting the program’s benefits and long-term goals.

“Based on Quonset Business Park’s successful ‘Site Readiness’ program, RI Ready will make it easier to build or expand businesses across Rhode Island,” McKee wrote. “By adopting this blueprint and replicating it statewide, RI Ready will spur industrial development and help create jobs across the Ocean State.”

RI Ready will provide an array of services for enrolled sites, including technical assistance and help with other pre-approvals. Sites will be considered eligible based on the following criteria:

- Sites that will allow for upgraded or improved infrastructure in support of an industrial use; or
- Sites that will allow an existing industrial use or facility to expand significantly; or
- Sites that are approximately 10 acres in size (or are capable of supporting an approximately 100,000 s/f building);
- Sites zoned for industrial or offshore wind support uses, and;
- Sites within one mile of a roadway designated by the state to support industrial traffic.

Representatives of eligible projects, with approval from their host city or town, will work with Quonset staff to get their sites ready for development. Wrap-around services will be provided by State agencies to projects that are enrolled in RI Ready. These services may include technical assistance with engineering, permitting and other pre-development approvals and activities to prepare the site for development activity as well as workforce development and marketing assistance. Applications will start with the “Red” step, during which projects are reviewed and evaluated for enrollment. Next they will move on to the “Orange” step, which includes technical assistance, full-site engineering, permitting and cost estimates.

Projects will then head to the “Yellow” step, at which capital investment may be available for appropriate sites, and RI Ready can assist with financing for on-site or off-site improvements. Finally, once a site achieves “Green” status, it will be pre-permitted, fully engineered and ready to go. All it takes is four steps to help businesses get their shovels in the ground quickly and efficiently.

A half-dozen applications from across Rhode Island—including Johnston, Cranston, West Warwick, Warwick and Pawtucket—are already on the path to becoming “Rhode Island Ready.” The RIReady.org website includes an interactive map tracking all application sites. Five of these applications will be considered for official enrollment by the Quonset Development Corp. board of directors during their April meeting as RI Ready continues to generate interest from additional industrial sites across the state.

“The Quonset team looks forward to working with land owners and communities across Rhode Island to prepare industrial sites to generate jobs and tax revenue that benefits everyone in the Ocean State,” said Chelsea Siefert, RI Ready program manager and Quonset’s director of planning and development, in a January 2022 piece in the New England Real Estate Journal.

Learn more and start your application at rirdy.org.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540