

RHODE MAP

# Here's what Rhode Island's movers and shakers are watching for this year

Rhode Map asked some of the state's smartest movers and shakers across many sectors for the trends they are watching in the new year. And of course, they made a few predictions, too.

By [Dan McGowan](#) Globe Columnist, Updated January 2, 2025, 9:52 a.m.



Downtown Providence, Rhode Island. JONATHAN WIGGS/THE BOSTON GLOBE

Welcome to 2025.

After asking Rhode Island's top politicians for their [New Year's resolutions](#) earlier in the week, I asked some of the state's smartest movers and shakers across many sectors for the trends they are watching in the new year. And of course, they made a few predictions, too.

You can check them out below.

## **Neil Steinberg**

*Chair, Rhode Island Life Science Hub*

A trend that is very concerning to me and I don't think is drawing enough attention is that the [birth rate is declining](#) significantly across the globe and in the United States. The potential ramifications are striking, both short and long term. We are building many new schools in Rhode Island with a declining population of school-age students across the state (may differ from town to town). Higher education is facing similar challenges. A great deal of planning will be required to tackle challenges to make sure we have teachers, nurses, police, and firefighters — the backbone of our communities.

Growing the [life science industry](#) in Rhode Island is an opportunity and a prediction. When I was a young banker, we had two major industries in Rhode Island: textiles and jewelry. We have some companies left in those industries and many good companies across the state. However, I ask many people what industry replaced textiles and jewelry, and I always get a blank stare. We have always had the meds and eds, but big industries with small and large companies need to make products and sell them.

I don't know if it will be cybersecurity or wind or blue tech, but we have had a very good start given the accomplishments of the life sciences with the first year of the [Rhode Island Life Science Hub](#). With the support of the governor and legislative leaders, many disparate segments are being pulled together under this umbrella organization, similar to our neighbors in Massachusetts.

## **Chris Marsella**

*President, Marsella Development Corporation*

I think 2025 will be the year for downtown Providence and all the positive changes we've been hoping to get in motion for years. I would expect to see momentum on a new RIPTA transit center with intermodal connectivity, which will finally provide incentive and a timeline for the community as a whole to decide what type of great public space Greater Kennedy Plaza can and should be.

With those two issues coming together, the Superman building can no longer be ignored. It's not a single building; it's an anchor for all of downtown and right now it's dead weight. The time has come for all Rhode Islanders to see the importance of that project coming to fruition as more than just symbolic.

I'm hopeful the [Track 15 food hall](#) will bring a lot of people downtown to show everyone just how great downtown is, and what the potential is to do even more.

## **Elizabeth Tanner**

*Secretary, Rhode Island Commerce*

In 2025, lower interest rates offer a bright spot, with the potential to fuel private investment in real estate and key industries like defense and ocean tech. Rhode Island plans to seize this opportunity by optimizing its programs and empowering local entrepreneurs to engage in these sectors.

## **Pat Crowley**

*President, Rhode Island AFL-CIO*

I'm going to be watching how Rhode Islanders, especially young Rhode Islanders, react to the second Trump administration. The last resistance to President Trump started over eight years ago, but since then a whole new generation of organizers, some serving in elected office, some serving as field staff for unions and other justice organizations, have entered the local scene, and I'll be curious to see if they can build a broad consensus of everyday working people to protect all of our rights.

We've made a lot of progress on important issues in the last few years here in Rhode Island – including labor rights, environmental work, gun safety – all of which can be undermined by what happens in Washington, D.C. Rhode Island's organizers of today will be our leaders of tomorrow, so in 2025 and beyond, I will be watching to see what kinds of leaders emerge from our new struggles.

## **Robert Brooks**

*Managing partner, Adler Pollock & Sheehan P.C.*

My predictions are in two areas: general business climate and labor and employment law. I think that the Federal Reserve will continue to slowly lower interest rates, and the number of corporate transactions will pick up in 2025 after the Trump administration takes office.

I think the combination of lower interest rates, a Republican-controlled Congress and the Republican administration will “grease the wheels” of the economy in 2025. I think the Trump administration will be proactively moving to blunt the changes made by the [National Labor Relations Board](#) during President Biden's administration, which helped promote increased union organizing activity.

I think we will see new board members and a new general counsel at the NLRB and steps will be taken to reverse those changes. The same applies to enforcement actions at the US Department of Labor. Under Biden, the DOL became much more strident in its

enforcement of wage and hour laws, imposing interest and penalties even when employers were willing to acknowledge missteps, and settle cases at their inception. I predict the Trump administration will roll back many of these pro-employee initiatives.

## **Angélica Infante-Green**

*Rhode Island Education Commissioner*

In 2025, Rhode Island will continue to improve school attendance as we seek to improve student outcomes statewide and meet Massachusetts levels of academic achievement. Our students' data clearly shows attendance matters with there being, on average, more than 20 percentage point achievement gaps across elementary, middle and high school levels between students who are chronically absent and their peers who are not.

With our all-hands-on-deck approach to decreasing chronic absenteeism, which has been recognized nationally and internationally, Rhode Island has seen a nearly 10 percentage point decline in chronic absenteeism since our highest point. We're off to a great start with approximately 64,200 fewer absences heading into the new year compared to last year. We will continue to emphasize to all Rhode Islanders that attendance matters – our kids cannot learn if they are not in school.

## **David Cicilline**

*President and CEO, Rhode Island Foundation*

I'm hoping to dig into "[Nexus](#)," the newest book from Yuval Noah Harari. A follow-on to "[Sapiens](#)," the book explores the spread of information and how it has shaped societies across the globe. Pulling from historical lessons to determine how we can best address the rise of AI, bridge ideological divides, and combat the spread of misinformation is something I continue to be focused on.

I predict that there will be more kitchen tables for Rhode Islanders to gather around next holiday season, thanks to the availability of new, and revitalized, affordable homes coming online throughout the year. Voters overwhelmingly approved a \$120 million housing bond in November, opening the door to an affordable place to live for more Rhode Islanders. Focusing on housing affordability and availability is one way we're working together to create a thriving Rhode Island. There are better years ahead, as we apply that same collective energy to climate action, civic health, and creating equitable opportunities for all Rhode Islanders to thrive.

## **Cortney Nicolato**

*President & CEO, United Way of Rhode Island*

Historically, election results have always impacted social services and economies, and I don't expect that to change in 2025. And our state's nonprofits are helping more Rhode Islanders than ever before, at a time when their needs are greater than ever before.

Nonprofits are the underpinning of all that's good in Rhode Island and they need and deserve our support. They are vital to our state, and as their role is even more pronounced, so will that of the United Way. But we all must be part of the change we want to see – engaged and involved, giving of our time, talent, and treasure. Because real progress in 2025 must begin locally.

## **Annette Maggiacomo**

*President, Duffy & Shanley*

I'll be watching the US Supreme Court's decision on whether the TikTok ban remains and how that affects the social media landscape, and how companies provide equitable treatment between in-office and remote employees as full return-to-work becomes the norm again.

On the fun side, I'm hoping the Patriots return to a winning record and I'll bring drinking Sabrina Carpenter's Brown Sugar Shakin' Espresso at Dunkin' all winter.

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*This story first appeared in Rhode Map, our free newsletter about Rhode Island that also contains information about local events, links to interesting stories, and more. If you'd like to receive it via email Monday through Friday, [you can sign up here](#).*

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