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## BAHAMIAN TRADE MISSION

### Fertile ground for Rhode Island skills

By Natalie Myers,  
PBN Staff Writer

*Second in a series on a four-day trade mission to the Bahamas.*

NASSAU, the Bahamas – It was 9:15 a.m. when Newport Collaborative CEO John Grosvenor and I parted from the group of nine Rhode Island delegates yesterday, to attend his first appointment of the day.

The goal of the meeting at the Bahamian Ministry of Tourism was to start a conversation that might lead to work in Nassau on waterfront development, boutique hotels or historical preservation – projects like those that fill Newport Collaborative's portfolio.

For Grosvenor and his fellow Rhode Islanders, it was Day Two of the trade mission organized by Maureen Mezei and Michael Manning. Mezei is international trade director at the R.I. Economic Development Corporation. Manning – who today announced his promotion from captain to major – is coordinator of the R.I. National Guard's year-and-a-half old State Partnership Program.

There are many more steps to take before deals for trade in goods or services might materialize. But each member of the delegation attended several meetings yesterday, organized by the U.S. Embassy, that were tailored to their type of business, their needs and their objectives for the trip.

"It's very interesting to see the dynamic going here," Grosvenor said to David Johnson, deputy director of The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. "In Newport, we have, just like you have, a number of buildings that go all the way back to the Colonial era."

The problem is, some of the historic buildings in Nassau's downtown have been neglected to the point of deterioration. Then there is the obvious contrast between the island's newer, extravagant resorts, such as Atlantis, and the older, minimally developed shops and restaurants scattered throughout the downtown.

The result is, most visitors stay confined to the resorts and don't contribute to local businesses.

That's where Grosvenor sees an opportunity. He said he and his firm have the experience and expertise in redeveloping historical sites to help transform downtown Nassau into something more appealing to tourists.

But first, he believes, the government will need to improve the infrastructure, including traffic control, and it will need to move the container port that now blocks the waterfront from the main street. It also needs to create some sort of incentive for developers, he said.

As we walked back to the hotel, Grosvenor observed a large truck maneuvering the narrow streets of the city, blocking the view and making it difficult for foot traffic. He pointed out a historic building that is not highlighted in any way – a potential attraction that currently goes unexploited.

These are things that need to be sorted out, he said. But they are not a deterrent for Grosvenor.

In fact, he and Eric Offenber, president and chief engineer of North East Engineers, have started talking about coming back on their own, to make more connections and build relationships that could lead to a major redevelopment project not limited to historic preservation in the downtown.

The day ended with a mock signing of a memorandum of understanding by the RIEDC, the Bahamas Development Bank and the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce,



PBN PHOTO / NATALIE MYERS

**JOHN GROSVENOR, left, CEO of Newport Collaborative, speaks yesterday with David Johnson, deputy minister of The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, exploring the possibility of development and historic preservation projects in Nassau.**

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