

The Rhode Island Association of Conservation Commissions

E News

July 9, 2004

A Note From The President:

During the past four months, RIACC has undergone some internal changes with regards to duties and responsibilities of the officers and board members. We have also undertaken several large projects, formed new partnerships, and have been working even closer with DEM and other state agencies to outline the specific needs and role of conservation commissions statewide.

Unfortunately, due to all this activity, we have been remiss with regards to the last four issues of E News. We hope this issue of E News will update conservation commissioners on some of what we have been doing on your behalf. We will continue bringing you monthly updates in the form of our regular E News from this point forward. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

RIACC BUSINESS AND FEATURES ANNOUNCEMENTS STATE AND STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

RIACC BUSINESS AND FEATURES

RIACC PLAYS KEY ROLE IN FIRST STATE LAW EMPOWERING

CONSERVATION COMMISSIONS.

Thanks to the hard work of Rep. Eileen Naughton, conservation commissions within the State of Rhode Island have taken on a whole new role. She asked the RIACC Board of Directors about what we thought could be done to help "give teeth" to Conservation Commissions. As a result, Bill number H-8198-04 passed both Houses of the General Assembly on the last day of the 2004 General Assembly Session. This new law changes the language of existing statute 45-51 to allow the mayor/town manager of each municipality to designate the conservation commission as the environmental advocate. The role of the environmental advocate is to:

- (1) Receive complaints from residents or businesses within the municipality regarding safety of drinking water, water quality, or clean air, or other pollutants affecting the environment.

- (2) Investigate any complaints requested by a state regulatory agency.

- (3) Prepare a report with an appraisal of the validity of the clean air or water problem, the responsible parties, the remedial action required, and identification of the state agency with jurisdiction over the problem, and submit the report to the city council and office of mayor or town administrator.

- (4) Serve as liaison for the city or town with all agencies charged under state law with enforcement of all laws and regulations pertaining to air and water quality as stated in subdivision (3)

(5) Serve as advocate for the municipality and its residents before the agency under whose jurisdiction the problem falls; with the objective of securing remedial action.

(6) Assist the office of solicitor in taking legal action to secure court orders requiring the responsible state agency to take remedial action when the action has been unduly delayed or neglected by the agency.

(7) Conduct public information activities to inform the community of the availability of the services of the commission.

We realize that these duties are not what have been typically performed by conservation commissions in the past. However, this new law does open up new possibilities for conservation commissions. It gives commissions legal standing and authority within the municipality to make decisions affecting our environment.

It also, and more importantly, gives conservation commissions the recognition and status they deserve. We believe that this law is only the beginning when it comes to empowering conservation commissions with the authority they need to effectively perform their appointed duties.

Members of the RIACC Board of Directors will be meeting with Acting DEM Director Fred Vincent on July 13th to discuss this law. We will be working with DEM to develop a program to train commissioners for this new role and will distribute information accordingly. We will also be drafting a model ordinance for commissions to present to their municipal councils to complete this process.

We look forward to working with state agencies and municipal conservation commissions to develop this new law into a workable role for conservation commissioners. We will be sending each commission chair a copy of the law, and will continuously update you as new information arises.

RIACC ANNUAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONFERENCE.

On June 5th, RIACC held its third annual Environmental Conference. The conference featured nine informative sessions, a RIACC business meeting, and Dr. John Peterson Myers as our keynote speaker. Dr. Myers presented the latest scientific findings linking human health and exposure to environmental toxins.

During the business portion of the conference, 19 by-law sections were amended: 16 of which (as well as the Mission Statement) were language corrections and changes required by the IRS for 501 (c) (3) status.

Copies of the amended bylaws will be sent to all commission chairs. Additionally, Michael Ahnrud and Sue Cabeceiras were re-elected to the Board of Directors for a full three year term each. Commissioners were updated as to the latest activities of RIACC and what we are working on for next year.

OFFICER ELECTIONS AND A SAD GOODBYE.

At the regular June RIACC Board of Directors meeting, in accordance with the RIACC by-laws, elections for the offices of Treasurer, Secretary, Vice President, and President were held. RIACC Treasurer Lynn Ruggeri announced that she is stepping down from the Board of Directors for personal reasons. Lynn was one of the original RIACC Board members and our first treasurer. Lynn was an energetic and enthusiastic member of the Board, who not only chaired this year's annual conference committee, but was instrumental in so many of the initiatives which RIACC has worked on since its inception. Lynn is moving on to other things although she will continue to serve as the RIACC delegate from the Richmond Conservation Commission. Lynn will be sorely missed by all of us.

RIACC Officers for 2004 - 2005 are:

Geoff DiCenso, President; Michael Alexander, Vice President; Lori Bellavance, Secretary; and Michael Ahnrud, Treasurer. Bill Bivona, RIACC's first vice president, remains on the Board of Directors. The Board thanks him for his work as vice president during the last two years, and continues to benefit from his input and experience.

RIACC PARTNERS WITH THE RHODE ISLAND ASSOCIATION OF WETLAND SCIENTISTS

Dorian Boardman, president of The RI Association of Wetland Scientists (RIAWS) attended the May meeting of the RIACC Board of Directors to discuss ways our two organizations can partner to develop effective programs for municipal conservation. RIAWS will be working with RIACC during our upcoming RIACC Conservation Commissioner Training Program as well as working with us to review the Rhode Island Wetlands Act to define the role of the local conservation commissioner. RIACC welcomes RIAWS as its newest partner and looks forward to working with them in the future.

RIACC RECEIVES \$70,000.00 GRANT FROM US EPA

RIACC and the RI Rivers Council teamed up to write a grant proposal to EPA to train conservation commissions and watershed councils to conduct inspections during and after construction projects in accordance with Phase II Stormwater regulations. The grant, in the amount of \$70,000.00 was awarded earlier last month. Geoff DiCenso (RIACC) and Meg Kerr (Rivers Council) will be working closely with EPA to develop this program.

The grant calls for hiring a consultant to develop a pilot training program for three commissions and watershed councils to perform these inspections. If successful, our two organizations will apply for a second grant to continue the training statewide. This new role will be another form of positive recognition for conservation commissions as well as a new position of municipal regulatory authority.

RIACC COMMISSIONER HANDBOOK AVAILABLE

Electronic copies of *The Rhode Island Conservation Commissioner Handbook, A Guide To The Principles and Practices of Municipal Conservation* are available free to all Rhode Island conservation commissioners by emailing RIACC at riacc@surfglobal.net <<mailto:riacc@surfglobal.net>> .

MEETINGS

RIACC board of directors meets every last Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM at the Pilgrim Senior Center in Warwick. All are encouraged to attend. As always your input, ideas, and involvement are welcome. All meeting minutes are available to all conservation commissions upon request. To receive a copies of meeting minutes, call 965-7058 or email your request to riacc@surfglobal.net <<mailto:riacc@surfglobal.net>> .

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NEW RULES FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Beginning this July, ALL municipal Boards and Commissions will be responsible for posting their own agendas on the Secretary of State's website. Here's how it works: Each municipality will have a separate **filing coordinator** (typically in the Clerk's office). One person from the conservation commission will be deemed the **filer**. The municipal **filing coordinator** will provide the **filer** with a user name and temporary password. The **filer** will log onto the website to choose a permanent password. The **filer** then has the responsibility of ensuring that monthly commission agendas are sent to the Secretary of State's office via the website. RIACC encourages all commissions to contact their Clerk's

office to identify their **filing coordinator** and to then work with that person to develop this program. For more information, visit www.state.ri.us <<http://www.state.ri.us>> , then click on civics and public information – open government – rules and regulations - tools for filing coordinator, or call the Secretary of State's office at 222-3983. **It is the responsibility of each individual commission to ensure that this new rule is followed.**

STATE AND STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

OPEN SPACE BOND PASSES HOUSE

The Rhode Island's House of Representatives approved a \$70 million Open Space, Recreation, Bay and Watershed Bond referendum for the November 2, 2004 Ballot. With approval by Rhode Island voters, this Bond will provide significant funding for programs that conserve the best of Rhode Island.

The Bond referendum on the November Ballot, if approved by Rhode Island voters in November, provides funding as follows:

- \$25 million - RIDEM Open Space Protection Programs

(Note: This is an 11% increase over funding levels in the 2000 Bond)

(\$15 million for state land acquisition and farmland protection)

(\$10 million for Local Open Space Grants Program)

- \$18 million - Recreation Programs - for design, development, expansion and renovation of new or existing public recreation facilities and parks.

(\$8 million for State Park facilities including \$3 for Fort Adams)

(\$4 million for Local Recreation Grants Program)

(\$2 million for Local Recreation Development Grants)

(\$4 million for Roger Williams Park and Zoo)

- \$8 million - Groundwater Protection & Land Acquisition by the
Water Resources Board to protect public drinking water supplies.

- \$19 million - Narragansett Bay and Watershed Restoration

(\$10.5 million for revolving loan fund for upgrading wastewater treatment facilities)

(\$8.5 million for restoring and protecting water quality)

RIACC encourages all conservation commissions throughout the state to help promote the Bond so that Rhode Island's voters support it on election day (November 2).

For more information about RIACC, please contact us at 965-7058 or email us at riacc@surfglobal.net <<mailto:riacc@surfglobal.net>>.