



Monday, December 7, 2020 | 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM | Virtual Meeting on Zoom

Attendees

Priscilla De La Cruz, Rupert Friday, Mal Skowron, Meg Kerr, Greg Gerritt, Victoria Leytin, Barbara Walsh, Barry Schiller, A. Hoffman, Topher Hamblett, Jeanine Silversmith, Connie McGreavy, Douglas Doe, Eugenia Marks, Everett Pope, Gregory Schulz, Hank Webster, James Crowley, James Kingston, Jessie Kingston, Katherine Gibson, Kathleen Crane-Godley, Krystal Noiseaux, Lily Kilby, Nicole DiPaolo, Paige Therien, Peter Neronha, Peter Trafton, Sheila Dormody, Sue Anderbois, Susan Korte, Tricia Jedele, Miriam Weizenbaum, Emily Koo, Jonathan Berard, Kai Salem, Linda Perri, Dana Goodman, Reuben Reich, Paul Roselli, Paul Beaudette, Jim Salem, Helen Drew

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions 5:30 - 5:40 PM

- Land Acknowledgement, Mal Skowron
- Approval of November minutes
- Office Report

Presentation 5:40 – 6:40 PM:

- Updates from Attorney General Peter F. Neronha & Tricia Jedele | 20 minutes
- Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP), George Wiley Center, Lilly Kirby & Alesia Ross | 20 minutes
- Climate Crisis Campaign, Kai Salem & Mal Skowron | 10 minutes
- Climate Reality Project | 10 minutes

Policy Committee 6:40 – 6:46 PM

- Coffee Hour on January 27th
- Legislative agenda discussion (PolComm on Monday, Dec. 14th, 4:30)

President's Report and Strategic Planning update 6:46 – 6:52 PM

Reports from ECRI fiscal agency projects 6:52 – 6:57 PM

- Green Infrastructure Coalition
- School Recycling Club

Announcements 6:57 PM

Adjourn 7:00 PM

Welcome and Introductions

- Land Acknowledgement by Mal Skowron
 - Mal hopes ECRI can utilize our land acknowledgements as a place to learn and understand the complex history that has brought us all to this land here today. The land that we call Rhode Island was never ceded by its native inhabitants and was in fact forcefully taken.
 - Moment of reflection on: the legacy of displacement and colonization of this land; that which we are grateful for on this land; the Pequots, Nipmucs, Niantics, Narragansetts, Wampanoags whose early ancestors are thought to have first settled on this land some 30,000 years ago and have lived on it sustainably for thousands of years before colonization; how moving forward, we can correct and address the legacy of land stealing and white supremacy that we've inherited with the environmental work that we do.
- Approval of November Minutes:
 - **First motion made by Eugenia, Meg Kerr Seconds. All vote in favor. November Minutes approved.**
- Office Report by Greg Gerrit
 - Currently: ECRI - \$35,774.59; Education fund - \$39,494.35; Year-End Appeal - \$975
 - Tisdale Awards: Received 4 applications thus far; grants will be given out in February
 - Volunteers needed to organize fundraiser (most likely a silent auction)
 - Video festival: 5 videos received so far
 - February 21st, livestream event on RINHS Facebook page
 - Nature videos can be submitted to Gregg Gerrit
 - Annual Meeting (virtual event) – need volunteers to help plan starting after January 1st, 2021
 - Volunteers can contact Greg Gerrit
 - ECRI is 50 years old! Greg recently received documents from RI Secretary of State office. The executive committee will figure out how to celebrate.

Presentations

Updates from Attorney General Peter F. Neronha & Tricia Jedele

Peter Neronha

- One of the greatest attributes of this state is our natural environment.
- Importance of Environmental Advocacy: Peter Neronha is willing to do all he can on both local and federal levels to act on climate change
 - Works with other Attorney Generals around the country
 - Built a local environmental advocacy team – worked on issues regarding the Providence waterfront (with Save the Bay)
- Clean Air Act case brought against SIMS Recycling (federal government stepped away from at the last minute)
- Important that Attorney General offices hears from groups, beyond state regulators, on the state of our environment.

Tricia Jedele (Past President of ECRI 2010-2013)

- Welcomes everyone to reach out to and engage with RI Attorney General (RIAG) office

- Three-person unit: Tricia Jedele, Greg Shultz and Alison Hoffman work under Miriam Weizenbaum, Chief of Civil Division and Neil Kelley, Deputy Chief of Environmental Unit (lead attorney on lead paint case years ago and currently lead on State v. Chevron and an MBTE case)
- AG Office
 - Public access, water quality, air quality, disproportionate environmental impacts
 - Currently working on right-of-way obstructions issues at Public St in the Port of Providence and Lee's Wharf in Newport
 - Office functions/positions: Environmental Advocate (statutorily created position), Lead Advocate (works with Department of Health DOH), and sits on State Properties Committee
 - Works with Department of Justice (DOJ), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and other states to pursue remedies for violations of environmental law.
 - Important for people to know that there are lawyers reading through the nuances of lengthy rules, complaints, court filings, etc to identify single words or phrases that render regulation impossible, less effective, or harmful.
- RIAG Multistate Environmental Actions Summary:
 - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bNzkWDJpFvOfISYLdfQgs2vY1basSsPE/view>
 - Actions taken in 2020 against: EPA with respect to clean air rules, clean water rules, toxics; National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration with respect to clean cars; the Bureau of Land Management US Fish and Wildlife for proposals to lay pipelines under the Appalachian Trail, or to do drilling in the arctic wildlife refuge.
 - Contact RIAG for more detailed information
- Two significant cases to be aware of:
 - State v. Chevron
 - "The Climate Change Case" - phrase has been co-opted by fossil fuel industry so these cases can be heard in federal court instead of separate state and city courts (requires less time & resources)
 - 20 fossil fuel defendants
 - Basic product liability – not about regulating emissions. They failed to warn Rhode Islanders, and engaged in a decades long campaign of deceit.
 - RI was the first to file this type of lawsuit, followed by NY, MA, MN, DC, CT, DE, plus 6-7 cities.
 - Defendants claim their drilling and sale of gas has been at the direction of the federal (another reason for their desire to take cases to federal court)
 - Most federal courts disagree, some circuit courts on appeal have agreed
 - There is a pending case in US Supreme Court called BP v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore (Case # 19-1189)
 - Response to the brief is due December 16
 - RI and other states will file an amicus brief
 - SIMMS Metal Management in Johnston and Port of Providence
 - In July 2019, DOJ notified RIAG that SIMS was violating the Clean Air Act and did not have proper permitting
 - Spewing particulate matter and volatile organic compounds into the air, making neighboring residents and even RIDEM inspectors sick.
 - DOJ disagreed with interpretation of the law under Clean Air Act, was unwilling to pursue action and walked away from the case, leaving RIAG, EPA & RIDEM – RIAG felt it important to pursue to send a message.

- Through negotiations, RIAG achieved the largest settlement and most significant controls against a metal shredder in the country to date
 - Secured a total penalty of \$2M, plus \$5.5M in control technologies
 - \$325,000 of penalty settlement is set aside for air quality projects in Johnston (\$ is typically reserved for impacted community)
 - \$125,000 for air quality projects in Port of Providence – must be allocated in 10 months (July 2021)
 - Have sent 2 encroachment letters to Airway Leasing (adjacent to Public Street right-of-way) regarding red containers and chain link fence. Containers have been removed, fence set to be removed by 12/21

Q&A

- *Question, Hank Webster:* Massachusetts AG Healey’s successful petition to their utility regulators to start thinking about how to wind down a gas distribution system (docket # 20-80) - has RI begun this conversation?
 - RIAG: Not aware of one currently in Rhode Island but the office is willing to follow-up
 - TJ: PUC (Public Utilities Regulation) Division at RIAG – head by Christy Hetherington
- *Chat comment, Barry Schiller:* Please consider helping pass some road safety bills (e.g H7259) to improve road safety, especially for low-impact walking and bicycling facing increased risk - from Barry S for RI Bike Coalition
 - RIAG: Love to hear more about this, along with anything RIAG should know about
- *Chat Comment, Linda Perri:* Can the federal government, go back and pursue federal fines to SIMS?
 - TJ: No, we negotiated that as part of our EPA with part of our settlement and they receive their penalty money.
 - RIAG: US Attorney’s office had partnered with us as civil attorneys, not prosecutors. DOJ will be a better partner going forward.
 - TJ: Unprecedented in my time as an attorney - DOJ suing states for environmental protection during this administration.
- *Chat comment, Paul Roselli:* RIAG office opposed Invenergy’s billion dollar power plant proposed for the middle of the woods in northwestern Rhode Island. They also opposed the water deal with the Town of Johnston.
- *Chat comment, Douglas Doe, West Bay Land Trust, Cranston:* The AG’s office and DEM were absolutely critical in our efforts to protect the Knight Farm conservation area from National Grid and the Lippitt Ave solar developers when they planned the interconnection route.

We welcome the Attorney General and RIAG office for future meetings

Percentage Income Payment Plan (PIPP), George Wiley Center, Lilly Kirby

- George Wiley Center
 - statewide organization creating social and economic justice through policy change
 - regularly reach over 6,000 low-income households in network
 - coordinates with other orgs & congregations to mobilize groups of people facing food utility housing and income insecurity
 - founded 1981 by activist united after death of George Wiley (co-founder of the Welfare Rights Movement & civil rights movement leader)
 - Member-based organization led by people directly impacted by energy insecurity

- Train members via ladder of engagement
- Example of victories: forgiveness plan for debt, year-long moratorium on utility shut-offs amid pandemic
- direct action and mutual aid
- Utilities are a basic need (internet, electricity, heating/cooling, maintaining hygiene, school/work, medical equipment, etc.)
- Energy insecurity disproportionately affects low-income communities and people of color
- Diana Hernandez, PhD - studied energy and security from a public health framework
 - More people face energy insecurity than food insecurity
 - Low-income cost burden is 3x's that of wealthier folks
 - Lack of weatherization in many economically disadvantage homes
- Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP)
 - Progressive restructuring of the utility model
 - Not based on usage: instead pay a flat rate of income each month (low-income people would pay 2-4% of monthly income for utility service)
 - Currently a dozen states have PIPP programs
 - Rhode Island adopted a PIPP from from mid 80's – mid 90's.
 - Currently RI'ers under poverty line spend 44% of income on utilities
- Utility justice and the climate movement
 - Transition away from natural gas can tackle many problems at once (racism, classism, other forms of systematic oppression exacerbated by environmental exploitation)
 - Increased reliance on utilities due to climate change
 - Distribution and supply costs manifesting as increased cost burden
 - Just transition and Green New Deal
- *Question, Dana Goodman:* In order to create PIPP, would that also require participants to have an energy audit completed before they're able to enroll in the program?
 - No, only prerequisite is income (same used by LIHEAP)
- *Question, Eugenia Marks:* What is the next step in moving this program forward?
 - Currently passing resolutions in different cities through city councils
 - Central Falls unanimously passed a resolution in support; now working in Providence and Pawtucket
 - Hoping to get PIPP to pass state-wide this legislative session with more local pressure
- *Question, Nicole DiPaolo:* Can you share action opportunities to ECRI and others?
 - Sign-on letter has a place for emails – those that sign on will receive follow-up call to actions and updates
- *Chat Question:* On Community Choice Aggregation – has the GWC begun to think about ways that it could be that these programs can sort of work together
 - PIPP is a prerequisite to any other energy program – they inherently already work well together
- *Question, Kai Salem:* Would you support other methods of lowering costs such as increasing discount rate? Why this proposal versus any other proposal?
 - Discount rates we currently advocate for are some of highest in the country (GWC still supports increases)
 - PIPP is more over-arching than many other (ex. Protection from distribution costs) & is a structural approach
 - Efficacy in other states and in the past in RI
- LINK to sign on for ECRI members:
 - www.tinyurl.com/ecrisignon

Climate Crisis Campaign, Kai Salem & Mal Skowron

- Project launched by ECRI about a year ago After two years of no climate, energy or environmental bills passed in GA
 - Rhode Islanders care about the climate crisis
- Goal: unify environmental advocates; team up with other organizations and interest groups (including non-traditional allies); series of events and grassroots movement
 - Released a Climate Crisis Statement last year
 - Also had a successful climate hearing last year
- 2021 = great opportunity this year to address climate bills
 - mandatory carbon emissions reductions targets
- Meeting over the past month to discuss strategy for 2021 session (outreach, events, etc)
- Everyone welcome – use the ECRI Policy Committee listserv for emails (email Kai at kai@greenenergyconsumers.org to be added
- In January, launch with virtual PR event as well as first climate advocate training
- Communications sub-committee
 - Message earlier this year: encourage action on climate by advocating for a bill that updates the state's greenhouse gas emission reduction goals in a way that's mandatory and enforceable into campaign messaging
 - Priorities have since shifted; excited to integrate principals regarding public health, job/resource accessibility
 - Not just about setting new goals...creating a pathways to achieving those goals
 - Soon have draft of the statement of intent for 2021
- Website: <https://www.riclimatetcrisis.org/>

Climate Reality Project (Krystal Noiseux)

- <http://bit.ly/GreaterPVD>
- Global organization started in 2011 by Al Gore to train people to speak formally about climate change
 - 140 Chapters in US, 9 international branches – staffed by volunteers
- Currently 31,000 climate reality leaders - during COVID-19, the Climate Reality Project offered training online and free of charge
 - Those in RI formed an formal RI chapter
- Main goals of RI Chapter for 2021:
 - Amplify voices of RI groups already engages in local climate action
 - Form a group of speakers that can give the presentation to community groups
- Slides are available to everyone – you don't have to be a formal, trained member to access or use. CRP has tailored the presentation to be more relevant to RI
 - Format: The Climate Story (Connection), Must We Change? (Urgency), Can We Change? (Hope), Will We Change? (Opportunity), Your Climate Story (Action)
 - NNOCCI – Effective messaging - values, metaphors and solutions
- RI Chapter shared draft a presentation with local climate leaders for feedback
 - Leadership circle is meeting next week to finalize RI presentation (will be shared with ECRI) and create a schedule for 2021 (Zoom)
- Hope for ECRI members to view a presentation and become a presenter
- Monthly chapter meetings (community-building) with speakers to do a deeper dive of issues
- *Question, Mal Skowron:* Is the content provided about how to teach, solutions-based, or mix of both?
 - Mix of both: basic science, with more RI-focused solutions

- Opportunity for every individual presenter can develop customized slides
- *Chat Question, Jeanine M. Silversmith: How do folks join the RI chapter?*
 - <http://bit.ly/GreaterPVD>

Policy Committee

- Climate Crisis Campaign (see above)
- Coffee Hour - Wednesday, January 27 (3 pm?)
 - virtual, semi-interactive with topical breakout groups
 - inviting House and Senate leadership
- Legislative agenda discussion (PolComm on Monday, Dec. 14th, 4:30)
 - Transportation
 - Status of Green Bond
- Everyone welcome to notes and/or meetings –email Kai at kai@greenenergyconsumers.org to be added to PolComm listserv

President's Report and Strategic Planning update

- Strategic planning survey was conducted courtesy of Andrew Grande (Temple University)
 - Over 60 responses
 - A report will be provided at next meeting and on website once Andrew analyses
- Strategic Planning Committee
 - Have [finalized RFP for equity-based consultant](#), which members can pass along
 - Meeting next week for one hour
 - Anyone can participate in the meeting
 - developing and finalizing and evaluation criteria for the proposals that will come in (early January deadline)
- January Board Meeting
 - Focused on strategic planning and racial equity

Reports from ECRI fiscal agency projects

- Green Infrastructure Coalition
 - Coalition did a virtual stormwater expo in November with great attendance
 - Providence Stormwater Innovation Center
 - Identified maintenance of green infrastructure & construction oversight as key niches for work
 - Training Calendar for 2021 will soon be on [website](#)
- School Recycling Club
 - May be looking for more grants

Adjourn

- First motion Dana Goodman, Adjourned at 6:56 pm

Please take the ECRI Meeting Feedback Survey: bit.ly/ecrifeedback

