

Environment Council of Rhode Island



Membership Meeting, Dept. of Admin. Bldg., Conference Room B
December 3, 2018, 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

Attendees: Meg Kerr, Judee Burr, David Veliz, Nicole DiPaolo, Polly Barey, CJ Oppenhausser, Susan Korte, Brandon George, Kai Salem, Richard Dionne, Steve Ahlquist, Erika Niedowski, Angie Koziara, Gregory Schultz, Alex Kithes, Timmons Roberts, Paul Beaudette, Katherine Gibson, John Berard, Jeff Taylor, Eugenia Marks, Laura Landon, Nina Wolff-Landau, Nathaniel Pettit, Pete Galvin, Martin Lynn, Cristina Cabrera, Michael Roles, Kenneth Filarski, David Brunetti, Lisa Petrie, KellyAnn Cameron, Laura Brion, Joseph Tudine, Leah Bamberger, Michelle Beaudin, Kathleen Crawley, Macky McCleary, Mary Pendergast

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Approval of minutes
- Report: Pol Comm (John Berard)
- Presentations:
 - Water Supply Management in Rhode Island (Macky McCleary, Administrator, RI Division of Public Utilities and Carriers)
 - City of Providence Water Supply Management (TBD, City of Providence)
- Office report (Greg Gerritt)
- President's report (Meg Kerr)
 - Consideration of letter from Lisa Petrie
 - Consideration of marine monument letter
- Dates for upcoming meetings (Jan 7 general membership, Dec 10 Pol Comm/Ex Comm)
- Report: ECRI coffee hour (Kai Salem)
- Reports from ECRI fiscal agency projects (Agenda item deferred to January Meeting)
- Announcements (all)

Reminders:

ECRI meetings – first Monday of the month at 5:30.

ECRI PolComm meetings – second Monday of the month

The Minutes:

- Introductions and welcome
- John Berard moves to approve the minutes, Eugenia Marks seconds. All approve.

Report: Pol Comm (John Berard)

- ECRI policy committee meeting next Monday, Dec 9 at 4:30pm
- Goal to get ECRI members an update on what's happening in the General Assembly each day using the website/other technology – Let John know if you'd be interested in helping this effort
- Discussed making the ECRI report card a more collaborative project – it's a lot of work for one person
- Come to ECRI PolComm meetings to get more involved
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Presentation: Water Supply Management in Rhode Island (Macky McCleary, Administrator, RI Division of Public Utilities and Carriers)

- Water Resources Board merger with DPUC
- Steps that need to be taken now to address key issues related to water management
- The DPUC regulates a wide variety of industries and entities: major gas distribution company – National Grid, electric distribution companies, many others (Uber, Lyft)
- Want to move away from “command and control” regulations to address complex problems; market as a powerful force but not an omniscient god
- Rhode Island is going to have to deal with a number of issues related to climate change – “fires and floods” – Air and water temperatures are increasing, sea level rise, increased rainfall (endangering water treatment facilities – “all in the wrong place”)
- Rhode Island is small so we can't move the market – but we can lead the market. We're small, so we can make decisions quickly. Water is a place that we can lead.
- Water is a shared responsibility, abundant here but not equally distributed – DPUC goal: preserve and protect the commodities that Rhode Islanders need. Water Resources Board has a similar mission – protect water resources needed for health, safety and welfare of general public
- Water Resources Board has abundant statutory power but has not been funded or supported by staff for a time – DPUC wants to preserve WRB's powers
- WRB: Balancing the Development, Protection, Use and Conservation of water
- Question about appropriate media coverage – 98 percent of the work is behind the scenes, good media coverage of public work is important
- WRB being subsumed into DPUC will result in more funding and staff time – statutory proposal will come from the DPUC board
- Does WRB statute allow for mediation in municipal water affairs? Not sure if they have that authority

Presentation: City of Providence Water Supply Management (Leah Bamberger, Office of Sustainability, and Jeffrey Dana, City Solicitor, City of Providence)

- Protecting water for current and future residents – complex issues and financial challenges
- Drinking water supply for more than 60 percent of the state
- City using ownership of water supply to address pension shortfall – the main recommendation of significance from consultants was to do this to stabilize pension fund (25% funded pension)
- Pension at risk of insolvency; other aspects of the city’s budget are moving in the positive direction
- Monetizing water is something that’s being done across the country, for many reasons. Out west, to keep rates down.
- Leasing the water system – encouraging the state to create a statewide water authority to manage leasing of water. Long-term leasing proposal this year and last year.
- Posted an RFQ (request for qualifications) – looking for qualified operators of Providence water system, also a statement of what the city is looking for and what conditions the city is hoping the operator can adhere to (ie. rate stability)
- Probably monetization would require enabling legislation to move forward
- This is a strategy for the city to avoid bankruptcy at all costs, which is the worst case scenario for water. The city is not at the precipice of bankruptcy now, but this is a long-term look and plan.
- At no point has the city proposed selling the water system. Monetizing not privatizing water.
- Scituate has a tax agreement. Has there been engagement with the town of Scituate? Two years ago there was outreach, not last year. Questions in the room about engagement in Scituate and whether enough has been done in recent years.
- What other research has been done on options to fund the pension without monetizing water? Large publicly-available report is available online – it concludes that monetization of water is required along with a host of other strategies
- Cutting Public Utilities Commission out of rate setting – is that still part of the plan? Legislation has not been drafted yet this year. The intention in the past was to not have the PUC have oversight over the transaction with a new operator but to have authority over rate-setting after the transaction.
- Is there a problem with unpaid bills now? Not a significant problem
- Narragansett Bay Commission submitted their own bill last year to enable them to participate in agreements of this kind
- Can there be research done in indigenous rights? If the city decides to sell the parcels would the land go back to indigenous rights? Leah says that this is not the case. And the city is not trying to sell the land so extensive research has not been done in that area.
- What kinds of consultation have been done with the community? Has the city done recent consultations? In the past, city gave community presentations.
 - Statement read from California climate summit, presented there by communities of color discussing protecting water as sacred in response to climate change. Linking water rights and indigenous land rights. This runs counter to the city’s plan to monetize water.
 - There have been no conversations with Indigenous People’s Network, EJ League.
 - Feeling that the city has failed thus far to have updated conversations with communities.
- What cities are good examples? Allentown and Scranton, Pennsylvania – Allentown was an example of a regionalization, which the city proposed a few years ago
- A number of people state that corporations operating based on corporate interests would put our water at risk
- Making lots of references to water systems out west – but the water rights are completely different

here. Point out here are also east coast examples.

- Providence's Water and current forestry activities – how would this work with a new operator? The operator would hopefully enter into leasing agreements to continue this work
- Indianapolis advisor to the city on water monetization, that community had to fight to gain back control over their water after monetization failed to work. He now works for a right-wing group. Jeffrey points out he is no longer a consultant.
- RFQ is available to the public – ECRI members can take a look.

Office report (Greg Gerritt)

- 7 application for Tisdale Awards
- Compost conference – looking for volunteers to help manage the registration table
- Annual Meeting – need more volunteers to help plan. Suggestions of theme: water in providence; water quality and lead; port of providence – from extractive to regenerative; east bay bike path; Urban Rivers; shore access on Aquidneck Island; Insect apocalypse; Burrillville; renewable energy siting
- Send Greg annual meeting suggestions on topic and location by Friday
- Contribution – year end appeal for the EdFund

President's report (Meg Kerr)

Consideration of letter from Lisa Petrie

- ExComm recommended that we do not support signing on to this letter to the governor. The vote was not unanimous, there was some dissent.
- Lisa Petrie gives a presentation of the letter – the content is consistent with positions that ECRI has supported in the past though the tone may be more confrontational than usual. We've opposed Burrillville and the LNG facility already and we've stated as ECRI that we stand in solidarity with the environmental justice community. Environmental justice was identified as a top priority at the ECRI retreat.
- Rich Dionne gives a statement in support of the letter – ECRI is here to represent the entire environmental community. Building these plants would make it impossible to meet the state's climate goals. Join forces with all environmental partners to send a message to the governor.
- Cristina Cabrera gives a statement in support of the letter – this is what we need to go from fossil fuels to a regenerative economy. Building an LNG facility in the port of Providence is a direct threat to marginalized communities in Washington Park and the Port of Providence – it's a toxic space. Need to keep our leaders accountable.
- David Veliz – part of the No LNG coalition – this should be a no-brainer. Some communities are suffering from the division of conservation and environmental justice. This is an opportunity to stand for environmental justice. This involves health hazards for the community most directly impacted.
- Audubon via Meg Kerr statement about not supporting the letter – the tone is concerning, although she's on board with the issue. The letter includes charges against Raimondo that don't seem pertinent, and it's driven by emotion.
- Clean Water Action via John – the tone is an issue, ECRI is already on the record opposing these power plants. It isn't a strategic move for ECRI to sign on to this letter. ECRI has worked for a long

time to be able to have conversations with the Governor, we can do that now. The organizations signing on to the letter are doing important work, but this isn't the role for ECRI.

- A number of people have issue with the tone of the letter. There can't be a re-work of the letter because there already are signatories. Some propose adding to the existing letter.
- ECRI could instead write a new letter or prioritize meeting with the governor asap around these issues if this is our role to play.
- Timmons Roberts – tone is confrontational but everything in it is factually correct. This is a gut check for ECRI. ECRI could put out another letter later, but we are being asked to do this now and it's important to stand with the environmental justice community.
- A number of people speak in support of signing the letter (Judee Burr, Erica Niedowski, David Brunetti, Mary Prendergast, Angie Koziera) – we need to show our support and solidarity. Erica Niedowski makes the point that Acadia Center could not sign on to this letter, but ECRI can be a voice that's larger than Acadia Center.
- Integrity is the best strategy – business as usual approach to climate politics isn't working. Emotion behind the letter is warranted.
- Cristina Cabrera – It's also important that grassroots groups be present in the ECRI space. They are not represented now. They don't feel welcome now. You would be personal if your children were being impacted. Don't feel comfortable with politics as usual – need to be inclusive of all voices. Sometimes it's uncomfortable.
- David Veliz – this is hard, it's been a long road for the conservation movement to come to work with the EJ community, these communities are struggling with environmental racism. Might be uncomfortable but we are being given this opportunity.
- Laura Landen moves to approve the letter, Rich Dionne seconds. More discussion?
- We should be thinking about what we stand to lose as a movement by not standing with the environmental justice community, not what we stand to lose by not appealing to the Governor.
- John Berard – hearing the comments in the room, Clean Water Action has changed its vote and will be voting in support of the letter

All in favor? Unanimous vote in support of signing the letter (including absentee vote in support of the letter from Toxics Action Center)

Consideration of marine monument letter

- Letter following up on presentation from CLF.

Eugenia Marks moves to sign on to the letter, Laura Landen seconds. Unanimous vote in favor of signing.

Dates for upcoming meetings (Jan 7 general membership, Dec 10 Pol Comm/Ex Comm)

Reports:

ECRI coffee hour (Kai)

- In January, speakers will be arranged
- Do you want to be included in the Faces of ECRI booklet? Kai & Greg will send out the document
- Let Kai know if they want to be included in the planning

Reports from ECRI fiscal agency projects

- [nothing new to report – this will be deferred to January meeting]

Announcements

- Compost conference
- Toy drive for DARE at the Parlor, Dec 11, 5-7pm
- Lisa: we should try to meet with the Governor – Meg will look into that
- Send Sue Korte your announcements (email Greg, he will send to her)
- Students part of Sunrise Rhode Island – talking to community groups about transportation. Getting feedback and sign-ons – Greg will share their documents
- Water Resources Board meeting coming up – ask Eugenia for details
- Comments about offshore wind – 3pm Dec 5 meeting about offshore wind at the nature conservancy
- PolComm meeting 4:30pm next week
- 1pm at DEM plastics commission conversation
- January 24 – Clean water action and climate Action Rhode Island “The Devil We Know” at Rochambeau
- March 9 – land and water summit at URI

Adjourned 7:50pm