

Environment Council of Rhode Island



Membership and Board Meeting Minutes September 14, 2020, 5:30 -7:00 PM (Virtual)

Attendees

Jerry Elmer, Susan Korte, Greg Gerritt, Kate Sayles, Scott Millar, Priscilla De La Cruz, Eric Wuesthoff, Meg Kerr, Susannah Hatch, Paige Therien, Eugenia Marks, Christopher Reilly, Nicole DiPaolo, Sue Anderbois, Katherine Gibson, Ken Filarski, Seth Handy, James Crawley, Topher Hamblett, Paul Beaudette, Barry Schiller, Kai Salem, Dana Goodman, Barbara Walsh, Francis Pullaro, Karen Bradbury, Mary Jane Sorrentino, Mal Skowron, Hank Webster, Candace Powning, Angie Koziara.

Welcome and Introductions

- Priscilla De La Cruz began meeting at 5:31 pm
- Reconvening after no meeting in July or August
- No opposition was given by any participant for having the meeting recorded – recording began at 5:35 pm

Approval of minutes from June Meeting (Annual Meeting)

First motion by Jerry Elmer. Seconded by Paul Beaudette. All vote in favor - no abstentions or oppositions. June minutes approved at 5:47 pm.

Office Report (Greg Gerritt)

- Current balances: ECRI \$36,539.28; Ed Fund operations account is \$41,426.23
- There are a few organizations that have not yet paid this year's dues. I have been following up, but if you have any questions as to whether or not you are paid up I can answer your questions.
- Upcoming projects and uncertainty – email ideas & suggestions to Greg
 - With uncertainty about our ability to sell raffle tickets to support the enterprise, would appreciate your thoughts on the Tisdale awards and how to do that in the COVID era.
 - We are unsure whether we shall be able to gather this winter for the nature video festival. Should we do it as strictly an online event? Rhode Island Natural History Survey has shown interest in an online version.

Presentations and Updates

Christopher Reily and Kate Sayles, RI Forest Partnership and Forest Values [Report](#)

- Christopher Reily and Kate Sayles are co-coordinators for Rhode Island Woodland Partnership

- The Value of RI's Forests Report was developed for the Rhode Island Forest Conservation Advisory Committee in 2019 with Judee Burr
- RI Forests = rural and urban
 - 39% of RI classified as urban land, 56% of RI is forested (oak-hickory is most dominant, with some examples of rare forest types such as cedar swamps and oak-holly)
- Majority of forested land is privately owned
- Highly fragmented by development and infrastructure
- Forested lands have high value: clean the air and water, mitigate flooding, moderate temperature (mitigates heat-island effect of cities), economic engines, allows wildlife to thrive, store and absorb carbon (avg carbon storage for RI's forest types= 75 metric tons/acre)
- Ramping up renewable energy infrastructure & conserving forests can be done hand in hand
- RI forests absorb nearly 500,000 metric tons of carbon each year (approximately equal to annual emissions of 100,000 passenger vehicles)
- Forests are critical to meeting climate goals - possible strategies to conserve:
 - Maintain & increase forest coverage
 - Improve and expand forest management
 - These, combined, will maintain and increase carbon stocks which = more carbon sequestration
 - Create or dedicate state funding for forest conservation (state and non-state funding, taxes, watershed protection funds)
 - Adopt a Community Preservation Act (like Massachusetts)
 - allows for a small % of property sales to be redirected
 - Ideally, the state would match
 - Work together to balance forest conservation and energy development in RI – we need both strategies to be employed
 - Use forestry as a tool to enhance forest condition across the landscape
 - How can we bolster the work of RIDEM?
 - Municipalities should use land use planning tools to avoid forest loss
 - Use state land-use plans
- Q&A
 - In regard to the Community Preservation Act – another revenue source could be around hardscape development (i.e. parking lots)
 - Another benefit of forest management is decreased likelihood of wildfires.
 - Determine which other groups see this as a policy priority
 - What legislation would be most beneficial for maintaining forests as a climate change mitigation tool?
 - One example: NE Forestry Foundation – Build it With Wood Initiative – encourages greener construction with smaller carbon footprint (such as the cross-laminated timber technique)
 - RI currently encourages development sprawl – RI Woodland Partnership's recommendation is to bolster how we think of this at the local level & that all future development (not just renewable energy) should happen on previously-developed land
 - Covid-19 is encouraging more and more people to move to more rural areas

Susannah Hatch, [New England For Offshore Wind](#) coalition overview and update

- ECRI voted to endorse the campaign earlier this year
- ECRI's last presentation on this coalition was in [November 2019](#) - By Nicole DiPaolo, National Wildlife Federation & Eric Wilkinson, Environmental League of Massachusetts
- This regional coalition launched August 26th, 2020
 - Coalition now has over 50 endorsers and partners from various sectors – labor unions, academic/research, businesses
- Meeting behind the scenes working on advocating at the federal level to reinforce the policy work being done in each state
- Coalition Mission, Vision and Shared Values now on website
- Looking ahead to 2021 legislative priorities
 - Including continued advocacy to Governors and State Legislatures
- ECRI policy priorities recognize that we need offshore wind - how do we do this within the in responsible ways (i.e. science-positive)?
- Also prioritizing equity, inclusion, and participatory governance
 - Exploring policy pathways to increase socioeconomic diversity in participation
 - Allocating funds to be available as sub grants for environmental justice groups (four sub-grants so far from four different states)
 - Call for ECRI members and Climate Crisis campaign partners can provide more funding
- Partnership with Blue Green Alliance to offer labor training and hear what is needed by vulnerable labor forces and those that are most impacted by climate change

Policy Committee Update (Kai Salem)

- PolComm typically meets on second Monday of the month (September's meeting is on Monday the 21st)
- Congratulations to Clean Water Action and Climate Action for primary election results - many endorsed candidates were elected
- Green Bond was supposed to be on ballot this November – have been pushed back by Senate and House
 - They will reconvene and possibly hold a special election – members should still contact their legislators to ask that the bond be considered
- Green Report Card to be released this month
 - Grades legislators on their voting record
 - 2020 Green Report Card will be a bit different because there were no environmental bills considered this session. It will emphasize that the legislature should have acted urgently around climate issues, yet they failed to do so.
 - Have received and noted input from ECRI members and others
- Off-shore wind
 - Hoping PolComm will be an advocate for offshore wind development in RI.
- Climate Crisis Campaign
 - Campaign built momentum last session by getting people to contact their legislators

President's Report and Strategic Planning Update (Priscilla De La Cruz)

- Executive Committee has been organizing the strategic planning process over the summer
 - Will center equity and justice
 - One-pager regarding our goals and visions to be shared soon
 - NWF affiliate has provided \$10,000 grant – ExComm is currently working on MOU
 - Will vote on the MOU at next meeting
- [Black Lives Matter statement](#) was sent to membership and posted on website in June 2020
 - Introduces ECRI's commitment to center anti-racism work in strategic planning process
- Recommendation to nominate Nicole DiPaolo as Co-Vice President of development
- Call for members and individuals to participate in the strategic planning process, including equity trainings.
 - Working-group committee to be formed in coming months – along with other ways to organize the strategic planning process

Announcements

- Eugenia Marks – Water Resources Board
 - Drought Steering Committee submitted a recommendation to Governor on Friday, September 11, 2020 that a statewide drought advisory be issued
 - agriculture in the state is suffering
 - Dry wells in multiple towns have reported
 - Scituate Reservoir is at 83% capacity

Adjourn

- October 5th 5:30-7 pm is next ECRI board meeting
- First motion by Eugenia Marks. Seconded by Kai Salem. All voted in favor - no abstentions or oppositions. Meeting Adjourned at 6:57 pm.