



Rhode Island Local Officials 2025 Municipal Education Program

02/25/25

Program Syllabus



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Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program

The Division of Statewide Planning, Department of Administration is part of the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, established by RI General Law [§ 42-11-10](#). The Division is the centralized planning agency for Rhode Island and staffs the State Planning Council. The Council, comprised of federal, state, and local representatives, and other advisors, guides the work of the Program. The objectives of the Program are to:

- Prepare State Guide Plan Elements & coordinate activities of the public and private sectors within the framework of the State Guide Plan.
- Assist municipal governments with land use and transportation planning, serve as the statewide Metropolitan Planning Organization for transportation planning purposes, and adopt the State Transportation Improvement Program.
- Function as the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee and maintain the Statewide Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- Advise the Governor and others on physical, social, and economic topics related to land use and transportation planning.

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TITLE VI – Nondiscrimination Policy & Complaint Process

The Division of Statewide Planning gives notice that it is a policy to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, and related statutes and regulations in all programs and activities. Title VI requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, or national origin be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity for which the Division receives federal financial assistance. Any person who believes he or she has been aggrieved by an unlawful discriminatory practice under Title VI has a right to file a formal complaint with the Division. Any such complaint must be in writing and filed within 180 days following the date of the alleged discriminatory occurrence. Title VI Discrimination Complaint Forms may be obtained from the Division by calling (401) 222-7901 or at www.planning.ri.gov.



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Authorization for Program

Pursuant to [R.I. General Law 45-70-3](#), *Land Use Law and Planning*, the following is a syllabus for the Division for Statewide Planning (the Division) to conduct a required education program on behalf of the Director of the Department of Administration (the Director) for municipal planning, zoning, and historic district boards, or commission members in land use law and planning. The program is subject to the approval of the Director and appropriations to the Division.

Topics & Advisory Committee

After consultation with the Advisory Committee for Education of the State Planning Council, the Division Staff (Staff) creates the program syllabus. The Program delivery schedule is subject to available staff resources and Division funding. The Program design intent is to be flexible for using a variety of instructional means including, but not limited to, traditional style classroom & seminar training, virtual workshops, virtual webinars, on-site presentations, website materials, and other means of training. The focus is to be for the singular purpose of providing education for members of the valuable volunteer historic, planning and zoning boards and commissions of the various municipalities of the State. Basic topics that **may** be covered in the educational program are listed in Chapter 45-70-3, such as, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. history and purposes of land use planning and zoning
- b. board functions and legal tools for land use planning
- c. state laws applicable to the work of planning, zoning, and historic district boards/commissions, and affordable housing
- d. best practices for managing public meetings
- e. roles within the land use review process
- f. using community comprehensive plans in decisions
- g. understanding due process/property rights related to land use decisions
- h. basics for reviewing land development applications
- i. basics for making land use decisions and setting conditions when approving applications
- j. annual updates of legislative changes impacting board or commission responsibilities, and
- k. sea-level rise, stormwater management & flooding.

The initial advisory committee was appointed on December 8, 2022. This Committee was created per R.I. General Law § 45-70-3 and the [Rules and Standards](#) of the State Planning Council, Rule 1.1.7.E, Committees. The purpose of the Committee is to assist the Staff in creating a municipal education program. From time to time the Staff will add or remove additional non-statutorily required members and or ex-officio members to the Committee based upon participation, availability, and expertise needed for the topical content of the program. The following is the excerpt of the Rules specific to creating this Committee:



E. Municipal Education – An advisory committee for education (ACE), as provided for by Rhode Island General Law [CHAPTER 45-22 Local Planning Board or Commission](#), shall advise the Division of Statewide Planning Staff (Staff) on creating an educational program (the Program) for municipal planning, historic, and zoning commission or board members.

- 1. Appointments** - The Staff shall recommend appointments to the Council, when necessary, in accordance with Section 1.1.7.A of these Rules for committee membership. The Advisory Committee shall be composed of at least but not limited to representatives of the organizations identified in Chapter 45-22. Appointments shall be for a two-year term.
- 2. Membership** - The number of members of this Committee shall be recommended by the Staff to be approved by the Council and may be changed from time to time as deemed necessary as approved by the Council. Members shall be recommended by Staff based upon backgrounds in educational training combined with experience in municipal land use planning. When a vacancy occurs on the Committee, the Staff shall recommend a replacement to the Council to fill the vacancy for the remainder of that term.
- 3. Meetings** – In accordance with Chapter 45-22, the Staff shall organize and conduct the meetings of the advisory committee. The Staff shall set advisory committee meetings as needed to conduct the educational program. In accordance with Chapter 45-22, staff shall call for at least one annual meeting of the advisory committee.
- 4. Duties** – The members shall attend meetings when called and provide advisory educational expertise on addressing the topics outlined by Chapter 45-22, information on best land use practices, and other related knowledge on municipal land use planning to the Staff for incorporating into the Program. The Staff will be the advisory committee liaison to the Council.

According to [R.I. General Law 45-70-3](#), the advisory committee shall include, but not be limited to, representatives listed below.

- American Planning Association - R.I. Chapter
- American Council of Engineering Companies - Rhode Island
- Grow Smart Rhode Island
- Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns
- Rhode Island Builders Association
- University of Rhode Island Coastal Resource Center, and
- Office of Housing and Community Development.



Training Descriptions

In 2022 it was estimated within the 39 cities and towns, there were 680+/- members of historic, planning, and or zoning boards/commissions that needed to receive training. This Section describes the **2025** Proposed Syllabus. The Syllabus is subject to change due to availability of staff resources, financial budget appropriations, and General Assembly enactments related to land use enabling laws.

- **Workshop #1** – 3-hours - Introductory Workshop - between January to June - one per month virtually.
- **Workshop #2** – 1-hour Annual Update – one per month virtually between January to June and subject to availability of staff resources. Also possibly at 2025 RILOTS in November.
- **Workshop #3** – In person and virtual training for Historic District Commissions through a Cooperative agreement with Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) through the Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program.
 - Anticipate an in person late in 2025
 - Anticipate one virtual workshop in 2025
- **RI Local Official Training Summit (RILOTS)** – Work August to November to develop a 3-hour in person meeting to be held in November. Subject to availability of staff resources and financial appropriations. Topics TBD by working with the ACE, however, may include offering for the 1-hour Annual Update (see Workshop #2).
- **Online Training for Planning Boards** – Continue work through two separate Cooperative Agreements with the University of Rhode Island on the development of online stormwater/flooding education and begin updates to PREPRI climate change/sea level rise training. Target dates for online training is December 2025.

Descriptions

Workshop #1 – 3-hours - Introductory Workshop - Conducting Public Meetings

Ongoing - delivered by Zoom

Future - Continued virtual trainings - eventually develop an optional self-directed online training for certificates.

Description - A multi-topic course for the required 3.0 hours introductory training for all 3 boards addressing the 14 suggested topics from the Statute. Outreach through local land use planners for distribution to municipal board members. Includes an exit survey for evaluation purposes.



Workshop #2 – 1-hour Annual Update - A multi-topic workshop with variable topics developed working with the ACE. The 2024 updated highlighted the General Assembly legislative enabling changes. It is anticipated this training will need to be updated for 2026 after studying the 2025 Assembly changes. Outreach through local land use planners for distribution to municipal board members. Future topics TBD by exit surveys from participants. Includes an exit survey for evaluation purposes.

Ongoing - (1.0 hour) virtual as staff resources allow

Future - (1.0 hour) virtual & in-person legislative updates at RILOTS

Description - Continued virtual trainings working around municipal meetings as staff resources allow - eventually develop an optional self-directed online training for certificates. Outreach through local land use planners for distribution to municipal board members. Topics will vary from year to year.

Stormwater Management/Flooding Training (required for Planning Boards only)

2024 - (2.0 hours) training self-directed using existing resources

2025/ Future - Online training for self-directed certification for stormwater /flooding training.

Description - This will be eventually become online training for meeting the required two hours every two years in management/flooding training requirement for Planning Boards. The Division is currently working with URI NEMO/Cooperative Extension for content development. The Training will use the University of RI hosting platform, *Brightspace Engage* to deliver two hours' worth of interactive slides/video and quiz content about stormwater training and impacts from transportation infrastructure such as roads for municipal planning boards and through the Platform, track attendance. Target date for online training are stormwater/ flooding Spring 2025.

Sea Level Rise/Climate Change Training (required for Planning Boards only)

2024 - (2.0 hours) training self-directed using updated PrepRI materials

2025/ Future - Online training for self-directed certification split into numerous mini -topical sessions

Description - This will be eventually become online training for meeting the required two hours every two years in sea-level rise management/climate change training requirement for Planning Boards. The Division is currently working with URI CRC for content development. The Training will use the University of RI hosting platform, *Brightspace Engage* to deliver two hours' worth of interactive slides/video and quiz content about sea-level rise management/climate change for municipal planning boards and through the Platform, track attendance. Target date for online training is December 2025.

Historic District Commission targeted training through RIHPHC

2025 - Deliver through a partnership with the RIHPHC the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program (CAMP) in both formats of in person and virtual training.

Future – Continue to partner with RIHPHC to conduct training from the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions on an annual basis.



Description - This training will address responsibilities of historic district commissions for areas within their purview such as training on architecture, character-defining features, use of composite materials, areas for administrative approvals and other areas pertinent to work of historic commissions. It will also provide an equivalent training to the 3-hour introductory training or annual update requirements.

RI Local Officials Training Summit (RILOTS) for introductory 3.0 hours or annual update 1.0 credit

2025 - Work with ACE for development of 2nd in person summit. Focus on topics requested in exit surveys of participants, and possibly annual update materials. If staff resources allow possibly introductory training.

Future – continue annually if funding and staff resources allow.

Description - a half-day in-person conference for 3-hours of mandated land use training held in a central location in the State. Free to municipal volunteers. Outreach through local planners for distribution to municipal board members. Priority for municipal planning, zoning, and historic district board members in registrations. Purpose is to fulfill both required introductory training, and annual update. Includes an exit survey for evaluation purposes.

Exemptions & Equivalent Trainings

The following exemptions can be granted pursuant to [R.I. General Law 45-70-3](#):

- (1) Ex-Officio Board members - All training is waived for the chief municipal officer of the city or town, or any person designated to serve on a planning board in an ex officio and non-voting capacity.
- (2) Exemptions to three-hour introductory training only - Any person who has completed any of the following may apply to the Division for an exemption to the initial three-hour training requirement:
 - (a) at least a three-hour or more equivalent workshop or course of study in land use and planning taken from an accredited college or university, and or a workshop taken from the Division no more than two years prior to January 1, 2023. (The Division issued exemption certificates to 75 persons for participating in voluntary workshops between 2020 and 2022.) The Course shall, in the determination of the DSP Staff acting for the Director or in consultation with ACE, be equivalent to the required three-hour introductory training, or
 - (b) maintains an updated certification by the American Institute of Certified Planners, or
 - (c) has obtained a master's or doctorate degree in planning from an accredited college or university, or



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(d) has completed three hour or more course or seminar on historic district commissions sponsored by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission or a similar DSP approved sponsoring agency.

(e) has completed a DSP approved three-hour workshop presented by a former trainer from the Division's Land Use Training Collaborative using the same training materials as the Division.

Applications - applications for an exemption shall be by email to the Division's designated training staff with a request for an exemption and at least the following documentation attached:

- a copy of a diploma for completion of a master's or doctorate degree in planning from an accredited college or university, or
- a copy of a certificate for and the current certification number issued by the American Institute of Certified Planners, or
- a statement of completion and or certificate from Division Staff indicating prior workshop(s) completed presented by the Division no earlier than January 1, 2020, or
- a description of the number of hours completed and a copy of a school issued transcript or a certification of completion certificate of a land use planning course or courses from an accredited college, university or other recognized provider of land use education as determined by the DSP Staff no earlier than January 1, 2020, or
- an agenda from a training course or seminar for historic district commissions along with evidence of registration and confirmation of full attendance from a DSP Staff approved sponsoring agency no earlier than January 1, 2020. *See Appendix B for a potential example.*

- A copy of the workshop title, date(s), times, hours completed, and a roster of attendees signed by the former Land Use Training Collaborative Trainer and an associated municipal historic, planning, or zoning official.

A determination (statement) of exemption certificate will be sent by Staff by email reply to the applicant. If an exemption is approved, it is up to the applicant to file with the city or town clerk the certificate if they are exempt from the initial introductory training, however, pursuant to [R.I. General Law § 45-70-3](#), they remain subject to annual continuing education requirements.

Request for Acceptance of Equivalent Training

Applicants seeking credit for an equivalent number of hours of training provided by others shall submit an email request to designated [DSP training staff](#). The request shall include submission of a copy of the agenda from the training, evidence of registration and confirmation of full attendance or certificate of completion from the sponsoring agency. Evidence submitted will be verified with sponsoring agency and upon validation, an equivalency certificate will be issued. Applications for equivalency must be directly specific to the duties and functions of planning, zoning and historic district boards and commissions as defined under Rhode Island Law. Generalized training for other topics and areas of interest while exemplary, will not be granted equivalency. *See Appendix B for a sample of directly equivalent types of training.*



Records & Reporting

The Division shall maintain a list of all persons trained and a list of all exemptions granted. The Division shall submit to the Director, the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Senate President, a report detailing the program development and completion of training by board members of each community no later than April 30, 2027.

Appendix A Sample of Equivalent Training by Others

What: Historic District Commission Professional Education & Training - Training provided by instructors from the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions

When: October 28, 2023 — 9:00 am to 4:30 pm

Where: Warwick, RI

Sponsored By: Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission

Agenda: submit detailed agenda of topics and timeline for the day.