

Rhode Island Local Officials Training Program



EVALUATION 2024



Department of Administration
Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning
www.planning.ri.gov



2024 PROGRAM

Program Goal & Purpose - The Land Use and Education Team (Staff) continued to deliver a standardized curriculum of training detailing land use review responsibilities for the estimated 680 +/- local officials (volunteers) of local historic, planning and zoning boards and commissions as mandated by R.I. General Law [§45-70](#). The training content was developed with the assistance of the Advisory Committee for Education (ACE) who are appointed by the State Planning Council. There were 5 meetings held for the Committee between February and November 2024. The Land Use and Education Team was comprised of a staff of two full-time employees for all but the month of December 2024. The purpose of the Program is to provide education for local community volunteers and it is designed to cover how to conduct public meetings and the R.I. General Law responsibilities for conducting various land use reviews.

Partner Agencies - In 2024, in addition to the ACE, several other State agencies assisted in the program;

- University of Rhode Island Nonpoint Source Education for Municipal Officials (URI NEMO)
- University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center (URI CRC)
- Department of Environmental Management – Narragansett Bay Research Reserve, and (DEM NBRR)
- Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC)

Program Accomplishments – the 2024 Program **trained a total of 202 local officials from 30 communities** as follows:

- Staff provided 8 virtual educational workshops at which 63 participants from 15 communities received standardized training consisting of an introductory 3-hour course highlighting the planning responsibilities of the Division, best practices for conducting public meetings, and land use review responsibilities for local officials.
- Staff conducted the 1st Rhode Island Local Officials Training Summit (RILOTS) on November 9, 2024 at which 69 participants from 25 communities received training. See page 3 for more details on the Summit.
- Approved Equivalent Training:
 - Standardized training provided by municipal solicitors for 37 participants in 4 communities.
 - Working with RIHPHC, provided virtual Historical District CAMP training from the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions for 33 participants from 11 communities for local historic district commissioners and other local officials.
- Developed with assistance from the ACE, a one-hour continuing education workshop updating land use planning responsibilities and other topics and municipal boards for virtual delivery in 2025.
- Worked with Partner agencies to address certain mandated education topics:
 - Worked through a cooperative agreement with URI NEMO to continue to develop an online, two-hour stormwater / flooding training for planning board members using the URI Brightspace Engage learning platform.
 - Developed a cooperative agreement with URI CRC and DEM NBRR to begin to develop an online course concerning climate change and sea level rise for planning board members by updating the existing PrepRI webpage to URI Brightspace Engage learning platform for self-directed training.

Summary of All Local Officials Trained from 2021 to November 9, 2024: 526 persons from 38 communities (77% of the target audience.)

Outreach - The schedule of workshops and other educational items was set at the end of each month by Staff and was subject to the workload of and the Staff's availability. Workshops were conducted virtually in the evenings for the training. The selected evenings were scheduled using a central list of local historic, planning, and zoning board/commission meetings created by the Staff. Outreach for workshops, once scheduled, was conducted through the Division's monthly newsletter issued on the first of the month and the Rhode Island American Planning Association Chapter's weekly email to members. Direct emails were also sent to local planning staff for distribution to their boards and commissions. For tracking purposes, the participants are required to register by email individually for each workshop.

RHODE ISLAND LOCAL OFFICIALS SUMMIT (RILOTS) 2024

WHEN: November 9, 2024
TIME: 8:30 AM—NOON
WHERE: Bristol Room — Crowne Plaza
 801 Greenwich Ave, Warwick, RI 02886

WHO: The Land Use and Education Team (Staff) from the Rhode Island Division of Statewide Planning conducted an in-person gathering to provide training and peer networking opportunities for volunteer local officials on historic, planning, and or zoning boards/commissions.



WHAT/HOW: The Staff working with the Advisory Committee for Education and several guest ex-officio instructors (Trainers) guided participants through a role-playing exercise concerning the responsibilities of local officials under the State Enabling Laws for land use and affordable housing. Group assignments (roles) were given upon check in at the registration desk. The 10 trainers helped guide the participants through a review of a master plan application for a faux comprehensive permit application for affordable housing. Participants were assigned to one of 6 different groups representing the various types of stakeholders in the comprehensive permit review process. With the help of the Trainers, a mock planning board hearing was conducted.

COST: None to participants it was free training for volunteer local officials on historic, planning, and zoning boards & commissions. The training was supported by the Division of Statewide Planning with funding from the US Federal Highway Administration, and RI State appropriations.



WHY: To help local officials meet the educational mandates of RI Gen. Law [§ 42-11-10](#). Attending the Summit fulfilled requirements for local officials for either an Introductory Course equal to 3-hours of training or a 1-hour Annual Update if prior training had been completed. Participants were emails certificates for the training.

ATTENDANCE: Local officials were individually emailed an invitation. Preregistration was required. Eighty-two persons registered along with 10 trainers for an expected count of 92 persons. **There were 69 participants representing local historic, planning, or zoning boards or commissions from 25 communities.** Among the 69 participants, 12 were historic district commissioners, 33 planning board /commissioners, and 22 were zoning board officials. The final headcount for the event when including the 10 trainers, was 79 persons.

FEEDBACK: Participants were asked to fill out an evaluation form for the Summit before leaving. Of the 69 participants, there were 57 evaluations received. See page 4 for more details on the feedback received.



Workshops & Feedback

Division of Statewide Planning Virtual Workshops Feedback

Feedback for the virtual workshops was gathered by Zoom exit surveys. The Surveys have asked four questions. Two questions had the choice of agree, disagree or no opinion. One question was a write in answer. The final question was to determine participant interest/ availability for conducting the in-person event (RILOTS).



- Overwhelmingly the participants agreed that the virtual workshops were informative and would help them in their roles as board members. More than a dozen exit surveys have been collected since initiating the surveys in 2022, and only 1 negative response has been received.
- Most commented they liked the Zoom workshop formats. They were time efficient, well run, and a good use of the volunteer's time.
- The write in topics mentioned most frequently were; more on Roberts Rules of order, more on the power of comprehensive plans, a desire for online self-teaching modules, defining hardships, writing actual decisions with case studies, more ethics, more on standards for boards, more HDC materials, more on comprehensive permits, and more about appeals.
- Numerous write-in topics were specific and outside the mandated scope of the Law for the basic training were: information on solar energy and utility companies, other building or State rules that affect planning, more information on climate change, public speaking, and wastewater management,

“Thank you for the training, very helpful.” 2023 feedback

“Thank you for a very professional and thorough presentation!!” 2023 feedback

“And thank you for an informative training session. The time, effort and commitment it takes to produce and provide these sessions is appreciated.” 2025 feedback

2024 RILOTS Evaluations & Feedback

For the first ever in person Summit held by the Division of Statewide Planning, there were 69 total participants. Fifty-seven participants returned evaluation forms. Overall, the Summit was viewed positively and considered a good event by 52 participants. The forms asked four questions. Two questions had the choice of agree, disagree or no opinion. One question was a write in answer. The following summarizes the feedback received. Numeric answers will not tally as not every question was answered on every evaluation form.

- Question 1: 51 participants found the Summit informative, 5 disagreed and there was 1 no opinion.
- Question 2: 35 participants said the information presented would help in their role as a board/commission member, 5 disagreed, and 4 had no opinions.
- Question 3 was the write-in question asking for what topics they would like more training on:
 - The top topics requested were: zoning board specific topics; defining the role of s=State agencies in reviews/authorities, historic district commission specific procedures, information on specific changes in the enabling laws, planning board specific legal authorities.
 - There were 33 complex planning related topics outside the mandated scope of the law for basic training requested including: assessing environmental factors, stormwater management designs, science of OWTS, assessment of municipal service capacity, avoiding local conflicts, *“what to do when the developer lied”*, how to ask for plan changes, and how to use procedures effectively.
- Question 4 asked for interest in providing training during the workday in addition to evenings – 25 persons answered they could take training during the day during the workweek.

Some quotes from the Evaluations were:

“This was great! Thank you!” 2024 RILOTS feedback

“Staff hosting the event, including the volunteers, were really great! Amazing time!” 2024 RILOTS feedback