



Rhode Island Local Officials 2026 Municipal Education Program

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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 land Use and Education Team of the Division for Statewide Planning (the Division) to conduct a required education program on behalf of the Director of the Department of Administration for municipal planning, zoning, and historic district boards, or commission members in land use law and planning. The provision of the Program is subject to appropriations available to the Division.

Topics & Advisory Committee

After consultation with the Advisory Committee for Education of the State Planning Council, the Land Use and Education Staff (Staff) creates the program syllabus annually. 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, website materials, and other means of training. The Program focus is 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 the Law, 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 on topics impacting board or commission responsibilities, and
- k. sea-level rise, stormwater management & flooding.

The initial advisory committee for education 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. From time to time the Council annually in December will renew or appoint members to the Committee as recommended by Staff. The purpose of the Committee is to assist the Staff in creating the 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.



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.

Staff continues to recommend to the State Planning Council that a representative of the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission staff serve on the Committee.

Training Delivery & Descriptions

This Section describes the **2026 Proposed Syllabus**. It is estimated within the 39 cities and towns, there are 680+/- members of historic, planning, and or zoning boards/commissions that need to receive training. 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. Availability of workshops and training opportunities are posted monthly on the homepage of the Division and emailed to municipal planners for distribution to board volunteers. Scheduling workshops also considers exit survey feedback and the timing and days of monthly municipal meetings. The following is the anticipated Syllabus for 2026.

- **3-hour Introductory Workshop** (*Ongoing*)
 - Description - This is a core 1-hour virtual multi-topic workshop for the required 3.0 hours introductory training mandated for all 3 boards addressing suggested minimum topics from the Statute. Also, this requirement may also be fulfilled by a volunteer attending 2026 RILOTS in person. Includes an exit survey for evaluation purposes.
 - 2026 - Amend existing workshop materials as needed due to 2025 legislative enabling changes and review with ACE in early 2026. Anticipate conducting a virtual workshop once via Zoom platform between January to June subject to staff resources. Demand for the workshop has been declining. Most of the target audience has taken this workshop. Potentially, a 2nd workshop could be held at the end of the year.
 - Future – Continue providing virtual trainings and work with University of Rhode Island Nonpoint source Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO) for development of optional self-directed 3-hour online training course to be hosted on *Brightspace Engage* Platform. (See also the Stormwater /Flooding Training topic for Planning Boards.)



- **1-hour Annual Update Workshop (Ongoing)**

- Description – This is a core 1-hour virtual multi-topic workshop for annual updates on variable topics impacting the three board or commission responsibilities. This requirement may also be fulfilled by a volunteer attending 2026 RILOTS in person. Includes an exit survey for evaluation purposes.
 - Program note & recommendation - experience in 2025 revealed the universe of 680 +/- officials that need this training exceeds the staff capacity to deliver. Consider online options and a recommendation for a future statutory amendment of regarding changing the timing of the “annual requirement” to a longer time.
- 2026 – Amend existing materials due to 2025 land use enabling law changes and several Key updates to State Guide Plans by the Division. Review with ACE in early 2026. Anticipate delivery of evening and weekday 1-hour virtual workshops at a variety of times between January to June subject to availability of staff resources.
- Future – Continue 1-hour virtual Zoom workshops. Future topics TBD by exit surveys from participants.

- **In-Person Training - RI Local Official Training Summit (RILOTS) (Ongoing)**

- Description – This is a half-day in-person conference for delivery of mandated land use training held in a central location in the State. Free to municipal volunteers. The Summit fulfills the 3-hour training, or 1-hour annual update requirements for all three types of boards, and possibly the other 2-hour requirement for Planning Boards. Includes an exit survey for evaluation purposes.
- 2026 - Work with ACE for development of a 3rd in person summit July to November to develop a ½ day in person meeting to be held on a Saturday morning in late Fall or early Winter. Subject to availability of staff resources and financial appropriations. Topics TBD by working with ACE and workshop participant exit surveys. Focus on topics requested in exit surveys of participants from 2025 Summit and from exit surveys of 2026 workshops.
- Future – continue annually in person if funding and staff resources allow. See also the Online training Options – 1-hour Update for all Boards.

Online Training Options: (Ongoing & New)

- **1-hour Annual Update Course for all Boards (New)**

- Description – This will be a 1-hour online self-directed course using *Microsoft Forms* and *Y-Tube* to engage local officials to complete at their own pace. Access will be from the DSP home page. Officials will be directed to view a 1-hour video of the Keynote Speech delivered at 2025 RILOTS via posting on *Y-Tube* through a private link. To obtain credit for viewing, official will have to complete a series of questions in *Microsoft Forms* as a quiz to test the knowledge capture from the video. Upon completion and review by Staff, correct submissions will be issued an annual update certificate. Upon receipt of the



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certificate, officials will receive a PDF of the appropriate PowerPoint slide deck if such is embedded in the topical video viewed. Includes an exit survey for evaluation purposes.

- 2026 – Under development and beta testing. Anticipate launch in February 2026.
- Future – After initial launch and monitoring of the response/participation in the first 1-hour training, DSP will design and post other self-guided trainings using other video portions of the RILOTS captured in the breakout sessions.
- **Stormwater /Flooding Training for Planning Boards (Ongoing)**
 - Description - [Rhode Island Official's Online Stormwater Training for Planning Boards](#)
Launched in 2025, this is 2.0 hours of training that is self-directed using 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. It helps local planning board officials meet the required two hours every two years in sea-level rise management/climate change training requirement.
 - 2026 & Future - Continue online Platform through on-going Cooperative agreement with URI NEMO

Future Training

- **Climate Change/Sea Level Rise Online Training for Planning Boards (Ongoing)**
 - Description – This is 2.0 hours of self-directed 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 and update of the current PrepRI website though providing numerous mini -topical sessions. This will also use the University of RI hosting platform, *Brightspace Engage* and through the Platform, track attendance. It will compliment the already launched Stormwater training course.
 - 2026 & Future - Continue to work with URI Coastal Resources Center (CRC) and DEM Narragansett Bay Research Reserve (NBRR) for development of the online training. Target date for online training is March 2026.

Potential Future Training Through Partnerships (As opportunities present)

- Land Use and Education staff will continue to investigate potential partnerships, educational offerings, and equivalent trainings by others which would help fulfill the mission of educating local historic, planning, and zoning officials regarding their designed land use responsibilities and to help assist them in fulfilling their mandated educational requirements.
- **Training for Historic District Commissions (New)**
 - Description - Assist in promoting an equivalency workshop of training to be held through a partnership with Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC)



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and Preserve Rhode Island (PRI) by virtue of PRI receiving a grant to host training on demolition delays for planners and local officials. This addresses one area under the responsibilities of historic district commissions (HDC). It is yet to be determined if this will also provide an equivalent training to the 3-hour introductory training and or fulfill annual update requirements for HDC members.

- 2026 – Approve delivery of equivalent training through a partnership with the RIHPHC and Preserve RI.
- Future – Investigate working with National Alliance of Preservation Commissions for virtual training delivery on topics specific to HDC.

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 a city or town, or any person designated to serve on a planning board in an ex officio and non-voting capacity.

(2) Exemptions to 3-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 3-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

(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 Team Leader with a request for an exemption with any of the following applicable 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 workshop, course or seminar for local commissions along with date(s), times, hours completed, and 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 an example of prior approved training.*

If needed the request may be reviewed with ACE for disposition. A determination of applicability and or an 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 the designated [DSP training staff](#) Team Leader. 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 /trainer. Evidence submitted will be verified with sponsoring agency/trainers and if needed the ACE, 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/commissions as defined under Rhode Island General Law. Generalized training for other topics and areas of interest while exemplary, will not be granted equivalency. *See Appendix B for a sample of previously approved 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 summarizing the completion of training by board members of each community no later than April 30, 2027, as required in the Law.



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 with confirmation of attendance from sponsoring organization.