

April 2020

Open Meetings Act Modified



On March 16, 2020, Governor Raimondo issued an executive order that modifies certain provisions of the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and Access to Public Records Act (APRA) and has since extended it through at least May 8, 2020, as part of the State's emergency response to COVID-19.

Public bodies may now conduct meetings by telephone or audio or video conferencing, provided that the public body is meeting for "essential purposes and ensures public access to the meeting through adequate, alternative means." "Essential purpose" means that the meeting is necessary for either continued government operations or to meet deadlines set by law or regulation. "Adequate alternative means of public access" means measures that provide transparency and permit timely and effective public access to the deliberations of a public body, such as conferencing via telephone, video, or audio. See this one-page explanation from the RI Attorney General's Office for more information; this guidance from Common Cause RI; and this list of online tools from the RI League of Cities and Towns. Also see the APA-RI website for information that is being updated daily.

The modifications bring challenges to public bodies: residents without appropriate technology need to have a phone dial-in option to access the meetings; plans and documents need to be posted on a website if municipal offices are closed; the requirement for abutter notification through certified mail has not been relaxed, among other issues. There will be further guidance issued by the Governor's Office soon, so check the AG's Office website for updates.

The 2020 Census is Here

The 2020 Census is underway and is ready for you to respond. By now, should have received your form in the mail: make sure to include everyone you expect to be living in your house on April 1 (but see this guidance on college students who have returned

home). If possible, go to the US Census website to fill out the Census online: my2020census.gov - you can also use the paper form or call in to complete your Census, but the online method is the quickest way to record your response, and is the best use of available resources.

United States Census 2020

Here is the breakdown of Rhode Island Census 2020 response rate by county, as of March 30, 2020:

- Bristol- 41.9%
- Kent- 40.4%
- Newport- 36.2%
- Providence - 33.0%
- Washington- 35.1%

The U.S. Census Bureau continues to monitor the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation and is following the guidance of federal, state, and local health authorities. To that end, they have adjusted operations to protect the health and safety of their staff and the public while still fulfilling the statutory requirement to deliver the 2020 Census counts. Important dates have been adjusted to reflect these changes.

Here are some ways you can safely promote the 2020 Census:

- Post a blog or video message from your leadership encouraging census response;
- Send notices to your fellow employees to encourage response;
- Leverage resident/customer bills and receipts to include reminders;
- Host a teleconference to share census information and answer questions;
- Write letters to the editor or op-eds on why census participation is important (particularly to support challenges like coronavirus); and
- Actively monitor, fact check, and correct census misinformation on social networks.

For more information, please see the [RI Division of Statewide Planning's 2020 Census Page](#) or contact Vincent.Flood@doa.ri.gov.

Port of Providence Community Engagement & Truck Study

As part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (US EPA) National Ports Initiative, EPA Region 1 has been working with RI state and local agencies, port businesses, and community groups in Providence over the last year and a half to identify ways to reduce the environmental impacts of the working port on employees and neighbors while still supporting vital maritime commerce. This effort was funded through the EPA's Near Port Community Capacity Building Pilot Project



and has included robust coordination and discussion of a cleaner greener vision for the port, improved air quality and public health, improved coordination of public safety and emergency management, and improved traffic safety and truck movement.

One of the major initiatives that the Division of Statewide Planning has advanced, along with the US EPA, is a truck study of the Port of Providence that will provide accurate and

updated truck counts, truck movement descriptions, and the types of trucks going into and out of the Port of Providence. A near-term goal of this work is to assess the degree to which trucks serving the Port of Providence area, among other sources, are contributing particulate matter and other air pollutants. Trucks not only travel into and out of the Port area, but also queue up to enter nearby Port-related businesses. The queuing trucks often idle while waiting, violating RI's five-minute idle limit, as well as restrict access to the bicycle lanes on Allens Avenue and use secondary roads through residential areas to access the Interstate.

Results from this project will inform the RIDSP's freight assessment and planning efforts, the RI Department of Transportation's Allens Ave Road Safety Assessment, the RI Department of Health's air quality monitoring and asthma reduction efforts, the RI Department of Environmental Management's diesel emissions reduction program, and the City of Providence's sustainability and environmental justice priorities. The effort will also improve the accuracy of RIDSP's Travel Demand Model and further refine transportation planning initiatives for the Port of Providence. For more information about the Community Engagement Project or the Port of Providence Truck Study, please contact Joshua.ONeill@doa.ri.gov or 401/222-4849.

Brady's Bulletin

Shape
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Census
2020

What's April 1st, other than April Fool's Day, a Wednesday this year? It's Census Day! Despite the fact that the 2020 Census has had field outreach efforts delayed, there are still online activities available and many ways for you and your communities to participate. You know people, whether they are your friends or colleagues, coworkers or local residents, fellow parents or neighbors. Complete your Census today at My2020Census.gov and ask everyone you know to do the same. There are graphics available to use on the Census website and on the Division of Statewide

Planning website, and there are new resources available every day. I'm presently working with Vin Flood to develop a series of short PowerPoints answering the frequently asked questions around the Census and addressing what I've termed as the "frequently shared myths". We hope to have these completed early next week, and then we'll provide links and Division staff will be asked to reach out to the planners in all of our communities: we want to know what you're doing to promote the Census locally and what we can do to support you!

Besides the Census, there's something else really important that I want to talk about: community. Whether we're referring to the cities and towns of Rhode Island, the communities formed by professionals with similar goals and backgrounds, the sense of community in our neighborhoods, or the communities we form with colleagues and friends, the need to be part of something bigger than ourselves drives us to seek community. Truly, nothing is more important to our vitality and our sense of well-being than community: it's where we share something of ourselves. It's where we belong. Now, with this biomedical crisis upon us, we are learning about the meaning of the communities in our individual orbits, and the challenges that arise in separating ourselves from our communities. We're also learning about the building blocks of our local, state, national, and international economies and we are testing the limits of our technologies to connect children with schools, staff with the workplace, families at a distance, physical and mental health providers with patients, trainers and teachers with

classes eager to learn and connect.

So what does community mean to you? What changes have you seen in your faith communities? Your professional communities? Your villages and towns? I have asked the staff at the Division to consider this question, and a few have shared their thoughts with me. I'd like to hear from you, as well: how has the COVID-19 crisis changed your daily life and impacted your communities?

I have started carrying my Staff of Social Distancing on my walks to Rome Point (1.2 miles from my house to the parking area...) It's about 5' tall. My mother and I started carving it together when I was 13 and never finished, but it carries some memories of a time when we lived in a rural setting, far (ok, ok, Rhode Island far! Maybe 25 minutes?) from the suburban, cookie-cutter neighborhood where I grew up. I started carrying it because people clearly do not understand keeping a six foot distance. Of course, it's also heavy and rather unwieldy when one is walking 5+ miles. This spawned a Facebook discussion suggesting that maybe bringing back old fashioned hoop skirts would help. A friend (and former boss) of mine chimed in (he so rarely comments) with a cry of "Hoop skirts for all!" Maybe that's my COVID-19 slogan? Hoop skirts for all!

Upcoming Meetings

Due to the on-going coronavirus emergency, please check the links to see if meetings have been canceled or will be held via video conference or teleconference.

[Technical Committee](#)

April 3- **CANCELED**

[State Planning Council](#)

April 9- **CANCELED**

[Transportation Advisory Committee](#)

April 23- 5:30PM: **scheduled**

All meetings are open to the public.

PHOTO TRIVIA:

Do you know where in RI this structure is located? See the answer at the bottom of the newsletter.



Events

April 3 ["COVID-19 and the Legal Landscape."](#) Learn how COVID-19 is impacting local planning efforts and how communities can continue planning operations; understand the emergency rulings that have made for temporary changes to the municipal planning landscape, including the Open Meetings Act, permitting, and other planning operations; and learn how you can navigate this landscape with proper guidance and techniques in a virtual meeting landscape. Time: 12PM-1:30PM. Sponsored by APA-RI.

April 9 [Community Food Security for Racial Justice and Equity: Covid-19 Response.](#) Join RI Food Policy Council leaders working in the field of community food security for a facilitated discussion on the need for our COVID-19 response to be people-centered and grounded in ethics and public health. Participants will share how their work is ensuring

that programs and policies that deal with the COVID-19 crisis are human rights-centered, equitable, and foster food sovereignty in our communities. Time: 2:30PM. Free.

April 14 [Using Flood Maps](#). Free NOAA webinar on the rising costs and dangers associated with coastal flooding that are motivating communities to assess the people, places, and resources at risk. During this live interview with a guest speaker, participants will hear first-hand experiences from field experts who have used maps to engage stakeholders in discussions about local hazards and risk. Time: 3PM-4PM. 1 CM credit.

April 24 ~~CANCELED~~ [Offshore Renewable Energy Interactions with the Environment: Lessons Learned from Europe](#).

April 25 ~~POSTPONED UNTIL APRIL 2023~~ [Back to the Future: The 35th Annual RI Statewide Historic Preservation Conference](#)

Grant Opportunities

April 6 [RIDEM Climate Resilience Fund grant deadline](#) Funds are to implement climate resilience projects for climate-driven challenges facing Rhode Island communities, both inland and coastal. RIDEM is seeking grant proposals for projects that will support governmental and non-profit entities in restoring and improving the climate resilience of vulnerable coastal habitats, as well as river and stream floodplains and related habitat. The funds will provide matching grants (75%-25%) to government and non-profit entities.

April 8 [National Coastal Resilience Fund](#) pre-proposal deadline. This National Fish and Wildlife Foundation program provides grant funding to restore, increase and strengthen natural infrastructure to protect coastal communities while also enhancing habitats for fish and wildlife. The fund will help create, expand, and restore natural systems to protect communities from coastal storms, sea- and lake-level changes, inundation, and coastal erosion.

April 9 [National Endowment for the Arts' Challenge America](#) grant deadline (Part I). The program offers support primarily to small and mid-sized organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to under-served populations -- those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability. Grants are for a fixed amount of \$10,000 and require a minimum \$10,000 match.

April 17 [2020 Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Cost Share Grant Program](#) deadline (extended from March). Grant Category: Creating and Enhancing Resilient Urban and Community Forests. The USDA Forest Service seeks innovative (new, cutting-edge or builds upon existing studies) grant proposals for program development, study, and collaboration that will address urban and community forest resilience and aligns with one or more applicable goals in the *National Ten Year Urban and Community Forestry Action Plan (2016-2026)*.

April 21 [Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grants Program deadline](#). This program supports the rehabilitation of historic properties to protect and foster economic development of rural communities. It funds preservation projects for historic sites, including architectural and engineering services and physical building preservation, to non-urban communities with populations less than 50,000. Eligible properties must be listed in the National Register of Historic Places (or determined eligible for listing).

May 11 [Regional Food System Partnerships](#) (RFSP) program grant deadline. The USDA's RFSP program supports partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan

and develop local or regional food systems. Effort is focused on building and strengthening local or regional food economy viability and resilience by alleviating unnecessary administrative and technical barriers for participating partners.

May 11 [Farmers Market Promotion Program](#) (FMPP) deadline. The USDA's FMPP funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand direct producer-to-consumer markets to help increase access to locally and regionally produced agricultural products by developing, expanding, and providing outreach and technical assistance to farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, online sales or other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities.

May 15 [AARP Community Challenge grant deadline](#) (extended from April). The Community Challenge provides small grants to fund "quick-action" projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. Projects should improve housing, transportation, public space, technology ("smart cities"), civic engagement, and more. Winning projects must be completed by December 18, 2020.

Planning Articles of Interest

[RI municipalities to receive \\$15.2M as part of federal Covid-19 response](#)

[Traffic and pollution plummet as U.S. cities shut down for coronavirus](#)

[East Providence starts two emergency loan programs for small businesses](#)

[Black Americans were forced into social distancing long before the coronavirus](#)

[Density is normally good for us. That will be true after coronavirus, too](#)

[How to perfect your home work setup so your back stops hurting so much](#)

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PHOTO TRIVIA ANSWER:

[Town Pound \(1748\)](#), Chepachet (Glocester)

Photo: Wikipedia