

**Environmental Roundtable Meeting Notes
October 15, 2001**

Present: Jeff Kos, Eugenia Marks, Harold Ward, Chris Modisette, Topher Hamblett, Alicia Karpick, Kris Stuart, Brad Hyson, Molly Clarke, Norma Willis, Guy Lefebvre, Bob Mendoza, Steve Schwartz, Sandra Winslow, John Campanini, Amy McNamara, Barry Schiller, Fred Stolle, Jane Jellison, Vernon Current

DEM: Jan Reitsma, Tom Getz, Steve Hall, Russ Chateaufneuf, Leo Hellested, Angelo Liberti, Bob Ballou, Scott Millar, Fred Vincent, Kathy Sparks, Fred Presley, Alicia Good, Tom Dupree, Janet Keller, Jeff Nield, Mickie Musselman, Roger Greene

Old Business

Stormwater Phase II Updates

Angelo Liberti mentioned DEM held a public hearing on revisions to the RIPDES Regulations that incorporated the EPA Phase II Storm Water program. The revisions were available for public comment from July 2nd through August 15th. A public workshop was held on July 25th, and a public hearing was conducted on August 14th. Based on comments received, DEM will be proposing a few changes to the draft regulations.

Discussion points raised concerning this topic included:
Reducing stormwater runoff has positive environmental impacts.
DEM should review its technical data concerning LUI coefficients.

Watershed Updates

DEM is setting up a web-based system to notify watershed groups on major DEM regulatory activities that occur in each watershed. DEM is committed to provide an appropriate level of information to the watersheds.

The Director mentioned that there was concern raised on how grant funding was being distributed to the watershed councils. He mentioned that DEM was directed by the legislature to provide funds to only two organizations. Although it would be beneficial to fund all five councils, he does not have the flexibility to modify the split of funds. He suggested that the River Council should discuss this issue with legislative leaders.

Budget

The Director mentioned that he had concerns about the DEM enforcement resources. He has been working closely with the Budget Office and environmental organizations on this issue. The Department had to identify cuts that represented a 6% reduction from last year's budget. When fixed costs such as rents are considered, this represents a 7 1/2 % reduction. Although the Department has been successful in the past in getting proposed funding cuts restored, the Director was concerned that this may not happen this year due to the size of the projected deficit. He has suggested revenue enhancements, such as beach fees, and some restricted receipt accounts. He acknowledged that these cuts would impact levels of service in the department especially in the Waste, Water and Bureau of Natural Resources.

Discussion points raised concerning this topic included:

- The Department should look into energy fees or “green taxing” as a means to enhance revenues.
- DEM will submit a supplemental budget to cover unanticipated costs.
- DEM will also submit a request for a new bond issue to provide funding for programs such as TMDLs and stormwater, and water quality bond programs for which funds are depleted.
- DEM was requested to brief the environmental groups earlier in the process. Response - A general briefing like today is possible, but a detailed briefing is not possible, since this is a dynamic process. DEM’s workplan is transparent and the strengths and weaknesses are evident.

Performance Partnership Agreement (PPA)

ECRI members expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to meet the new EPA Region I Regional Administrator Bob Varney on September 12, but asked if the Director would invite him to come to RI again. He was so pre-occupied with the aftermath of September 11 that he was not able to spend time with the attendees.

Bob Mendoza said he likes the public process for the Strategic Work Plan and suggested a similar process be held while evaluating the content of the Work Plan next year. He mentioned that EPA would be linking their website with DEM’s for appropriate topics. Two issues he would like to have discussed with the public are how to measure accountability and indicators to measure progress. Another issue he raised is the potential linking of the Watershed Institute and the Growth Planning Institute.

The Director mentioned that the public meetings to discuss the PPA were not well attended and there needs to be more public input to make this a valuable exercise.

The Urban Forestry Plan was not in the Strategic Plan. The Director explained that all DEM program initiatives are not found in the Strategic Plan, but additional information is available in the Division’s work plan.

New Business

Enforcement of Recycling

A reporter from the Providence Business News interviewed the Director and a story was published on October 15. Jeff Kos asked what DEM is doing regarding enforcing recycling. The Director said we are not enforcing recycling because we have no resources and do not expect to have the resources. The recycling program was recently turned over to the Resource Recovery Corporation. Our part will involve re-thinking outreach and enforcement. We will be working with municipalities, schools, and state agencies. We will ultimately create a separate program in Waste Management for recycling as part of the Solid Waste Plan, and will look at enforcing residential and commercial recycling.

Barry Schiller said he works for a state agency that is not recycling and asked if the Legislature is aware that there are state agencies that do not recycle. He also said that the grants to towns for litter control were important and funding was stopped this year. He suggested that the Source Reduction Task Force be reactivated and the state should revisit the issue of a bottle bill. Guy

Lefebvre said RI was a leader in recycling nationally and he wants us to regain that position. Warwick is a model for recycling and maybe they could look at commercial recycling in that community. The Director added that related to recycling, the landfill capacity would become an urgent issue again.

Forestry

Mr. Schwartz led the discussion on arborist licensing. He thought some arborist are causing damage to trees and there is a need for a licensing program. Mr. Schwartz asked about the Department's position on licensing arborists. He said the group he represents believes licensing would help them to get liability insurance. The Director said he is not convinced that licensing is necessary and that insurance is a Department of Business Regulation issue, not an environmental one. The director is not opposed to a liability requirement and would work with the organization on the issue. Tom Dupree said a legislative committee will consider arborist licensing, however in the past, legislation on this topic did not pass. He also mentioned the trend in other states is to not license arborists.

Urban and Community Forestry Plan

There are few resources for the Urban and Community Forestry Program compared with other programs in Forestry. The Director is pursuing forestry projects through watershed plans. John Campanini said this is the first time the state has taken a position on tree resources. The Tree Council sees the plan as a first step to educate community officials and is now trying to educate local and state planning officials on this issue. The Director was supportive of the plan and would make himself available for future discussions on this issue. Jeff Kos suggested that we discuss this further using a working group.

Guy Lefebvre said he is concerned that the Department has only 1 FTE for urban forestry among a staff of 30. DEM should place more emphasis on this issue since the state is being developed at a rapid rate. Tom Dupree said the division received \$50,000 from federal sources to fund work in this area. The Tree Council is empowered to carry out the strategies identified in his work plan for urban forestry. In addition, Tom noted that other individuals within the division work on urban and community forest issues. He reiterated that there is more than one FTE working on this issue.

Greenhouse Gas

Janet Keller reported the stakeholder group to develop a greenhouse action plan for RI has been meeting and has agreed on:

- Developing a framework for Phase I
- Developing an action plan in Phase II
- Statewide targets
- The year to use for baseline forecasting is 1990

For more information and to follow the development of the action plan, see

www.raabassociates.com.

Open Forum

Jeff Kos congratulated Brad Hyson on the second Sustainability Conference held in October and will put sustainability on the agenda for the next meeting.

Guy Lefebvre announced the Pawtuxet River Celebration on November 15.

Alicia Karpick asked for an update on the MTBE problem in Burrillville. Angelo Liberti said a plan to treat groundwater and pump it back into the ground is under review and he expects it to be completed by the end of the week.

Angelo also gave the status of nutrient reduction from wastewater treatment plants. Revised permits have nutrient limits where appropriate. Permits are site specific and the limits are determined as a result of the Water Quality Restoration evaluation.

Barry Schiller supported bikeways in Coventry / Blackstone River corridor and elsewhere.

Alicia Karpick asked that groups share information on the Providence River Dredge Project.

There will be a hearing on trail management in Arcadia on November 15, and one issue is the use of motorized vehicles in this area.