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RIEDC board approves changes to CCEC program

The Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. (RIEDC) will make changes to the agency's expedited permitting process, known as Certificate of Critical Economic Concern (CCEC). The changes are designed to make the program a more useful tool in the state's effort to expedite high priority economic development projects and to accelerate the creation of higher wage job opportunities for Rhode Islanders.

The CCEC expedited permitting program will identify priority economic development projects and assist state agencies in responding as efficiently as possible to permitting and review issues associated with these important projects. Changes to the program will tie CCEC eligibility to the state's economic development goals of creating new jobs and office capacity throughout Rhode Island.

Effective immediately, projects eligible for CCEC designation must create at least 100 new full time jobs, with an average wage at or above 105% of the average wage in Rhode Island. At least 50% of those jobs must meet or exceed 105% of the average wage (i.e., the wages of a small subset of high earners at a company cannot offset a majority of lower paying jobs). Or, the project must create more than 50,000 s/f and have more than 50% of the total development square footage dedicated to new office, manufacturing or research and development space.

The rule changes have gone through the required public review process and include removing the current fee requirement for program participation. The changes to the CCEC program were approved by the RIEDC board of directors on April 28.

"CCEC expedited review is an important step in improving our business climate and a mechanism for moving high priority economic development projects forward," said RIEDC Executive Director Saul Kaplan. "These changes to the CCEC program will ensure that the program is fully aligned with our economic development strategy to create new jobs and to increase the availability of office space throughout the state."

In addition to changing eligibility requirements for the program, RIEDC also is committed to creating more efficient channels of communication across permitting agencies. For example, RIEDC is working closely with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to ensure that DEM is promptly alerted to CCEC opportunities and able to engage in project discussions earlier in the process.

"DEM is committed to working with RIEDC to ensure that projects of significant importance to the state's economy receive a prompt and coordinated permitting review," said DEM director W. Michael Sullivan. "Coordinating activities and deepening the lines of communication across the two agencies is an important step forward in ensuring that Rhode Island can mount a rapid response to major economic development opportunities."

"It is important to note that although CCEC certification expedites the review process, review outcomes and permitting approvals are tied exclusively to a project's compliance with all applicable regulations," he added.

Changes to the CCEC program were first proposed in RIEDC's 2008 Economic Growth Plan, which seeks to increase the percentage of jobs in Rhode Island that pay above the national average wage of \$42,000 from 40 to 60 percent. Top priority activities of the plan include new programs to increase the availability of growth capital to businesses, a regional attraction campaign to promote new company relocation and expansion, a partnership to leverage property made available through the I-195 relocation, programs that strengthen the state's workforce development platform, an effort to increase the state's research and development capacity and a renewed emphasis on programs that support the state's small businesses.

"We must work across agencies to bring the full power of the state together in a coordinated way to keep and grow high-wage jobs in Rhode Island," said Kaplan. "Adjustments to the CCEC program are an important step in realigning Rhode Island's economic development toolkit to support our strategy to build a higher wage economy that provides job opportunities for all Rhode Islanders."