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RIEDC proposes expedited review process to assist priority prospects

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The Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. (RIEDC) will propose new rules to strengthen the agency's expedited permitting process, Certificate of Critical Economic Concern (CCEC). The agency cited the recent decision by commercial property insurer FM Global, Rhode Island's largest private company, to build a new \$60 million, 340,000 s/f headquarters in Johnston, as a model of how expedited review of high priority economic development projects can improve the state's business climate and retain and create high wage jobs in Rhode Island.

"With the lease on our current headquarters expiring in July 2009, FM Global was faced with a tight time frame under which to explore options for the future location of our corporate headquarters," said Shivan Subramaniam, FM Global's chairman and chief executive officer. "First and foremost we were looking for a timely review by state and local officials of our plans to build a new headquarters." "RIEDC helped us bring the right parties together to quickly assist us," said Subramaniam. "Within 48 hours of notifying RIEDC that our current headquarters would not meet our future needs, we met with governor Carcieri, director of the Department of Environmental Management, director of the Department of Transportation, and executive director of the RIEDC. Together, with town officials from Johnston, these officials committed to and delivered a coordinated and expedited review of our proposed plans to build a new headquarters."

"FM Global's decision to build its new headquarters here in Rhode Island is a great example of bringing the full power of the state together in a coordinated way to keep and grow high-wage jobs in Rhode Island," said Saul Kaplan, executive director of the RIEDC. "DEM has agreed to expedite their review of FM Global's permitting applications, DOT has approved a preliminary transportation plan of Atwood Ave., south of the Rte. 6 overpass down to the intersection of Central Ave., and completed a traffic signalization study. The town of Johnston also has mobilized its local review process. We have demonstrated that we can work in a coordinated way with state and local officials to speed up the review process to promote economic growth."

Proposed changes to the state CCEC expedited permitting program will be issued in January for public review and a public hearing before adoption by the RIEDC. Proposed rule changes will include directing the program toward companies that commit to keep or create more than 100 high wage jobs, development projects that create more than 50,000 s/f and have more than 50% of total development square footage dedicated to new office or commercial space, and projects that are located in cities or towns that also agree to a coordinated and expedited project review process. The proposed rule changes will also remove the current fee requirement to participate in the program.

"FM Global is an important part of the Johnston community and we were very determined to keep

their new corporate headquarters in our town," said mayor Joseph Polisena. "We know how important a predictable decision process is to corporate executives and Johnston delivered. It took a collaborative effort at both the state and local level to accomplish this great win for FM Global, Johnston, and Rhode Island."

The expedited permitting program rules will be issued according to CCEC statute, which requires state agency reviews for qualified economic development projects within 90 days.

"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," said Kaplan.

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