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President's message: RI state government members attempting to help RIBA members

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As we in Rhode Island's residential construction industry struggle under the triple-whammy of a poor economy, heavy overregulation and inconsistent interpretation and application of those regulations, there are those in state government who are aware of our plight and are trying to help.

Among these are the people at the Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. (RIEDC), headed by executive director Keith Stokes. Realizing how wrong-headed regulation is harming the economy, raising construction costs and preventing a recovery, RIEDC in 2010 established an Office of Regulatory Reform. Among other things, this office has as its goal the reduction of red tape for small businesses, including those in the construction industry.

Also deserving our thanks in supporting this effort are Gov. Lincoln Chafee and General Treasurer Gina Raimondo.

So what can the Rhode Island Builders Association do to help cut red tape, bring regulations under control, and make Rhode Island a more business-friendly state? Officials at RIEDC and those who support them believe that legislation is required to address these problems.

What these leaders need is information - data - that we can help provide. The permitting process in the state can only be described as torture. Who among our builder/developer members doesn't have story after story of costly delays, missed deadlines and unhappy customers caused by overregulation and inconsistent local interpretation? Who doesn't have war stories from their experiences with ridiculous regulations and expensive official roadblocks?

I'm asking our members to compile these stories and to be very specific about it. Don't just make a list of complaints. Document how much this or that delay or regulation has cost you and your customers. Don't be afraid to point out the specifics of this town's or that city's difficult permitting system or lack of consistency in interpreting codes and other regulations.

Get this information to us at the RIBA office, where we will compile it and present it in an orderly manner to RIEDC's Office of Regulatory Reform. It can then be used to build a convincing argument for legislators that statewide regulatory reform isn't only desirable, it's crucial before any economic recovery can take place.

You can drop by or call the RIBA office at (401) 438-7400. RIBA headquarters is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Or you can fax your documents to (401) 438-7446.

There's a reason why Rhode Island is dead last in New England and near the bottom nationally when it comes to economic recovery. Overregulation. Now here's your chance to help change that!

Robert Baldwin is president of R.B. Homes, Inc., Lincoln and is president of RIBA.