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President's message: Chafee continues support of RIBA; launches 2 new initiatives

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Good news is always welcome, and I'm happy to have a good deal of it this month.

The Rhode Island Builders Association's board of directors had a very constructive meeting with governor Lincoln Chafee on May 8. Not only has the governor kept his campaign promise to work with us to help our industry, but he has launched two major initiatives that we wholeheartedly support. Both are major steps toward RIBA's longtime goal of streamlining the processes for applications and permits.

One is the "pad-ready" project already under way at the Quonset Business Park in North Kingstown. This involves sites that are zoned industrial. The Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. (RIEDC) works with the owners to get all pre-approvals for building by whatever state and local agencies have jurisdiction over them, including the Dept. of Environmental Management, Coastal Resources Management Council, and local public works, water and sewer agencies. The governor told us that he hopes to make this a statewide practice. Such pad-ready sites would greatly shorten the development process and allow an incoming company to start construction immediately once financing is in place.

RIEDC is looking for an initial 8-10 industrial-zoned lots at various locations statewide to start this program.

The RIEDC's Office of Regulatory Reform and Quality Management (ORRQM) ORRQM has been meeting with individual RIBA members whose projects are now experiencing, or have in the past experienced, roadblocks because of action - or inaction - by local boards, municipal offices or state agencies.

Acting as facilitators, Leslie Taito and her staff are working hard to clear the hurdles and get residential development going or back on track and to gather data on the roadblocks and bottlenecks.

As I've said in previous messages, RIBA members who are having regulatory trouble need to get the specific information to the RIBA staff, who will pass it on to the ORRQM. Members and non-members alike can make their own appointments to meet with Taito or her staff, or they can take advantage of several dates when they will be at RIBA member suppliers' facilities: July 18 and 25 and August 8.

The information you provide to ORRQM should be very specific and can involve any state or local agency, including water or sewer boards, town councils, planning or zoning boards, public works departments, conservation or historic district commissions, or any other local or state agency. What kind of roadblocks are taking place? How long are the delays? What are the specific costs to you and your client? What agencies and officials are involved?

The objective is to gather data on the delays and put a cost on those delays. Once the data are

gathered, RIBA will work with RIEDC to formulate a plan of action through regulatory reform or legislation, as needed, to remove the bottlenecks.

Here is a chance to do something about the application and permitting snags that have plagued our industry for so long. Please make use of it!

So we thank Chafee for his awareness of our industry's importance to Rhode Island's economy and for his willingness to take practical steps to help us!

This is the first time in many years that a governor's door has been open to RIBA.

Meanwhile, our dedicated Legislative Committee and members who are active in our lobbying efforts continue their hard work at the State House. Several important measures affecting our industry continue to evolve in committee, and I urge all members to tell their lawmakers to support our industry as the best way to help Rhode Island's economy recover.

Also on the RIBA scene, our board of directors has accepted the retirement of our general counsel, James Sloan III, who has worked diligently for the association for 53 years. We have all come to know Jim with affection, and RIBA has been in his capable hands through many tough legal challenges over those many years. The board voted unanimously to organize a farewell dinner in Jim's honor, and we hope that all members will attend once the date is announced.

Sloan is a personification of RIBA's living history. We thank him from the bottom of our hearts for his invaluable service, and we wish him the very best for a happy and productive retirement.

At the same time, we welcome Christine Engustian, a longtime RIBA member and Rhode Island's first certified "green" construction attorney, as our new general counsel. Sloan calls Christine "the very best," and we look forward to working with her for years to come!

Michael Artesani Sr. is president of W. Artesani & Sons, Cranston, and is president of Rhode Island Builders Assn.

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