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Governor Chafee vows to support regulatory reform

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Easing the regulatory environment for small businesses is a top priority for the administration of governor Lincoln Chafee. That was the message from the governor himself as he addressed the Rhode Island Builders Association's board of directors on May 8.

"We want to see businesses grow, and we don't want to see them hung up on regulations," Chafee told a packed meeting room at RIBA's East Providence headquarters. "Additionally, Rhode Island has many assets, particularly our transportation infrastructure, colleges and medical institutions, which can help our economy advance."

RIBA president Bob Baldwin noted that Chafee was keeping a campaign promise.

"He visited this board while campaigning and promised that, if elected, he would be available and work with us. And here he is with us today. We are very grateful for that," Baldwin said.

In particular, the governor drew praise from directors for two of his administration's initiatives: "pad-ready" sites at the Quonset Business Park, and the Office of Regulatory Reform and Quality Management (ORRQM) at the Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. (RIEDC).

Pad-ready sites in business-zoned areas will be pre-approved by state and local regulatory authorities so that construction delays are kept to a minimum. The practice soon will be implemented statewide, according to Chafee.

ORRQM already is working with RIBA to resolve delays, stoppages and other difficulties members are having with state or local regulatory agencies or with the permitting process itself. Along with ORRQM director Leslie Taito, Dept. of Environmental management director Janet Coit and Coastal Resources Management Council executive director Grover Fugate are also cooperating in the effort to open the bottlenecks.

Chafee also stressed the importance of straightening out the various municipal budget crises around the state.

"If we have communities going bankrupt, then new companies are not going to want to move here," he said.

A lively discussion with the governor ensued on several points, notably over whether non-profit medical and educational institutions, as opposed to tax-paying companies, should be encouraged to expand in certain developable areas. There was also some discussion on state and local public employee and pension issues.

The governor expressed support for two proposals favored by RIBA: a Housing Bond Issue for the 2012 ballot, and a return of the state's Historic Tax Credit. He supports the latter with reservations, however.

In other matters, RIBA executive director John Marcantonio reported that the figures for the 2012 Home Show were in and that the event was the least expensive and most successful Home Show in recent years, with attendance up 7% over 2011.

Directors accepted the annual auditor's report and approved six new members.

Directors accepted the resignation of James Sloan III as RIBA's general counsel, a position he has held for the last 53 years. Attorney and longtime RIBA member Christine Engustian will be the new general counsel.

The board voted to sponsor a dinner in Sloan's honor. Members should watch for more information. For details on RIBA activities and membership, visit ribuilders.org or call (401) 438-7400.

Paul Eno is the owner and editor-in-chief of New River Press, Woonsocket and is the editor of the monthly RIBA newsletter, The Rhode Island Builder Report.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540