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Sea level rise imminent danger to coastal props. in R.I.

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"We can't let nature take its course anymore."

That summed up the message May 6th as Grover Fugate, executive director of the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) addressed the Rhode Island Builders Association's board of directors.

Fugate's topics were new CRMC regulations that anticipate global warming and sea-level rise, along with the need for low-impact development (LID) and urban coastal greenways.

"Computer models indicate a worst-case scenario: Sea-level rise of as much as 20 feet by 2100," Fugate said. "This is especially serious for Rhode Island because we already have a 'transgressive shoreline.' Beaches tend to seriously erode after each major storm as it is. A higher sea level will only make this worse."

He accompanied his talk with a slide show not only about coastal features and homes that already have been lost because of beach erosion, but also about anticipated losses because of sea-level rise. Those losses include all of Field's Point in Providence.

CRMC and other state agencies are addressing this anticipated crisis through the Metro Bay Special Area Management Plan, which Fugate outlined in detail. This plan includes not only the new CRMC building regulations but also an Urban Coastal Greenway (UCG) policy. UCGs can serve as partial buffers to sea-level rise in shoreline areas such as Providence, Cranston, East Providence and Pawtucket.

As for the new building regulations, reviewed in detail in the May Rhode Island Builder Report, Fugate anticipates public hearings this fall, with final regulations released next year. RIBA will be involved in discussions as a stakeholder.

In other matters, directors heard a report from Joseph Cracco, co-chair of RIBA's remodelers committee, which is now holding monthly meetings. The most recent was on April 30th, when Betty Galligan of Newberry Public Relations offered a program on sales and marketing for 25 RIBA members.

"Education is our highest priority," Cracco said. "We have monthly programs planned through the rest of this year and, tentatively, well into 2009."

Workers' compensation committee chairman Kenneth Jones recommended that RIBA hire an independent consultant to evaluate the association's insurance and safety programs to see where savings can be had. Directors agreed.

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