

# **Small Business Advocacy Council**

**Meeting minutes—March 19, 2009**

**Attendees: Dino Autiello, Kelly Carello, Sherri Carrera, Mike Clarkin, Amintha Cinotti, Alan Crisman, John Cronin, Barbara Cullen, Julian Dash, Mark Deion, Mark DePetrillo Shawn Donahue, Karla Driscoll, Arthur Dwyer, Omay Elphick, Darlene Evans, Sidney Goldman, Ed Greene, Fred Hashway, Conni Harding, Mark Hayward, Bob Lafond, Jo Lee, David Lucier, Dennis McCarthy, Laura McNamara, Jerry Meyer, Don Nokes, Phil Papoojian, Elizabeth Perry, Christine Smith, Herb Weiss, Caroline Wells, Carrie Zaslou,**

**Lt. Governor Roberts called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. and welcomed the members of the Small Business Advocacy Council (SBAC) and guests.**

**Lt. Governor Roberts talked about the need to control energy costs for small businesses and the importance of investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency to promote economic development, protect our environment and build the green economy in Rhode Island.**

**Lt. Governor Roberts introduced Mark DePetrillo from National Grid.**

**Mark DePetrillo stated that energy is becoming the number two cost for many businesses due to the rising price of energy. National Grid's small business program funded by electric ratepayers offers small businesses a free energy audit, incentives to replace lights, motors, HVAC and energy controls. Incentives can reach 70% of costs and free financing for up to 30% of costs is also available. Direct rebates for natural gas boilers are also available with efficiency ratings of 94% to 95%. The hotline number for the energy audit program is 800-322-3333. Their website is: [www.thinksmarththinkgreen.com](http://www.thinksmarththinkgreen.com).**

**Lt. Governor Roberts introduced Julian Dash from the Rhode Island Economic Development Corp (EDC).**

**Julian Dash stated that EDC manages the Rhode Island Renewable Energy Fund with approximately \$2.5 million in income annually. The two most important factors EDC uses to screen applicants for funding are cost and the potential to create additional economic development in the state. The Fund can support projects and research into diverse energy sources including solar, wind, tidal and wave power.**

**Lt. Governor Roberts introduced Omay Elphick from Alteris Renewables**

**Omay Elphick focuses primarily on "small scale" solar and wind**

**installations in Southern New England. He stated that recent changes to the 30% federal tax credit for wind and solar production will setup the industry for rapid growth in states with robust renewable energy programs. Location, size and design are key to successful renewable energy projects for small businesses. He mentioned a solar project in Massachusetts that could cut a mill's energy bill in half with a five-year payback period as an example.**

**Phil Papoojian of the Smaller Business Association of New England (SBANE) asked about Chinese companies dumping cheap solar panels on the U.S market and the impact that might have on the industry.**

**Omay Elphick thought that thus far the dumping had not changed state policies to support solar, so the result has been more development as installation costs have dropped.**

**Lt. Governor Roberts asked about the difference between incentives in Massachusetts and Connecticut.**

**Omay Elphick stated that it was an apples and oranges comparison because Massachusetts has set incentives while Rhode Island did not have dedicated funding for specific technologies.**

**Don Nokes asked about renovating a new building and getting access to National Grid's subsidies.**

**Lt. Governor Roberts stated that there should be a central clearing house for information about available subsidies for small businesses since the information can be hard to find unless you know what you are looking for.**

**Lt. Governor Roberts thanked the panelists and meeting attendees and adjourned the meeting at 10:00 a.m.**