

Draft

## Executive Climate Change Council

March 10, 2014

10:00 a.m.

Department of Administration  
One Capitol Hill  
Conference Room A  
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

### Meeting Minutes

**In attendance:** Janet Coit, DEM, Council Chair  
Michelle Burnett (for Jamia McDonald, EMA)  
Dr. Michael Fine (DOH)  
Kevin Flynn (DOA/Planning)  
Grover Fugate (CRMC)  
Marion Gold (OER), Michael Lewis (DOT)  
Richard Licht (DOA)  
Hannah Morini (for Marcel Valois, Commerce)

**Others:** See attached sign in sheet

#### **Director Coit called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.**

The first order of business was the purpose of the council. Director Coit noted that Executive Climate Change Council meetings (“EC3” for short) will be open to the public, as was this one. She briefly reviewed key aspects of the Executive Order that established the EC3. The intent is to coordinate executive agency efforts related to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to engage municipal leaders as appropriate. The intent of this forum is not to debate the science of climate change.

Per the [Executive Order](#) 14-01, the EC3 must advise the governor, the General Assembly, and the public on how existing and proposed efforts can best address the challenges associated with climate change. This effort builds off earlier efforts, including that of the Rhode Island Climate Change Commission.

A first report with findings and recommendations is to be completed by May 1, 2014, with updates provided by May 1<sup>st</sup> of subsequent years. Accordingly, the EC3 will continue to meet and develop recommendations for ongoing coordination after May 1, 2014. Director Coit noted the short turnaround time before the May 1 deadline. She encouraged the group to focus the first report on:

1. An inventory of existing climate change related initiatives;
2. an assessment of vulnerable infrastructure (e.g., roads, drinking water, treatment facilities);
3. a “to do” list for necessary actions to develop a state plan; and
4. recommendations on structure and funding moving forward.

The next order of business was the responsibilities of council members. Director Coit asked each member to make upcoming meetings a priority so that the May 1 report can adequately capture the many specific

efforts already underway, as well as suggest concrete steps and needs for continued coordination among state government. This would include an inventory of what state agencies have accomplished, current efforts, and plans for future efforts.

Director Coit introduced the DEM staff present: Terry Gray (Associate Director for Environmental Planning), Rayna Maguire (Assistant to the Director), and Bill Patenaude (Principal Engineer).

The next order of business was members providing an initial overview of how climate change impacts their agencies and what efforts are already underway.

#### **Director Richard Licht • Department of Administration**

Director Licht introduced Allison Rodgers who will be his assistant on the council.

He then highlighted efforts underway in his agency in both the mitigation and adaption arenas. These include efforts within the Office of Energy Resources and the Division of Planning (which are members of the council and will be noted further along.) Director Licht noted an executive order to bring energy efficiency to the state fleet, making all new purchases either a hybrid or electric vehicle (unless a waiver is granted for vehicle-specific needs). Similar efforts are underway for state buildings related to energy efficiency and/or renewable sources of energy, such as cogeneration. Director Licht also noted that DOA was seeking to expand the Division of Planning to better engage climate-related issues. In addition, the General Assembly had made the DOA director the chair of the state [Climate Change Commission](#).

#### **Director Michael Lewis • Department of Transportation**

Director Lewis noted that transportation is both a “cause” of climate change, and so DOT will be increasingly involved in mitigation issues, and it is impacted by climate change—due to storms and impacts on coastal infrastructure—and so DOT will be increasingly involved with adaptive strategies. He noted that DOT is investing in transportation alternatives, such as commuter rail and improvements for RIPTA. The agency is also working on alternative vehicles and electric charger stations; “targeted congestion relief” (which may seem to be investments in highway projects but really offers ways to reduce carbon emissions through increased transport efficiencies); and stream and river road crossing studies. Director Lewis introduced his assistant, Melissa Long.

#### **Director Michael Fine, PhD • Department of Health**

Director Fine explained that his agency is very focused on understanding and preparing for direct impacts of climate change from extreme heat or cold. Indirect impacts include physical and mental health damage due to slow or sudden environmental changes, such as flooding, etc.; changes in disease spread patterns, vectors and types, such as Lyme disease. In addition to monitoring existing infectious diseases, it is now necessary to monitor for infectious diseases that were once considered “conquered,” such as malaria, as well as new diseases that can develop given changing ecological conditions, such as altered pollen levels and types, etc. Dr. Fine noted that the RI Climate Change and Health Program (overseen by RI DOH’s Dr. Robert Vanderslice and Julia Gold) is directly studying health issues relating to a changing climate. A program report is expected in September 2014.

#### **Hanna Morini • Commerce RI**

Ms. Morini explained that Commerce RI’s involvement in climate related issues is primarily assisting businesses in the area of energy efficiency and with managing the cost of renewable energy. She listed

four programs at Commerce RI that benefit this goal by focusing on residential solar; commercial solar (which includes businesses and schools); feasibility study assistance; and an “early stage commercialization program.”

Director Lewis suggested that the state’s highway medians be looked at as potential economic resources, as they could be used for renewable energy systems like solar, etc.

(Director Fine left the meeting for another commitment.)

#### **Kevin Flynn • DOA Division of Planning**

Mr. Flynn noted extensive activities within his office focusing on long-range planning related to infrastructure; land use; conservation; state and municipal mapping/GIS efforts, especially for cities and towns. The Division of Planning has received one of three national EPA Technical Assistance Grants (out of eighty applicants) to study negative and positive impacts of climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Division of Planning has also revised requirements for community planning to include natural hazard planning. In addition, the office’s efforts related to climate change include working with North Kingstown in mapping/planning efforts related to sea level rise and storm surge; partnering with DOT on the “[Rhode Map RI](#)” transportation and land use elements; and administering Community Development Block funding, which can assist communities with disaster relief and damage mitigation efforts.

#### **Michelle Burnett • RI EMA**

Ms. Burnett explained that RI EMA uses its expertise to assist communities and the state with the development of Hazard Mitigation Plans. The agency also assists communities with funding for disaster mitigation efforts in post-disaster periods and for associated capital improvement projects in strategic plans; the development and sharing of best management practices; outreach and education, including for the design community; flood insurance program administration; public assistance for post-disaster recovery, and helping to integrate public assistance with disaster mitigation projects.

#### **Director Marion Gold • Office of Energy Resources**

Director Gold provided a high-speed overview of the many programs and activities in her office that relate to climate change. These include updating the State Energy Plan; coordinating with National Grid on energy efficiency programs; expanding existing renewable energy and distributed generation programs; modernizing current electric grid infrastructure/systems (including the means to absorb renewable energy into the distribution grid); expanding financial investment tools; and working with state government to reduce energy use at state buildings by twenty percent.

#### **Executive Director Grover Fugate • Coastal Resources Management Council**

Director Fugate noted that CRMC’s activities related to climate change currently focus primarily on adaptation. The CRMC has been considering climate change in its coastal policies for over a decade and was the first such agency to adopt a climate policy in 2008. Specific projects within the agency include the Ocean Special Area Management Plan, which has a chapter on climate change; analyzing impacts of sea level rise and erosion on property setbacks; the development of the Shoreline Special Area Management Plan (which examines sea level rise, erosion, and storm surge); storm resiliency planning and guidance; community planning (with pilot programs in North Kingstown, Newport, and soon in Warwick); Coastal “SLAM” modeling, specifically around saltwater marsh impacts; coordinating with Save the Bay on “Living Shoreline” projects; studying the impact of saltwater changes on sea life,

especially shellfish; coastal storm adaptive studies; working as a member of the [Northeast Regional Ocean Council](#) (currently, CRMC's Jeff Willis chairs that organization); and working with [RI StormSmart Coasts](#). Director Fugate noted that, to be effective, future efforts will require public-private coordination and partnerships.

Director Coit referred to a draft written summary (attached) of DEM related efforts—from an inventory of air emissions and the examination of fisheries impacts to stormwater and infrastructure studies. Director Coit noted that the draft summary demonstrates that most DEM activities are or will be impacted by climate change.

Director Coit suggested that the EC3 continue its efforts with a series of workshops related to various climate related topics, such as: energy planning; emissions; sea level rise; property and infrastructure vulnerability; and transportation. Members are encouraged to propose other workshops. Director Coit proposed that meetings will be ninety minutes in length and to keep an aggressive schedule so as to cover all pertinent issues by the May 1 report date. Director Coit also noted that, while the intent of the council is to coordinate information among state agencies, she has spoken with Kate Brock of the Governor's Office about the need to consider mechanisms to gather public input.

Director Licht suggested that the work of the council and its final report include the following:

1. develop statutory language to continue the coordinating work of the Executive Climate Change Council;
2. present climate change issues as economic development (not just environmental) issues; and
3. communicate the importance of climate change preparation to the average Rhode Islander and to local community leaders. (Director Licht then left the meeting for another commitment.)

Director Coit applauded the ongoing work related to climate change and she discussed various regional efforts that Rhode Island is taking part in. Director Lewis stressed the importance of working with the other New England states to build off such regional activities.

Jan Reitsma suggested that council members provide notes used in their presentations or summaries to be incorporated in or added to the minutes.

Director Coit noted she would be in touch to schedule the next meeting.

**With all business concluded, Dr. Lewis motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Flynn seconded the motion. With all members present voting in favor, the motion passed.**

The meeting adjourned at 11:32 a.m.