

Beth Cotter

From: Cynthia Zerquera <lczerquera@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 19, 2022 10:41 AM
To: Beth Cotter
Subject: CRMC Reorganization

My name is Cynthia Zerquera-Martin. I have been living here in RI since the Eisenhower Administration, first in Pawtucket, then in East Providence, and now in Narragansett where I am a longtime homeowner and full time resident. I am deeply entrenched in coastal living in this beautiful State of Rhode Island, The Ocean State.

I have watched our little coastal town grow and change quite a bit in these last few decades, most recently and dramatically with the onset of the COVID pandemic, resulting in residential redevelopment with larger structures replacing smaller seasonal homes. Sea level rise and coastal erosion are also taking their toll. Narragansett is responsible for protecting, enhancing, and formalizing public access points to the water, so the Coastal Access Improvement Committee (CAIC) was formed. I serve as the Chairman of that Committee.

The CAIC is an advisory body to the Town Council and works to improve accessibility, create maintenance plans, and upgrade public infrastructure around coastal access sites. The CAIC is comprised of unpaid volunteer residents of Narragansett who are passionate about protecting our vital shoreline and put in long hours to do so. Narragansett is clearly committed in speech and in deed to providing a positive and memorable shoreline experience for all.

Coastal municipalities such as Narragansett depend upon the guidance of our State's legislature in order to protect these shoreline access rights. We work hand in hand with governmental agencies such as DEM and CRMC to ensure that we are fulfilling our municipal obligations of shoreline access protection and enhancement.

We on the municipal level need from our State legislature a well funded and well staffed DEM and CRMC. As both organizations currently stand, they are woefully

underfunded and understaffed which makes work on the municipal level frustrating at best.

We in the CAIC are the guardians of the coastline in Narragansett where there are several CRMC ROWs already established. Based on the work of the CAIC, heirs to privately owned ROWs have come forth to offer their ROW to CRMC for designation. This requires much coordination between our Committee, our Town Council, and CRMC. We currently have one highly disputed ROW 'in the legal process' at CRMC and it has been for months.

There are also irregularities between CRMC's ROWs database and the ArcGIS map of ROWs. There are numerous ROW applications that are 'In Review' and have been for over a year, there are many applications that were rejected due to Insufficient Evidence. I have asked on numerous occasions that CRMC prove me with the paperwork associated with these applications so that we may push them along and/or provide additional information on the ones that were initially rejected. With the bare CRMC staffing levels currently, this work remains largely undone.

The folks that work as staff at CRMC are passionate about what they do and have great enthusiasm for their work. They want to help us fulfill CRMC's mission of having a ROW for every mile of coastline in RI. They are, however, understaffed to the point of turning away the necessary work to establish a new ROW back to the municipal level for tasks that are basic fundamentals like the legal review of supporting documents. For the CRMC designated ROWs already in existence, there is no available staff to assist with enforcement of access to those ROWs. Encroachment onto public ROWs is real and is largely unchallenged due to lack of leadership on the state level. There is a real risk of losing these ROWs over time as a result.

We in the CAIC are dancing just as fast as we can but we feel like we are between a rock and a hard place – the Narragansett/RI residents and the CRMC. We have active CRMC ROWs, we have many in the application phase, yet every time we contact CRMC for an update, the issue is always 'it's in review'. Many of these applications have been sitting for years. It is frustrating at best to receive inquiries from residents and have to reply 'it's with CRMC'.

It is time for CRMC to be reformed and to be restructured as a proper state agency like DEM. The Council needs to be eliminated and replaced with a staff that is educated in the matters of coastal access management. Political appointees simply do not provide the infrastructure – or funding – that is necessary for our state to achieve its goal of protecting the coastline for all RI residents, not just Narragansett.

Without proper support and funding for such important work as coastal management, the municipalities have their hands tied. We desperately need a fully funded, fully staffed CRMC to take the reins of responsibility for that which CRMC has been tasked – to protect our coastline. I urge our legislators and decision makers to give CRMC the authority and staffing necessary to achieve that goal.

Thank you.

Cinna Zerquera-Martin
Chairman
Coastal Access Improvement Committee
Town of Narragansett