

## Legislative discussion to be held next week

### Discussion

#### By Sean Flynn

Staff writer

NEWPORT - The **aquidneck island planning commission** has scheduled its 2017 Newport County Legislative Forum for Wednesday from 8-10 a.m., in the auditorium of the Community College of Rhode Island.

The 2017 forum is AIPC's second annual legislative forum and part of its ongoing "Smart Island" series of public events. The first legislative forum was held last year at the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy of Salve Regina University, but space was a little tight there, said Tom Ardito, the planning commission's executive director.

The discussion with the legislators is expected to draw 150-200 people this year, which the CCRI auditorium can accommodate. People in the audience will be able to submit questions for the legislators. Neil Steinberg, president and CEO of the Rhode Island Foundation, the state's largest charitable foundation, will moderate the discussion.

More than half of the state's Newport County

delegation will participate in the forum, including Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed, D-Newport, Sen. Louis P. DiPalma, D-Middletown, Sen. James A. Seveney, D-Portsmouth, Rep. Marvin Abney, D-Newport, Rep. Deborah Ruggiero, D-Jamestown, Rep. Lauren Carson, D-Newport, and Rep. Susan R. Donovan, D-Bristol.

"The goal of the AIPC and the Rhode Island Foundation is to improve civil dialogue and facilitate civic engagement," Ardito said.

The Community College of Rhode Island and The Newport Daily News are co-sponsoring the event, he said.

"There are so many major issues to talk about at the forum, we won't be able to get to all of them," Ardito said.

Newport's drive to establish an Innovation Hub in the north end of the city on land freed up by a redesign and relocation of the Pell Bridge ramps is of interest to local communities, he said.

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The initiative can be discussed in connection with a ballot question approved by voters in November that authorized a total \$45.5 million bond, \$25.5 million for the University of Rhode Island College of Engineering and another \$20 million for an "Innovation Campus Program."

The state has been investing economic development money predominantly in Providence and URI is located in South Kingstown, so Newport County's chances in

reduce the assessment by 30 percent. The relief would total \$55 million annually and take effect for the fiscal 2019 budget. Collectively, Portsmouth, Newport, Middletown, Tiverton and Jamestown only make up 3.7 percent of the state's total vehicle tax levy, and bring in \$8 million annually, according to figures provided by the governor's office.

Raimondo would like the state to invest some of its financial resources in an initiative to provide two years of tuition-free education at state colleges, another possible topic for discussion, Ardito said.

The annual cost to the state of the tuition-free program would be \$30 million by 2021, if the maximum number of students takes advantage of it. The program would

competing for the bond money could be an issue, Ardito said.

Increasing the number of jobs on Aquidneck Island that can attract young families to the island is related to this issue, he said. The demographics show there is an aging population on the island and the needs of senior citizens in the communities has to be balanced with efforts to retain young people here and expand opportunities for them, he said.

The public debate surrounding the motor vehicle tax is another possible topic of discussion, Ardito said.

State Speaker of the House Nicholas Mattiello, D-Cranston, has proposed phasing out the state's car tax over five years, which would require the state distribute \$215 million annually after five years to the municipalities to compensate for the lost revenue.

The administration of Gov. Gina Raimondo is advocating a more modest proposal. The governor is proposing to change how a vehicle's worth is determined by the state Vehicle Value Commission. The new assessment, intended to better align with the "average trade-in value," would

cost an estimated \$10 million in fiscal 2018, \$13 million in 2019 and \$18 million in 2020.

Congress is discussing the repeal of the Affordable Care Act and replacing it with the American Health Care Act being proposed by the Republican majority. The Republican proposal would cut funding for Medicaid. How that and other provisions of the bill would affect Rhode Island residents could be discussed, "although it might still be early for that," Ardito said.

"Community engagement is a positive force for change," Steinberg said in a prepared statement. "State lawmakers, the Planning Commission and local stakeholders deserve credit for coming together to share their vision for moving the area forward."

The event is free and open to the public; however, space is limited and registration is required. Tickets are available through AIPC's website,

[aquidneckplanning.org](http://aquidneckplanning.org)

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