



Richmond Police Department

P.O. Box 203
1168 Main Street
Wyoming, Rhode Island 02898



Elwood M. Johnson, Jr.
Chief of Police

Telephone 401-539-8289
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October 20, 2025

Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Historic Commission
Elizabeth Totten, Project Review Coordinator
Jeffrey Emidy, Executive Director
1 Capitol Hill, Suite 201
Providence, RI 02908

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter in support of our continued and persistent struggle to address the longstanding problem with our outdated emergency communications system. The Town of Richmond relies on a limited budget resting almost solely on residential taxpayers with little else to offset that burden, aside from opportunities like the one afforded to us through the USDA (via Congressional Discretionary Funding). We desperately need an upgrade to our emergency radio system to enhance interoperability, efficiency, and reliability. This communications tower is an absolute must. It is the proverbial need, not the proverbial want.

In July 2022, our primary emergency radio communications tower suffered severe damage from an accidental fire to the historical "fire tower cabin" at the top where our antennas were affixed. Our police department remains on an outdated VHF radio repeater system as it's primary network, unlike all of our current bordering mutual aid law enforcement agencies, because our 800 MHz system coverage had never been very good due to the insufficient height of our radio tower, the growth of surrounding vegetation near the old tower, and the topography of our jurisdiction with elevation changes between hills and valleys. The steel tower portion of the historical tower remains intact and sound, as the fire was restricted to the cabin at the top, which was successfully extinguished quickly by responding fire companies. However, the tower is too short to serve the Town's needs as the trees around it have grown over the last half century, and the cabin is no longer suitable to host radio antennas. The old tower does not pose a risk of damage or functionality to the new site or surrounding area. Rather, it is in a perfect location for enhanced security as the new tower will be outfitted with quality digital CCTV surveillance cameras and will provide us with the ability to monitor it remotely.

The Town of Richmond asserts that the historical feature should remain standing, as the cost of removing and relocating it is unnecessarily exorbitant, likely exceeding \$100,000, and would be counterintuitive as there is no better location than where it has stood "historically" since it was erected in 1968. This site is off-limits to the public and is gated at the entrance from Shannock Hill Road. It is restricted to public safety and emergency communications staff, and is

not a site for visitors, so it does not need to be refurbished for public viewing or visitation by the public like other historical sites.

Since July of 2022 we have been relying on the generous assistance of the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA), which loaned their mobile communications tower to us at that site. The temporary tower has been in place for more than three years and is not ours to use indefinitely. The newly erected tower will offer a permanent solution and much needed improvements to our emergency communications system. Further delays will possibly lead to additional costs to taxpayers in this community and place unnecessary risk on our interoperability with other emergency response agencies.

The height of the new communications tower at 160 feet will provide us sufficient height to clear existing vegetation/trees, which will enable us to move to the 800MHz system as our primary radio network, facilitating interoperability with our neighboring police departments, which is especially helpful when we train and/or respond to emergency calls on our large Chariho Regional School District campus in Richmond, or other mutual aid emergency responses. Furthermore, it will host our mutual aid partners within Fire Services, including the Richmond-Carolina Fire Department, the RI Southern Firefighters League, and the Town's Department of Public Works.

The current location is atop the most desirable high point in town, and in ideal proximity to the Chariho Regional School District's campus of nearly 3,000 staff and students daily during the school year. We have jurisdictional authority and responsibility for protecting the campus and across the 40-square miles of Richmond, and radio communications is a critical need for all of us in public safety and emergency response. Lastly, the tower will provide a critical link to the RI Emergency Management Agency's RISCO network which lacks sufficient coverage in this very area, so this location will inevitably enhance the entire statewide emergency communications network.

Chief Scott Barber of the Richmond-Carolina Fire Department has contributed to and reviewed this letter and offered his full support of the content herein. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to verify the authenticity of this correspondence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elwood M. Johnson, Jr." in a cursive script.

Elwood M. Johnson, Jr.
Chief of Police

From: Elwood Johnson
Sent: Monday, October 20, 2025 3:32 PM
To: Elizabeth.Totten@preservation.ri.gov
Cc: chief@rcfd.org
Subject: Communications Tower in Richmond

Dear Coordinator Totten:

Please see the attached letter. We are hopeful you and your team can assist us with seeing this project through, as it has been a long road and our emergency communications are in the balance.

I have copied this letter to Chief Scott Barber of the Richmond-Carolina Fire Department. If you need anything more from me or the Town in support of our request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Elwood Johnson

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