

# REAL ESTATE VIEWS<sup>®</sup>

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## Coastal Buffer Zones, A Primer: What Are They? (Part 1 of a 2 Part Series)

People interested in purchasing waterfront homes often expect a sweeping "Hamptons" lawn from the house to the beach but are surprised and sometimes, disappointed, to discover that newer waterfront homes in Rhode Island County have a natural coastal buffer zone instead of a lawn.

In Rhode Island, properties within 200 ft. above the water are subject to the jurisdiction of the Coastal Resources Management Council (C. R. M. C.). CRMC is responsible, among other things, for protecting water quality, coastal habitats for native plants and animals, scenic and aesthetic quality of the shoreline; assisting in erosion and flood control; and, protecting historic and archaeological resources along the coast. In order to accomplish these objectives, CRMC now requires coastal buffer zones to "preserve, protect and, where possible, restore ecological systems." This is supposed to be balanced with an



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individual's right to develop and use his/her waterfront property.

Waterfront homes that preexisted CRMC's regulations are "grandfathered" and exempted from the regulations unless an owner decides to expand the footprint of their residence 50% or more. New homes and expansions of existing homes that involve an increase in the footprint of 50% or more require a coastal buffer zone.

Generally, any vegetation in a coastal buffer zone is maintained in a "natural, undisturbed condition"

or managed in accordance with the standards set forth in CRMC's "Red Book", formally known as *The State of Rhode Island's Coastal Resources Management Program, As Amended*.

If a buffer zone area is free of vegetation or has been "strip-cleared" in violation of CRMC regulations, and owner may be required to restore/replant the buffer zone. An access path to the shoreline is normally permitted provided they are no more than 6 ft. wide and are winding, but direct, to minimize the possibility of erosion. Grass paths are allowed and may be mowed. Paths may also be surfaced with crushed stone or mulch.

**Source: *The Red Book*.**

Author's Note: This is a complex issue. I generally recommend that any questions regarding coastal buffer zones be addressed to CRMC or an attorney or other professional familiar with coastal regulations.

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