



January 22, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

While many January weekends bring eventful football games, few of them also bring unseasonal weather and dramatic marches and rallies – I hope you are taking in some part of this remarkable time. This week’s letter discusses the possible introduction of a suboxone office and the distribution of “wholesale” water by Providence Water.

A few weeks ago, an oversized sign stating “Suboxone – Available Spring 2017” appeared in front of a mansion located at Lloyd and Thayer. Suboxone is a type of medicine used to help end opiate addiction, and can be prescribed by doctors who receive a specific certification after a modest amount of training. The property owner was described in a media article as having unsavory connections, and the specific status of the property is not clear. On the one hand, the office could house physicians who would write prescriptions, which the patients could take to a pharmacy to fill. Other locations serve as “clinics” where the drugs are dispensed as well as prescribed. It is not clear which model (or another one) is planned for this location. The two types of facilities have different approval processes, with clinics having more extensive regulation than prescription offices. The property is in a residential zone, but a previous owner obtained a zoning variance to open a doctor’s office. With that said, some residents are exploring the current status of the prior variance. Finally, the Bureau of Inspections and Standards concluded the sign exceeds permitted dimensions, and has issued an order of removal. That order is subject to an administrative process which is currently underway.

In recent months, there has been discussion across the State about a proposed power plant in Burrillville. The plant would generate electricity from natural gas, leaving a smaller environmental footprint than the previous generation of coal-fired power. With that said, the natural gas in question is produced by a process called “fracking,” which involves the injection of water and chemicals into the ground, causing the release of methane and other local environmental impacts. As part of its application, the new plant must secure a water supply for cooling and other purposes. In recent weeks, the Town of Johnston has offered to provide that water from its allocation of “wholesale” water it receives from its agreement with Providence Water. The Providence Water Supply Board examined the issue, and concluded Johnston has the authority to do this (and gain revenue between the “wholesale” price it pays Providence and the “retail” price it would charge the power plant) under existing agreements. Without deciding the merits of the Burrillville power plant, I have concerns about the reckless sale of Providence water at “wholesale” rates to municipalities that are selling it to non-residents. In my opinion, municipalities should not be making a “profit” off Providence water for its own sake; instead, municipalities should limit their distribution of Providence water to local residents and businesses. Our water is a precious resource, not an unlimited one. Providence’s control over the water supply has been eroded by State law, and it would not be easy to persuade the General Assembly to return responsibility to Providence; however, I plan to research the State’s regulatory framework for the municipal purchase of “wholesale” water from Providence. I will be looking for a targeted way to protect our State’s water supply from misuse by municipal “wholesale” customers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Samuel D. Zurier'.