



January 24, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

When I was younger, I loved the snow, but viewed weekend snow storms as a lost opportunity to miss school. From my perspective today, the timing of this weekend's storm looks pretty good, as we have a chance to watch the football game today, and return to work tomorrow without a major disruption. In addition to discussing snow removal, this week's letter will discuss Fire Department staffing and economic development.

The City has developed a suite of online resources to stay up to date with snow storms and the City's response (parking bans, etc.). The Providence Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) has a [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter feed](#). You can sign up for updates via email and/or text messages through [the Code Red program](#). For those of us who are less "wired," we want to know whom to telephone to find either (1) when our street is going to be plowed or (2) why our street has not been plowed yet. During working hours, you can call the Mayor's Constituent Services Office at 421-2489, but the picture for nights and weekends remains unclear. The City has activated its "Snow Removal Hotline" at 680-8080, but when I tried it this morning, it was tied to the answering machine at the Mayor's Constituent Services Office.

On Wednesday, the Internal Auditor sent a [Letter](#) to the City Council concerning Fire Department staffing. There are currently 283 fire fighters available for active duty, which is one more than the "minimum manning" level of 94 required for each of three shifts. Historically, it is common for ten eligible fire fighters to be unavailable for their shift due to sick leave, personal leave, etc. Under current conditions, there is no reserve of fire fighters who are being paid for the shift but are not on duty. Instead, the vacancies must be filled by employees already assigned to another shift who will be paid "call back" or overtime. The Auditor estimates that overtime expense this year will more than double the \$5 million in the budget. In addition to the financial stress, the compounding overtime hours increase occupational stress for fire fighters (whose regular work week increased from 42 to 56 hours in August). The administration has questioned the legitimacy of the increase in fire fighters reporting "injured on duty" since the shift change, installing new management to look into possible employee misuse. To date, however, the new management has not resulted in any reductions in these reported injuries. For that reason, the Internal Auditor's letter highlights the urgent need to begin recruiting candidates for a new fire fighters training academy, a step the administration has declined to take. The administration requested funding for this academy (\$1.3 million) in this year's budget, which was approved. Four months ago, the City Council approved a resolution urging the administration to initiate this academy "as soon as possible." Given that there is a lead time of 9 months or more before the decision to start an academy and the start of work for new recruits, the delays create mounting risks for the City's budget and its fire protection program.

On Tuesday, the Governor unveiled an [Economic Development Report](#) prepared by the Brookings Institution. The Brookings Report meshes closely with a [Report](#) released by the I-195 Commission the week before, which is not surprising. More surprising and promising are the links between both of these reports and the independent [cluster development study](#) the City Council commissioned and published last year. While the particular recommendations and potential action steps are not completely aligned, the reports from the City and the State speak the same language, and provide the opportunity for constructive dialogue and coordinated activity should the parties choose to collaborate, which I hope we will be able to do.

Sincerely,