



October 1, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

This week, we saw a glimmer of a bright future for our City as construction began on a technology center on the I-195 land. In the meantime, this letter will discuss the plans for infrastructure repairs, the proposed suboxone office and a meeting to discuss alternative uses of the vacant Rochambeau Avenue fire station.

The City Council approved an infrastructure bond over the summer, and planning is currently underway to repair streets and sidewalks. In addition to allocating \$3 million for sidewalk repairs, the bond proceeds also will pay for an inspection and assessment of all the City's sidewalks. At a recent neighborhood meeting, the Public Works Director described possible new technology to perform a complete sidewalk inventory. A vendor is proposing a semi-automated system in which a device will roll along all the sidewalks, assess their condition, and add the information into an electronic database. When fully implemented, the database would be integrated into a City map to which all residents would have online access. This would provide a quantum leap beyond the current system, in which constituents contact their City Council representative, who contacts the City Council office, who contacts DPW to learn about the status of each sidewalk.

In recent weeks, a potential buyer for the house at 150 Lloyd Avenue has discussed a possible proposal with local residents, organizations and elected officials. To recoup the purchase price, the potential buyer seeks to subdivide the lot and construct residences on the lot. The potential buyer discussed one proposal to construct eight residential units on the subdivided lot, which would require a variance or a zoning change, given the R-1 zoning currently in place. The Planning Department indicated it could not support this change, as it would not be consistent with the City's comprehensive plan. The potential buyer is now considering whether it is feasible to develop fewer units. In the meantime, the current owner installed a new sign that is more consistent with zoning restrictions that permit a doctor's office but not a dispensary. On the other hand, residents who live near the building observe that work inside the building has slowed down, so it is not clear when the proposed office will be ready to open, if a sale does not take place.

This past Wednesday, the Planning Department held an open house at the former Rochambeau Avenue fire station to invite community input for possible future uses. During my visit, I heard many creative proposals, including a community center and a fire fighting museum, as well as interest from people who wished to purchase the property and return it to the tax rolls. I will be asking the Planning Department to proceed slowly and carefully for two reasons. First, we do not have sufficient information about whether our neighborhood retains sufficient access to fire prevention and emergency services since the station closed. At a community meeting earlier this year, residents expressed concerns about the winter, and whether the fire engines on North Main Street can climb the hill in snowy conditions. Second, even if we do not need to restore the fire engine, I am wary of selling the City's real estate to private owners. I am reminded of the condominiums near Laurel and Cole, where the John Howland Elementary School once stood. Losing that school compromised the City's network of neighborhood schools, and affected public education and residential patterns on the East Side. While a fire station is not a school house, the City will not be able to get it back once it is sold, so I will advocate for deliberation and caution.

Sincerely,