



October 9, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are enjoying Columbus Day weekend. This week's letter provides an update on the infrastructure bond.

The City's deferred maintenance, in the form of crumbling streets, sidewalks, sewers, schools and public buildings, is obvious to everyone. In a [Report](#) I wrote as Chair of the Bond Study Commission, we found bad news and good news. The bad news was that the City had made poor decisions in the past with bond funds, including the creation of discretionary accounts for individual City Council members during the Cianci era, a hyper-political process that wasted significant taxpayer funds. The good news was that the City's bond capacity over the next 10-12 years may be adequate to close its infrastructure deficit, provided that State school construction aid is fully funded and the City spends its own bond funds more wisely.

This past June, the administration proposed a \$40 million infrastructure bond to address a set of street, sidewalk, bridge, sewer and park projects. The City Council did not accept the administration's framework, proposing instead that each individual Council member be allocated \$1.5 million in bond funds to spend at his or her absolute discretion. I opposed this alternative, both in the Finance Committee and in an [opinion piece](#) published in the Providence Journal. The administration also opposed it, negotiating with the City Council leadership a revised bond ordinance which removed the discretionary accounts, but incorporated new language requiring the City Council to give a second round of approval to a spending plan before the bond could be issued.

When this measure came to the City Council floor, I voted "present" (i.e. not for and not against) for the only time in my six years on the City Council. I was reluctant to abstain, as you elected me to make difficult decisions on your behalf, but while I believe the City needs an infrastructure bond, I was worried that my colleagues on the City Council would leverage their requirement of a second approval vote to insert pet projects that would waste taxpayer money, thus bringing back discretionary accounts through the back door. For that reason, I stated that I did not know enough at the time to vote either for or against the bond.

My worries were realized on Thursday night, when the City Council leadership presented a proposed resolution that would confer discretionary authority on individual City Council members to select bond spending projects within their respective wards. In a [WPRI.com report](#), the Mayor described this as a "slush fund" proposal, which he would veto it if it passed in its present form. Given that the Mayor and the City Council leadership discussed this matter extensively over the past few months, this disagreement is more than a misunderstanding.

The timing of the City Council leadership's intransigence is poignant. On Friday morning, the Providence Journal published a [lead editorial](#) urging the Attorney General to investigate promptly a referral from the Board of Elections after the Board concluded that the City Council President was using campaign funds for personal expenses, following the path of Gordon Fox (who pled guilty and is now in federal prison) and Councilman Jackson (who is under indictment but still active on the City Council). The Journal's editorial concludes with this question: "If they can't manage their own matters, what business do they have managing the public's?" Though it was written before the current debacle with discretionary accounts surfaced, the editorial's question is the right one to ask in the current debate over the infrastructure bond. I will continue to exert my best efforts to prevent the debacle planned by the City Council leadership. While our infrastructure needs remain drastic and pressing, we cannot afford the ransom of "slush funds" that is being demanded by City Council leadership.

Sincerely,

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

P.S. To those of us observing Yom Kippur Tuesday night and Wednesday night, I wish us all an easy fast or, as the English might say, Keep calm and fast on.

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