

November 8, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you enjoyed some quality time outdoors this weekend, perhaps collecting part of this year's bounteous harvest of fallen leaves. This week's letter discusses neighborhood schools, economic development and the Providence Teachers Union contract.

At tomorrow night's meeting (Monday, November 9 at 6:30 p.m.), the School Board will review for initial passage a policy change regarding neighborhood schools. Currently, the School Department holds a lottery in the early Spring to assign children to new schools in elementary (kindergarten), middle school (6th grade) and high school (9th grade). The current practice is to fill all schools' seats at that time, and then operate from a "waiting list." This produces an inequity for children in families who move into the neighborhood after the registration cutoff (which typically is around February 1st.) These children are unable to attend the school in their neighborhood, even if the population of neighborhood children is well below the policy's intended 80% threshold. The policy amendment will allow the School Department to "hold" a limited number of seats (2 in elementary, 4 in middle and high schools) until late June for students moving into the neighborhood when the lottery results in an under-enrollment of neighborhood children. This represents a useful first step in the addressing this problem, and I am hopeful the experience will, over time, lead to further revisions reserving more seats for a longer period of time to address a serious need.

Last Tuesday, the Economic Development Task Force reviewed a revised [Cluster Analysis Study](#) to identify industries that are compatible with the City's current strengths and opportunities for economic development. The Study will now be forwarded to the City Council for review and action. It contains several intriguing suggestions, including Providence's position strengths in the food industry and the field of design. At Tuesday's meeting, the City's new Economic Development Director, Mark Huang, shared his comprehensive perspective and approach to the task. With that in mind, I am scheduling a community meeting to bring Director Huang and Stefan Pryor, the State's Secretary of Commerce together to discuss their ideas for economic development in Providence. I will have more details about this meeting in next week's letter.

Last week, the Finance Committee continued its review of the tentative agreement entered into between the administration and the Providence Teachers Union. This agreement was first announced in the Spring; however, a question arose as to whether the administration's change in fire fighter shifts (combining an 8% pay increase with a 33% increase in the average work week) would trigger an automatic pay increase for the teachers based on a "parity clause" contained in the tentative agreement. The parties negotiated an amendment to the tentative agreement waiving any dispute regarding this issue in return for a new guarantee requiring the use of seniority (within certification) as the sole criterion for certain types of layoffs. The State's previous Commissioner of Education prepared a letter to superintendents interpreting the State's Basic Education Plan to prohibit the use of seniority as the exclusive criterion for personnel decisions. With that in mind, I wrote a [Letter](#) to the Finance Committee Chair recommending that the School Department seek clarification from the Rhode Island Department of Education ("RIDE") regarding the validity of the new contract language prior to approval by the City Council. The School Department agreed to speak with RIDE on this issue.

Sincerely,

