



December 10, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you survived Winter Storm Benji, which showed us the courtesy of arriving and leaving during the weekend. This week's letter discusses the boat ramp project on River Road and the State's task force reviewing aid for school buildings.

The Planning Department held a public meeting to discuss the City's application for a State grant to build a boat ramp at River Road. The [Conceptual Plan](#) for the project calls for a 15-foot wide ramp, around 50 feet long, just south of the base of Irving Avenue. As the plan indicates, the ramp will extend diagonally to the street and the shoreline. The ramp would be suitable for kayaks or canoes, but not for larger boats. In addition to supporting a new recreational use in the area, the project will stabilize an eroded area and facilitate the handling of storm water flows. This semester, a class of URI students from the Landscape Architecture and Marin Affairs programs were given a class assignment of imagining a "post industrial corridor" for the portion of the Seekonk River between the Henderson and Washington Bridges. The students were asked to develop ideas concerning land use, circulation, bicycle and pedestrian movement, green infrastructure, access to the river and sea level ride. They will display their project and discuss it at a session on **December 18, 2017 from 3:00-5:30 p.m. at Rhode Island Hall at Brown University (60 George Street)**. Please contact Francis Richards at rickarichards@gmail.com if you wish to attend.

On Thursday, the Rhode Island School Buildings Task Force presented a [Draft Report](#) which proposes the expansion of the State's support for school building construction and for greater State technical assistance and oversight. It follows on an initial report that identified \$2.2 billion in necessary school repairs and renovations, including \$372 million in Providence (lower than the City's own estimates). The draft report proposes that the State borrow \$500 million over the next 5 years to help pay for the renovations, in addition to the current program which reimburses school construction projects with an ongoing annual appropriation of around \$80 million. An earlier State report indicated that the current level of support is inadequate to address the current construction backlog; instead, the problem will grow without additional funding. Also, the report proposes that the State use the bond proceeds to pay at least some of the local school construction costs at the time they are incurred, rather than reimbursing local districts after they pay themselves. This change would benefit the City of Providence which, through the Providence Building Authority is currently obligated to pay school construction bonds with a total obligation in the hundreds of millions of dollars, which limits the amount of available credit the Building Authority and/or the City can have available for other capital projects. The increased State regulation and technical assistance would include a representative at construction projects and greater oversight of annual maintenance. The proposed \$500 million in bonds will provide a useful increase in the State's support, but it is not clear from the report whether it will be sufficient to address the backlog adequately. Also, the report is a proposal that is subject to General Assembly review and approval, and it is not clear the General Assembly shares the same priorities as the task force. With that said, the report is helpful in identifying this serious issue and describing ways for the State to better address this important area.

Sincerely,