



December 9, 2018

Dear Fellow East Siders:

The recent passing of President George H.W. Bush offered an opportunity to reflect on his legacy and our country's path in the post-Cold War era, allowing us to build on what we have gained since then and to restore what we have lost. This week's letter discusses the City's school facilities program and the City Council's stewardship of City resources and programs.

On Wednesday, December 5, the School Department Oversight Committee received a report from the administration concerning the improvement of Providence public school buildings. Our school facilities suffer from decades of neglect, which can now be partially addressed thanks to the voters' approval of school facilities bonds in the amount of \$160 million at the local level and \$250 million at the State level. The State bond resulted from a task force that found approximately \$2.2 billion in needed repairs State-wide. The local bond was initiated by an administration announcement of a \$400 million program to renovate the City's school buildings. The State's program reimburses local school districts a proportion of approved school repairs based on the local district's ability to pay, which in Providence results in a State share of 83%. With that said, even with the \$250 million bond approved (as well as annual appropriations from the general fund), the State does not have enough money to fund its share of Providence's entire program; therefore, Providence will be assessing priorities based on a formula of 75% for "warm, safe and dry" repairs such as leaking roofs, and 25% for upgrading facilities to better accommodate best practices in academic programming. The administration and School Board expect to produce the first version of a "Stage 2" proposal for the next five years sometime in February. The bottom line here is that the entire list of renovations likely will be extremely necessary, but far from sufficient.

While the City Council devoted the majority of its December 6 meeting to saying farewell to the four members whose terms are concluding, the business portion of the meeting included four votes on initiatives I proposed as the current term (and my own service on the Council) head toward their conclusion. The City Council approved a resolution to set a goal of reducing the use of paper (which currently runs at 300,000 sheets per year) by 50% in the coming year through such practices as getting more members to use the Chromebooks we were issued years ago, and by changing rules to facilitate notice by email rather than by paper.

On the other hand, the City Council rejected three other resolutions I introduced to my surprise and disappointment. The first resolution followed a [Hummel Report](#) of excessive and avoidable cell telephone expense, including one member's racking up a bill of more than \$400 for overseas calls in a single month, most or all of which could have been saved had he made use of wi-fi calling. The resolution called for more wi-fi calling and the continued implementation of a policy that Council President Salvatore instituted of having members work with the Council office to review bills. Rather than approve the resolution, the debate turned to an airing of grievances blaming President Salvatore for the news story, even though his role was limited to providing information that the reporter requested (and which the reporter was entitled to under the State's public records law).

The second (non-binding) resolution asked the Finance Committee to give prompt consideration to the [Report](#) it received in April from the Pension Study Working Group, which took months of hard work to prepare, and which was accepted for this purpose by a previous vote by the City Council. Despite the resolution's advisory nature, the Majority Leader (who is also the Chair of the Finance Committee) made a point of asking the City Council to reject the resolution, placing an exclamation point on the Finance Committee's utter failure to conduct any substantive discussion (never mind take any responsible action) with regard to the City's \$1 billion unfunded pension liability throughout the entire term. The third resolution, which requested the Ordinance Committee promptly to take up legislation to prevent those indicted from felonies from serving as City Council President or

committee chair was also emphatically rejected, notwithstanding this term's embarrassment of electing two top leaders who relinquished their positions after each was indicted for felony crimes. We have seen the fruits of first of these indictments, as the former Majority Leader pleaded no contest to the charges against him. His admission in court means he knew he committed these crimes while seeking re-election by his constituents and while convincing my colleagues to elect him Majority Leader. The second indictment is still pending for a Council member who was re-elected in November, making the Ordinance Committee's failure to act that much more disappointing.

This Tuesday (December 11), the City Council will hold a vote to review the Mayor's veto of the Hope Point Tower project zoning change. The Home Rule Charter requires ten votes to override, which would require one opponent of the project to change his or her vote. I see no reason to change my vote against, and I am not privy to any discussions or negotiations with possible swing votes.

Sincerely,



Samuel D. Junier
