



February 2, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

What an exciting Super Bowl! As usual, my brother was there, as he has been for so many important moments in Boston/New England sports history, demonstrating once more why he is the coolest brother in the family. But I digress. This week's letter discusses neighborhood schools and economic development.

Prior to the snow storm, the Providence School Board scheduled a policy committee meeting for tonight to discuss the district's neighborhood school assignment plan. The School Board first adopted this plan in 2001 to balance the goals of parental choice and preserving neighborhood schools by reserving 80% of each school's seats within a school neighborhood (defined as 1 mile for elementary schools and larger for middle and high schools), with the remaining seats available to children outside the neighborhood. The quality of elementary schools varies, and this has produced different responses. Charter school advocates propose replacing all neighborhood schools with city-wide admission programs so as to create "equity" among neighborhoods for the best schools. Neighborhood school supporters note that a neighborhood identity can improve a school, especially when parents and the surrounding community are more involved. Also, neighborhood schools can be an important attraction to recruit and retain families, making this an economic development issue. With that said, I believe the formula can benefit from review and refinement, such as trying to adapt the 1-mile radius to actual neighborhood residential patterns.

Last Thursday, the Providence Preservation Society sponsored a talk by Tom Murphy, who as Mayor of Pittsburgh helped rebuild and reshape that city following the closure of the steel mills. Mayor Murphy noted that Providence has several valuable assets, including its universities, historic architecture, history and culture, but noted these assets are not enough to spur a City comeback by themselves. Instead, Mayor Murphy emphasized the importance of "intentionality" and planning. For example, he stated the redevelopment of the I-195 land should not be its own goal; instead, the City should have a long-term goal to guide and shape the development of that land. It therefore will be interesting to follow to view the changes in leadership at the I-195 Commission, where the current Chair stated his view the "market" should determine development, but who recently announced his plans to step down.

Mayor Murphy's suggestions are consistent with the findings of a [Report](#) issued last year by the City Council's Task Force on Economic Development, which recommended the formulation of an overall economic development plan. The Report recommended that the City engage a consultant to identify the particular industries most compatible with our environment (also known as a "cluster development study"), which would provide a focal point for the City's economic development recruitment and retention efforts. The City Council the issuance of a request for proposals for this study, and on Monday, January 26, the Board of Contract and Supply awarded a contract to Fourth Economy for this [Proposal](#). The cluster development study will provide useful information for the City Council and the new administration to fashion and implement an economic development plan. Through such a process, I believe we can gain the opportunity to engage in the type of intentional action that will support a successful long-term effort to transform the City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Samuel D. Zurier'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'S' and 'Z'.