

April 5, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are enjoying this Easter and Passover weekend. This year's is particularly significant, as it marks the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, which added meaning to our singing of "Go down, Moses" at our family Seder. (On another, sadder, note, Lincoln was assassinated on Good Friday in 1865, spurring another set of religious comparisons related to this season.) This week's letter discusses the City Charter's residency requirement, economic development and reviewing the City's policing practices.

Over the past few months, the City Council has debated nominations of residents from other cities to serve on boards and commissions. In some cases, the positions are difficult to fill, as they require specialized knowledge and do not offer financial compensation. For other, paid positions (such as the Board of Licenses), local knowledge is more valuable and there is a deep pool of qualified Providence residents. Two weeks ago, I prepared a set of ordinances to establish a residency requirement for certain key positions (such as the Board of Licenses and municipal judgeships); however, a question arose as to whether the City Council had the authority to enact requirements by ordinance (as opposed to amendments to the City Charter). I then reviewed Sections [1210](#) and [1207](#) of the City Charter, and concluded they contain a residency requirement for many positions without the need to enact ordinances. (A State law prohibits local residency requirement for municipal employees.) When I reviewed these provisions with the City Solicitor, he agreed, and he shared his opinion at the City Council meeting. At that meeting, the City Council ratified an appointment to the Building Board of Review after the Mayor certified that a qualified local candidate could not be found after a diligent search (a procedure permitted under the City Charter). While I do not know if the City Charter's balance is ideal, I am pleased that the City Council and the administration have agreed to comply with its procedures.

On Thursday morning, members of the City's Economic Development Task Force met with other stakeholders to kick off a project, facilitated by the Fourth Economy consulting firm, to develop a "cluster analysis" of industries and sectors to target in order to build the City's economy. Over the past term, the City's economic development program consisted of supporting companies that expressed interest in coming here. In contrast, many other cities identify businesses, and develop strategies to attract them. The "cluster analysis" will identify industries that could thrive in Providence, are poised for growth and which the City could attract with the proper invitation and incentives.

On Monday night, the City Council's State Legislative Affairs Committee will meet to review a number of resolutions introduced at prior meetings in support of bills pending in the General Assembly. Among others, the Committee will review resolutions I introduced in support of State legislation to [repair public school buildings](#) and to [assemble data regarding possible racial disparities in police practices](#). The police data bill passed the Rhode Island Senate last year, but did not pass the Rhode Island House of Representatives. In light of the past year's tragedies in Ferguson, Missouri, Staten Island and Cleveland (among others), the timing may be right this year. In the meantime, the Providence Police Department is reviewing its own practices to determine how to implement elements of the Statewide bill locally in the absence of success in the General Assembly. I have had preliminary discussions with the administration about this initiative, which I hope will surface over the coming months.

Sincerely,

