



June 11, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

With the first warm weekend this season (and a regrettably a blizzard of pollen for some of us) we also are reaching the end of the budget season in City Hall. This week's letter will discuss the operating budget, the capital budget and legislation concerning the proposed suboxone office at Thayer and Lloyd.

This Monday (June 12) at 5:30 p.m., the Finance Committee will hold a public hearing concerning the budget. The administration's budget hold tax rates steady, but funds a few new initiatives with various other sources of revenue (including federal grants and anticipated State aid), including a \$3.5 million increase in City funds to the School Department budget, the first such increase in seven years. The Finance Committee has vetted and largely accepted the administration's budget as presented, with a few adjustments, including a request that the administration develop a plan to mitigate the harsh late tax payments currently on the books. While the budget and the changes proposed to date can be supported as incremental improvements, the City Council has a history of adding additional tax or spending provisions to the budget at the last minute that are approved before they are properly vetted. I will be watching carefully when the Finance Committee holds a budget hearing Monday night following the conclusion of the public hearing.

The Finance Committee is also vetting the administration's capital budget, which it submitted along with the operating budget in early May. As you may remember, the City's voters approved a \$40 million infrastructure bond last November that did not go forward because of the insistence of the people then holding City Council leadership positions (including then-President Aponte and former Majority Leader Jackson, before he was recalled from office) for individual discretionary accounts. While it is a shame that we did gain the infrastructure program we needed, it is more clear than ever how much greater harm the City could have suffered if the leadership's plan been implemented. Recently, a resolution was introduced to support a \$45 million bond to implement the first section of the administration's capital budget. Funding would come through the Providence Building Authority, a quasi-public agency that can act without a referendum vote of approval. Given the public's vote approving a bond last November, it appears reasonable to support this initiative, provided that the spending is based on a clear plan that does not involve individual discretionary accounts.

For the past several months, residents near Thayer and Lloyd have watched with concern following the posting of a sign at 150 Lloyd Avenue stating that suboxone would be "available" in the Spring. Since that time, the Bureau of Inspection and Standards sent a [Letter](#) to the owner clarifying that the zoning variance did not permit the location of a suboxone clinic or dispensary at the location; instead, the only permitted use was for doctors' offices. With that said, residents questioned whether the zoning variance authorizing a doctor's office in a residential neighborhood had expired due to abandonment. The City Solicitor stated an opinion that the 1-year abandonment provision in the City zoning code applied only to nonconforming uses and not to uses permitted by variance. With that in mind, I introduced an ordinance that would extend the 1-year abandonment to variances. Last week, the Solicitor's office informed me that this proposal would violate the State's zoning code; therefore, I will propose a change in the State zoning code for next year's session of the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Samuel D. Zurier'.