



January 17, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are enjoying this weekend's opportunity to remember the work of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. On Thursday night, I attended a dramatic reading of his Letter from Birmingham Jail performed by three talented teenage actors. If you have time this afternoon, you can see an encore performance sponsored by the Mixed Magic Theater. You can learn the details by clicking on [this link](#). This week's letter discusses development of the I-195 parcel, snow removal and the school aid funding formula.

On Monday night, the I-195 Commission held a joint meeting with the State's Commerce Corporation to review a draft [consultant's report](#) to develop the I-195 parcel as an "innovation and design district." According to a [Providence Journal article](#), the I-195 Commission Chair recommended forming a "stakeholders committee" consisting of "universities, hospitals, state agencies and the Providence mayor's office." On Tuesday, the Brookings Institution is scheduled to present its economic development plan for the State. It is not clear how either of these reports will be coordinated with the City's [economic development cluster strategy](#). Also, I am concerned about the composition of the "stakeholders committee." While it is valuable to have the input of the tax-exempt "meds and eds," the I-195 Commission needs to consider more seriously the City's interests in the parcel. More specifically, [Section 42-64.14-8\(5\)\(ii\) of the I-195 District Commission Law](#) provides that all development on the parcel will be fully taxable absent an agreement with the City. For this reason, it would be better to involve the City (including the City Council) more closely in the "front end" of any project, rather than try to impose it upon the City on the "back end." It will not be a victory for the City or the State if we have an Innovation District that generates millions of dollars of sales tax and income tax revenues for the State, and little or no property tax revenue for the City for 25 years, as is the case with the Providence Place Mall.

On Monday night, the Director of Public Works described this year's snow removal program to the Public Works Committee, providing [answers to questions](#), a [Ward 2 snow removal map](#), and an [inventory of snow removal vendors](#). The map describes the Department's progression from major streets to residential streets. The City upgraded its fleet of trucks to enhance its ability to pretreat roads, and is committed to plow "curb to curb" (i.e. within 6" on either side). I asked about two issues you raised with me last year, namely plowing at street corners and 24/7 telephone access. The Director said that the City is aware of the problem of snow piling up at street corners (which makes it difficult to provide access to sidewalks) and will avoid that as much as possible, and will have some ability to clear corners on important streets. The Director also said that the "snow removal hotline" number of (401) 680-8080 will provide 24/7 message service for after-hours snow removal requests even when there is not a "snow emergency." This morning, I called that number and got a fax line. I am hopeful this changes, but please remember that you can always call the Police Department's non-emergency line at 272-3121 if the hotline fails.

Last Thursday, the Governor's working group approved a [draft report](#) recommending modest changes in the formula to accommodate special education costs, English language learners and charter schools, all within a constraint of proposals "that blend cost-neutral improvements and modest aid increases." This framework prevented the working group from anything beyond incremental change, which will not be sufficient to close the major funding gaps that current affect children in urban schools. While the modest improvements that can result will be welcome, I hope nobody views this effort as closing the door on more significant improvements to the formula, as it does not adequately serve our children's needs, which may not happen unless and until Rhode Island has a Constitutional right to education.

Sincerely,

*Sanne D. Junier*

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