



January 6, 2019

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope the recent New Year holiday allowed you to reflect on events of 2018 and ponder your hopes and plans for 2019. This week's letter reviews the recently concluded term of the City Council and offers my hopes for the new term that begins next week.

This past Thursday night was the last scheduled meeting of this term's City Council. The agenda contained 45 items, including important collective bargaining agreements with school teachers and City workers. Unfortunately, the incoming Council leadership organized a boycott by their members, and the meeting had to be canceled due to lack of a quorum. City Council members are elected to attend regular meetings and take votes, but these council members decided to shirk their official duties until they can call the shots and claim the credit. The boycott likely will not change the ultimate outcome of the agenda's legislative votes, but it will delay retroactive pay teachers' pay increases and educational reforms, as well as other business, such as appointments to board and commissions that have vacancies that prevent their proper functioning. It is, to say the least, ironic that the incoming City Council leadership's first accomplishment is to prevent the City Council from performing its essential work.

I hope that the incoming leadership team's poor judgment on Thursday night will prove to be an aberration, and that the next City Council will follow the model of the first two years of my first term (2011-12), when under the leadership of President Michael Solomon, the City Council worked with Mayor Taveras to, among other things, (1) bring the City back from the brink of bankruptcy, (2) install safeguards in the budgeting process to prevent future "fiscal hurricanes," (3) enact pension reforms to create a window of time for long-term solutions, (4) enact a new zoning code and comprehensive plan, and (5) pass legislation in a host of other substantive areas such as night-club regulation and tax reform to eliminate the "Florida license plate problem" and the "welcome to Providence" tax penalty. Mayor Taveras referred to those years as our City's "finest hour," borrowing a phrase from the Apollo 13 movie (which the movie borrowed it from Winston Churchill during the Battle of Britain) and certainly this was the finest hour of my two terms on the Council.

In contrast, the middle two years of the current City Council term (2016-17) were not its finest hour, and will be remembered for such fiascoes as (1) the resignation of the Majority Leader from his leadership position after a grand jury indicted him on felony charges, (2) the ["zombie bond,"](#) (an infrastructure bond approved by more than 85% of the voters, but blocked by the Finance Committee and City Council leadership because they wanted "ward accounts" that would allow individual members personal control over the allocation of \$1.5 million in each ward), (3) the former Majority Leader's recall from office by more than 90% of his constituents despite the efforts of the then-City Council President used his official position to interfere with the

recall process, (4) the City Council President's indictment on felony charges and (5) his unsuccessful battle to hold onto his leadership position in the face of a 12-1 vote of no confidence, causing the City Council to cancel a meeting before widespread public outrage overcame his resistance. In the final year of this term, after David Salvatore won election as Council President, the scandals that occurred this year (former President Aponte's admission of his second Ethics Code violation after losing a court battle seeking to exempt himself from its regulation, and former Councilman Jackson's sentencing to jail after ending years of false denials and admitting he committed the felony crimes with which he had been charged) took place outside the Council chamber, but the cloud of the previous scandals remained when the surviving elements of the old leadership team blocked the enactment of ethics reforms.

In addition to respecting the law and avoiding scandals, the next City Council needs to take more seriously the City's \$1 billion unfunded pension liability. Last April, a working group of City Council members presented the City Council with a [Report](#) that presented the history and magnitude of the problem, described potential tools for its resolution and proposed the formulation of a plan to address it. At its April 19 meeting, the City Council referred the report to the Finance Committee, which over the ensuing eight months never considered it. I introduced a resolution at the December 13, 2018 meeting requesting that the Finance Committee review the report before the current term ended, but at the urging of the Finance Committee Chair, a majority of the City Council voted to reject the resolution. I also introduced a resolution for last Thursday's meeting to urge the formulation of an action plan to during the coming year, but that resolution was never heard due to the aforementioned boycott.

The return of many of these Council members to leadership causes me concern, but I see a basis for optimism. With seven City Council members and a Mayor starting their final terms tomorrow (due to term limits), there is an opportunity for all of them to dedicate themselves to the City's long-term well-being without the constraint of re-election worries, and I hope they make the most of this opportunity.

While this will be my last letter as your City Council representative, I encourage you to remain informed and involved through the excellent newsletter produced by Councilwoman LaFortune in Ward 3 (read her latest by clicking [here](#).) and by signing up for the letters my successor Helen Anthony will send by going to her web page (at <https://helenanthony.com/>) and clicking on the button on her web page to subscribe. Your thoughts and comments helped me do a better job, and the City needs your continued involvement to address its important challenges and advance our shared life in our wonderful City. Thank you again for your interest and trust, and please keep up the good work!

Sincerely,


