

October 25, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

As the World Series approaches, this week's Ward Letter discusses the State's oversight of the City's finances, the State school aid funding formula and a new proposal to enhance River Road.

In the wake of the Central Falls insolvency, the General Assembly enacted laws requiring cities to file quarterly financial reports with the Auditor General to monitor requirements to (a) [submit a mid-year corrective action plan](#) to avoid year-end deficits, and (b) prepare and execute a [five-year plan](#) to pay off accumulated deficits. Since that time, the Auditor General has worked exclusively with the administrative branches of cities and towns statewide in performing this oversight. Last week, the Auditor General sent a [Letter](#) to our Mayor and City Council President (with copies to the City Council members) stating his concerns about Providence's recent non-compliance with these requirements, as well as what he called the "accounting mechanics" that appeared to indicate compliance but in practice did not. Moving forward, the Auditor General's letter breaks important new ground by specifically directing our City's administration to obtain the advice and consent of the City Council before submitting a new, more effective deficit reduction plan. While I regret the events that made this letter necessary, I look forward, with my City Council colleagues, to exercising this new formal responsibility for the good of our City. I am hopeful that someday we will look back on the Auditor General's letter as an important turning point, providing the catalyst for greater informal collaboration between the City Council and the administration, first in the area of budget management and then, over time, towards developing a stronger informal, collaborative working relationship across the board.

This week, the Governor announced the formation of a working group to study the State's local education aid funding formula enacted in 2010. She identified three areas to study, namely support for English language learners, special education and charter school funding. These are important areas, but I am hopeful the working group will undertake a comprehensive review, considering among other things two features of the current formula that do not support adequate and equitable funding for children in the State's urban core (including Providence). First, the current formula does not apply to operating expenses (such as utilities, and facilities maintenance) which are as much part of the core educational cost as such items as teacher salaries. Second, the current formula includes an obscure and opaque "quadratic mean" adjustment factor which diverts funding from those districts in greatest need, as measured by property wealth per student. If there is a desire to provide a minimum funding level to every district regardless of financial need, it would be better to spell that out in clear and explicit terms, rather than through the use of this indirect and inefficient alternative.

The Seekonk Riverbank Alliance seeks to enhance the River Road area as a public park. In June, they held a charrette seeking public input about what features the park should have. One major concern that neighbors stated was that any redesign should preserve the automobile access to River Road in both directions. Recently, the group prepared a proposal that satisfies this concern. They published diagrams of the proposal including an [Overview](#), and renderings of a [Plaza](#) at the foot of Irving Avenue, the [Meadow](#) area and the [Narragansett Boat Club](#) area. The group will be holding a public meeting to discuss the proposal on **Thursday, November 5 at 4:00-6:00 p.m. at the Planning Department, 444 Westminster Street.**

Sincerely,

