



December 13, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

As the tonight's last Chanukah candle concludes an early phase of this year's Holiday Season, this week's ward letter discusses proposed traffic controls on Blackstone Boulevard, the education aid funding formula and the fire fighters' litigation.

Over the past year, a group of Blackstone Boulevard residents have met with the Public Works Department to construct a plan to install traffic controls on Blackstone Boulevard. The plan calls for a combination of 24 speed lumps/humps, 19 raised crosswalks and 3 signs, which you can view by clicking on these links: [Map 1](#), [Map 2](#), [Map 3](#) and [Map 4](#). The City is holding a public hearing to solicit comment concerning the plan, which will take place **Monday Night, December 14 at 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. at Nathan Bishop Middle School**. Public comments are invited, and people who have a strong view for or against are encouraged to attend and speak.

Last Thursday, the Governor's Working Group to review the State's funding formula for aid to local school districts held a public hearing. As noted last week, the City Council approved a [Resolution](#) promoting major changes to the formula and/or approval of a right to education under Rhode Island's Constitution. I attended the meeting, and made a [Public Comment](#), which I supported with an 11-page [Position Paper](#) and exhibits. A group of urban superintendents submitted a [Letter](#) urging a separate funding stream for English Language learners. When the working group first met, it was told to limit its review to small incremental changes; however, our presentations make the case that a more thorough review is needed.

Last Wednesday, the Supreme Court denied the City's motion to postpone a pending "grievance arbitration" proceeding in the fire fighters dispute until the Supreme Court's review was concluded. The Superior Court ordered the arbitrator to review the fire fighters' claim to additional pay as a result of the administration's change to a 3-platoon shift structure. As a result of the Supreme Court's ruling, the appeal and the arbitration will proceed in parallel. While the administration sought to avoid this result, I believe these parallel proceedings can be beneficial to the City. By proceeding on both tracks at once, we will reduce the time needed to get answers to all the pending legal questions. The parallel proceedings also will provide both sides with a greater sense of urgency in trying to find a settlement that reduces the enormous pending litigation risk. A loss in Court could push the City to the brink of bankruptcy, which might leave the fire fighters with only a Pyrrhic victory. In this regard, the parties may benefit from the Supreme Court's Appellate Mediation Program, through a retired justice or other mediator works with the parties to consider a resolution short of a judicial decision. In my own legal practice, former Chief Justices Joseph Weisberger (of blessed memory) and Frank Williams have been instrumental in helping parties achieve their goals by agreement, often setting a foundation for productive future relationships. Needless to say, the City's dispute with the fire fighters is not a "one-off" matter, and for this additional reason an agreed-upon resolution is even more critical. The parallel proceedings create a shorter time window, which may help induce the parties to move beyond the current escalating, toxic and perilous impasse we face today.

Sincerely,

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