



December 9, 2012

Dear Fellow East Siders:

On Wednesday night, the City Council met to review the voting experience in Providence during the most recent Election Day, which was marked by long lines and frustrated voters. From presentations by the State Board of Elections and the Providence Board of Canvassers (as well as your comments), we learned that a cluster of factors contributed to this result. The State published a new rule to increase the number of voters at each precinct. Larger precincts can work if the State provides more voting booths and local communities provide more poll workers, but neither happened in Providence this year. Also, the Providence ballot was particularly long due to a series of proposed City Charter amendments, and many voters were not informed about the content of those ballot questions before arriving at the polls. (I wish to thank the College Hill Neighborhood Association for its efforts to inform voters, which offers some hope for the next time.) The ballot itself was hard to read, partly because it featured English and Spanish versions of the ballot questions stacked on top of each other. Both the State and City voting organizations indicated they would learn from this year's experience to make the next election more convenient for voters.

Providence has an endowed fund to support the planting of trees along City streets. The program provides a way for neighbors (preferably 5 or more in a block) to work together to improve their common quality of life. After a group applies, the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program staff arranges a Spring day to deliver the trees and soil, and assistance to plant them. My neighbors recruited Lauren and me for this project around 20 years ago, and it has been a joy to watch our neighborhood trees grow and mature. The City chooses trees that are compatible with their role, providing a canopy without a root structure that would disrupt the rest of the street. The application deadline is January 15, but the Program encourages neighborhoods to begin planning now in order to be organized in time. For more information, click on this link [Tree Program](#) or contact Liz Downing at ldowning@pnpp.org.

With your indulgence, I will digress to recommend the Lincoln movie currently in the theaters, which I saw with my family last night. The story is grand, and the actors and actresses are brilliant (my children got a particular charge out of Tommy Lee Jones as Thaddeus Stevens). The movie dramatizes the ugly and painful warts in our political system, and Lincoln's masterful skill in directing that system towards a noble goal. The movie also portrays the price Lincoln paid, within his family, among his peers and within his own conscience, for his service to our country. The movie reminded me how some of the social values we treasure most dearly today were far from inevitable, how the forces in our political system can array powerfully towards pettiness and against progress, and how profoundly one person can change all of our lives.

I would like to wish a Happy Chanukah to everyone celebrating this holiday, which celebrates the reward of succeeding against overwhelming odds, something I hope all of us can enjoy sometime.

Sincerely,

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