



February 5, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are getting ready for Super Sunday. Before you sit down with your bowl of chips, this week's letter will discuss the resale of Providence water, the School Department budget and the proposed suboxone office.

At last Thursday's meeting, the City Council unanimously approved a [Resolution](#) I introduced that recommends the passage of State legislation to clarify the permitted uses of Providence water purchased by other municipalities at "wholesale" rates for resale to others. When those sales take place within the purchasing city or town, there are natural checks and balances to prevent excess profit-taking. The opposite is true when the city or town purchases the water to sell outside its boundaries; instead, they have every incentive to maximize profits for the benefit of their own taxpayers. This is not an appropriate use of Providence water, where the wholesale price is regulated by the Public Utilities Commission for the benefit of all ratepayers. Resale for profit alone also creates the risk of wasting a valuable natural resource. I will ask our City's General Assembly delegation to introduce the legislation, which would also benefit other regional water supply systems.

Last month, the administration presented a five-year budget for the School Department projecting eight-figure deficits in the latter years, which are substantially larger because of the recently approved expansion of the Achievement First mayoral academy. **On Wednesday night, February 8 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall (third floor)**, the Education Committee will hear a presentation from the School Department concerning the projected budget gap and possible ways to close it.

At the end of last year, the owners of an old house at Thayer and Lloyd installed a sign announcing the arrival of suboxone on the Spring of 2017. Needless to say, this created concerns in the neighborhood. Since that time, the Bureau of Inspection and Standards sent a letter to the owner regarding the sign, which was larger than what was permitted. Last week, the owners reduced the sign's size to comply with the Code, but many questions remain about the proposed operation. At this point in time, the owners' lawyer has stated the office will house one or two doctors who will prescribe (but not dispense) suboxone. At this point in time, the City will not contest the opening of a doctor's office as provided in a variance for the property, but plans to hold the owner closely to what that variance allows. One of the issues the project raises is whether a property owner who obtains a variance for a non-conforming use can abandon the rights under the variance from extended non-use. The City has taken the official position that use variances cannot be abandoned in this way, and it would require a court case to test that legal proposition. Based on this, I am preparing an amendment to the City's ordinances that will provide, on a going-forward basis, that use variances can be abandoned after a year of non-use, the current standard for other non-conforming uses of property.

Sincerely,

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

