

March 31, 2018

Dear Fellow East Siders:

Many of us observe religious holidays this week that celebrate humankind's aspirations to freedom (Passover) or rebirth and renewal (Easter). I wish you a meaningful Easter and Passover and hope it brings opportunities for reflection and insight. This week's letter discusses the City's road paving plans, Remembrance Day and the mayor's veto of the reusable plastic bag ordinance.

Last summer, the City Council approved a \$45 million infrastructure bond, which allocated \$20 million for road repairs. At the end of last year, the City engaged a consultant (Street Scape) to assess the condition of the City's streets, which they accomplished with the help of pavement penetrating radar. The City then analyzed the cost required to repair all City streets to a "pavement condition index" (PCI) of 100. The estimated cost is \$212 million; therefore, the bond budget of \$20 million will pay for slightly less than 10% of the total identified repairs. The Public Works Department has assigned the highest priority to the repair of major arterial and connecting roads. Needless to say, any plan to repair only 10% of the City roads needing repair will leave 90% of them unrepaired, which will not be satisfactory to residents who use the unrepaired roads. The Public Works Department plans to select major roads as the City's first priority, because it will benefit the largest possible number of drivers. The work will be equitably distributed among the City's 15 wards; therefore, in some wards with fewer major roads, there may be funds available to repair secondary roads. The Department of Public Works expects to announce the list of planned repairs within the next two or three weeks.

This Wednesday (April 4) marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nation's tragic loss of Martin Luther King, Jr. to an assassin while King was supporting garbage workers in Memphis, Tennessee. Many cities across the country will mark Wednesday as Remembrance Day, and the City flag on top of Providence City Hall will fly at half staff. The School Department circulated special optional lesson plans for high school American history classes in the Providence Public Schools. While I have some fleeting personal memories of the day, I have found it rewarding to study it more closely, as it marked an unfortunate turning point in our country's history. If you wish to learn more about the actual event, I recommend a PBS 1-hour documentary "Roads to Memphis" that is being broadcast this week on Channel 2 and also is available [to view online](#). Much of that history is based on *HELLHOUND ON HIS TRAIL* by Hampton Sides, which I also recommend. By 1968, Dr. King had expanded his mission beyond civil rights to include economic justice and protest against the Vietnam War. He lost the support of President Johnson and many white moderates. This period is sometimes lost in the retelling of Dr. King's story that ends with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in such accounts as the movie *Selma*. For a thoughtful discussion of Dr. King's work during this period and contemporary reflections on it, I recommend a special online issue of [the Atlantic Monthly](#). In short, the Dr. King of 1968 took on many of the difficult issues we continue to face today, even after the passage of anti-discrimination laws. Remembrance Day therefore provides an opportunity not only to reflect on our country's tragic past, but also to find lessons to guide our future.

Last week, Mayor Elorza announced his veto of the reusable plastic bag ordinance. In his explanatory letter, the Mayor noted that representatives from the City's less affluent neighborhoods expressed their concerns about the affordability of the \$.10 per single-use bag charge, and that the legislative process had not allowed them an adequate opportunity to present their issues and have them addressed. In fact, this issue came up during the hearing before the Ordinance Committee, and Councilwoman Harris questioned the proponents extensively on behalf of these communities until she was persuaded that the ordinance was fair. With that said, the legislative process was quite rapid, and it is possible that further hearings will lead to suggestions and proposals that will improve the ultimate ordinance, while also expanding the base of support and acceptance for its proposal. There also will be an opportunity for those who oppose the bill entirely to advocate against its passage in any form (including a consortium of plastic bag companies who claim the ordinance is illegal and threaten to bring a lawsuit.) With that said, it is my hope that efforts to improve the previously passed legislation do not become a vehicle for undermining the important environmental policies it seeks to advance.

Sincerely,

