



April 17, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

As the Presidential primary comes to Rhode Island, this week's ward letter discusses the School Department budget, the construction of the I-95 parcel foot bridge and parking meter credit card charges.

This past Monday, the Superintendent presented a proposed [Budget](#) to the School Board, which likely will approve it and forward it to the Mayor next week. The budget incorporates an expected \$9.75 million increase in State aid from programs the Governor proposed to provide supplementary funds for children learning the English language, and greater relief to school districts from the impact of transfer payments to charter schools. These additional funds allow the School Department to increase investments in pre-kindergarten and advanced placement programs without requiring additional City funds. While this arrangement provides a satisfactory resolution to the current year's education budget, this marks the sixth consecutive year that the City has not increased its appropriation for public education, which is not sustainable going forward absent major cost-saving initiatives and/or significantly more State aid. The [Preliminary Report](#) prepared by the City's fiscal consultant did not address the School Department and its budget, but it is clear that Providence's long-term viability and success depends critically on our schools.

With last year's decision not to build a minor league stadium on the I-95 parcel, work has gone forward on planning a park on either side of the river, spanned by a pedestrian bridge which will rest on the piers that supported the previous highway bridge. Earlier this month, the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) approved the concept presented in the [original design](#) with modifications, including raising the bridge's height to accommodate sea level rises and removing stairs that access the piers of the previous highway bridge due to concerns raised by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Department of Transportation is now seeking Coast Guard approval, which is not expected to raise any significant additional issues. Their current schedule calls for the project to be bid out in the summer, with some work (perhaps off-site) to begin in the fall. This schedule would permit the bridge to open sometime around the Spring of 2018.

There has been much discussion about the expansion of the City's parking meter program. A recent [East Side Monthly article](#) described the concerns of local merchants and the perspective from City officials that the meters will help local businesses by opening up spaces near stores that previously were occupied by commuters or other non-customers. While the verdict on how these competing views play out remains to be seen, it has become clear to me that the current minimum charge of \$2.50 for credit card users cannot be justified. In other cities such as Atlanta and New Haven, the minimum charge for credit cards is \$1.00, while other cities such as New York have no charge at all. With that in mind, I introduced a resolution for next Thursday's City Council meeting requesting the administration to implement a immediate reduction to a \$1.00 minimum for credit cards and to consider further reductions.

Sincerely,