



May 29, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

While Memorial Day weekend marks the unofficial start of summer, I hope you have some time tomorrow to reflect on the sacrifices our soldiers made (and make) to protect our values and way of life. This week's letter discusses the City Council's budget review, a set of open government legislation and the registration of food trucks.

The City Council announced it will hold a hearing next Monday, June 6 at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall to hear public comment on the budget. Once this happens, the Finance Committee will approve a budget (with possible amendments) and forward it to the City Council. The City Council will then review and pass the budget in two separate meetings. The administration has requested expedited review due to the need to issue tax bills. The shortest possible schedule would have the Finance Committee complete its review the night of June 6, allowing the City Council to review the budget on June 9 and June 13. With that said, it may take longer for the Finance Committee to complete its work. Either way, next week's budget hearings (currently scheduled for May 31 and June 1) will be quite busy.

With the recent resignation of a State Representative and the arrest of a City Council member on charges involving misuse of public funds, there is an opportunity for the City Council to review and improve its transparency and "good government" program. Two weeks ago, the City Council approved a resolution Councilman Salvatore and I sponsored to audit the City Council's grant program. On Thursday, I will introduce a four-part package of further "good government" legislation. All four seek to learn from recent examples of how elected officials who do not file their required disclosure reports can hide misconduct. There will be two resolutions to enhance the City Council's website by posting copies of each member's filings with the Ethics Commission (financial disclosure) and the Board of Elections (campaign finance reports) respectively. The first ordinance will suspend leadership positions and committee assignments of City Council members who either (a) are more than 60 days late in filing disclosures with the Ethics Commission or the Board of Elections, or (b) have been charged with criminal misconduct related to their public duties. The second ordinance will require public disclosure of the donors and amounts donated to any legal defense fund established for a sitting elected public official. Under current rules, the Board of Elections regulates campaign contributions, but legal defense fund contributions are not regulated, leaving a loophole by which potential improper influence could be purchased without any disclosure.

At Thursday night's meeting, I also will introduce an ordinance requiring food trucks operating in the City to register their vehicles here. The City collects a 1% meal and beverage tax from all restaurants located here (as well as real estate property tax). A food truck registered in Providence will also contribute motor vehicle excise tax and the 1% meal and beverage tax; however, a food truck that has a foreign registration can set up shop in Providence, profit from business in the City, and then remit the excise tax and the 1% meals and beverage tax to the community where it is registered. Currently, 41 food trucks have licenses to operate in Providence, but only 17 of them have motor vehicle registrations in the City.

Sincerely,