



June 21, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you having a great Father's Day. This week's letter discusses a study of the City's capital project needs.

On Wednesday night (June 17) the Bond Study Commission heard reports concerning pending capital projects. The first was by Cliff Wood, the Director of the Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy (and my distinguished predecessor on the City Council). Based on the work of two successful New York organizations (the Central Park and Bryan Park Conservancies), the Downtown Providence Park Conservancy maintains and improves the City's public spaces to add to residents' quality of life and the City's overall economic development. In New York City, the two park conservancies began with an infusion of public funds, but over time became funded predominantly by local businesses whose property values and profitability grew with the success of the projects. The Providence Conservancy has brought improvements and programming to Burnside Park, and assisted in the transformation of Kennedy Plaza through a combination of public and private funds. Cliff will provide the Commission with some further information about what an infusion of City capital funding could to enhance its park system.

Russell Knight, the Director of Public Works, reported that the Department's cost estimate for unrepaired roads is \$120 million. With that said, no road lasts forever, and best practice is to maintain and repair the City's entire network of streets on a continual basis. Even if all \$120 million of repairs were carried out next year, the City would require an annual budget of approximately \$8 million going forward in order to remain current on its road repairs, rather than wait for roads to fall apart. In the long run, proactive maintenance would be more cost-effective, given the increasing cost per mile to repair roads that are poorly deteriorated. The City's current annual road maintenance budget is less than \$1 million; therefore, it would require a significant budgeting commitment even to meet half of the "steady maintenance" goal.

Turning to sewers, Director Knight confirmed that the current \$50 million estimated backlog is a "WAG", a military acronym where "W" stands for "wild" and "G" stands for guess. He indicated that the Department has budgeted funds to purchase a specialized camera to make a more precise assessment. The City's sewer system is in many places more than 100 years old, but fortunately portions were extremely well-built, lasting well past their expected "useful life." Director Knight suggested that the City incorporate into its next road repair program the additional funds needed to operate and deploy the cameras through the affected portion of the road network to confirm that the sewers under the roads designated for repair are themselves in proper shape. This additional investigation will reduce the risk of a newly repaired road collapsing due to a faulty sewer line beneath it. Director Knight also noted that for many years the City has attempted to transfer responsibility of maintaining its sewers to the Narragansett Bay Commission, which has the authority to assess sewer users for the cost of repair, in contrast to the City's need to fund sewer repairs through property taxes. Unfortunately, the mechanism for such a transfer has eluded the parties to date.

Director Knight confirmed the previously stated working estimate of 3,000 unrepaired sidewalks that would cost around \$20 million to repair. He indicated that this estimated needs to be updated with a sidewalk survey, and he hopes to complete such a survey in the coming year.

Alan Sepe concluded the evening with more information about the City's school buildings. He indicated that an overall budget of approximately \$250-\$300 million (or around \$10-12 million per school) would support

renovations to the City's inventory of schools to refurbish them so they can be safe, bright, clean and welcoming environments. He noted that Achievement First renovated the Perry Middle School on such a budget, and the results were dramatic. The State will underwrite 80% of the costs of any approved project. Currently, the City is preparing a \$10 million proposal to the State to address urgent needs in several existing schools. If the State approves the project, it will provide 80% of the funding.

The Bond Study Commission has concluded its investigation, and will now prepare a report. I am hoping we will have a first draft ready by July 1, the next scheduled meeting date for the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Samuel D. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" and "J".

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