



June 5, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you had a chance to visit the PVD Fest yesterday. My own visit spurred some thoughts about the City's future, which I will share in this week's letter.

With yesterday's brilliant weather as a backdrop, PVD Fest showed our downtown (and the City as a whole) as a spirited center of creation, inspiration and celebration. I saw Burnside Park was filled with families and children enjoying music, face painting and other delights, a welcome change from recent times, in which the Park has provided the setting for controversies involving civil liberties and quality of life. The downtown was filled with people enjoying arts, culture and each other's company, an inspiration to all.

As I took in this vision of our City's present and future, I encountered a veteran on-duty Providence Police officer, enjoying the absence of problems for him to address. He said the festival reminded him of how, outside of Boston, there was no other city on the East Coast that had Providence's combination of culture, charm and assets for greatness. He also stated his worries about the City's financial difficulties, which could affect its ability to fund its operations and meet its obligations (including his understandable concern of meeting future pension obligations). He believed the City needed to decide what it can truly afford, and make the difficult decisions to live within its means. He said he liked the Mayor's idea of developing a 10-year strategy for the City's finances, but he noted, that it is not enough to have a good plan on paper -- it also is necessary to complete the necessary legwork to bring everyone on board.

While this officer is known for his especially thoughtful approach, I think his views are shared by a broad range of City employees who have tied their own career and livelihood to the City's current and future prosperity and success. Our conversation validated the Mayor's announced goal of developing a 10-year plan to ensure the City's long term financial stability. While it will not be easy to formulate the plan, it only will have value if it is successfully implemented. This means involving stakeholders in the plan's development, not only because of the quality of the information they can provide, but also because they must "buy in" to any concessions they will be asked to make to help the City. As we learned from the "Category 5 fiscal hurricane" of 2011-12, the best-designed plan will call for and receive equitable contributions from everyone involved, because if everyone contributes their "fair share," it will deprive the "free riders" of a pretext to refuse to make concessions because one identifiable group has not stepped up first.

Because the State also must be part of any long-term plan for the City's prosperity, I will continue to press for the "good government" and "open government" reforms I introduced at last Thursday's City Council meeting. The current cloud over the City Council complicates the efforts of our City's General Assembly delegation to convince their colleagues that State investments in our City will be worth making, and will not merely be wasted on the whims of local officials. Rahm Emanuel once said we cannot "let a serious crisis go to waste." While "good government" issues are often seen as secondary to a city government's need to develop a sound fiscal program, our City's current need to justify State aid might provide an additional impetus for Providence to improve the openness and transparency of its government processes.

Sincerely,