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Commuter rail station to be economic catalyst for Pawtucket - by Donald Grebien

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Donald Grebien,
Mayor of Pawtucket

The past couple of months Pawtucket, and our neighboring city of Central Falls, have seen some significant milestones as we move forward with the new Conant Thread District. The 150-acre district has, as its centerpiece, a new train station and transit hub.

It represents the next step in our ongoing efforts to revitalize our city. We have embraced our rich history and aggressively focused on repurposing our mill buildings for live-work space and businesses with great success. With usable mill space in the Conant Thread district surrounding the train station, we have the same incredible opportunity to create an even larger hub of activity to live, work and play.

The commuter rail station will act as a catalyst for increased transit-oriented economic development. It will include dedicated platforms for northbound and southbound service, connected by a pedestrian bridge overpass, elevators, ramps and stairs.

On November 2nd, I joined with Rhode Island governor Gina Raimondo, members of the R.I. congressional delegation, Central Falls mayor James Diossa, and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation to break ground on this new \$50 million transit hub.

We are ready to take advantage of these new connections. We have identified over 4 million s/f of developable space near the transit hub – much of it in abandoned and underutilized mills. Working with the state and federal governments, we are putting in place clear zoning and incentive programs for development. Already five opportunity zones have been approved in, or adjacent to, the new Conant Thread district.

The district is conveniently located on the commuter line to Boston while offering less expensive rents and development costs. We are a quick 4-minute train to Providence and we provide unique and authentic complements to the capital city's entertainment and dining offerings. Our efforts are already attracting both regional and national attention.

A recent Forbes article was headlined, "All Aboard for Prosperity in Former Rhode Island Mill Towns," and focused on the great potential for Pawtucket and Central Falls and on the progress we are already making.

The New England Real Estate Journal, calling Conant Thread the next great development opportunity, is hosting a summit in Pawtucket on November 15th. Rhode Island's secretary of commerce, along with officials from RIHousing and the Department of Environmental Management will join me to outline funding resources and investment opportunities.

This project, including the rail station, transit hub and new Conant Thread district is an example of an incredible federal, state and local collaboration that will not only transform the cities of Pawtucket and Central Falls, but will also serve as an important gateway to Rhode Island.

For information about Pawtucket's economic development incentives, call commerce director Jeanne Boyle, or email, jboyle@pawtucketri.com.

Donald Grebien is mayor of the City of Pawtucket.

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