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Building strong future for new business and entrepreneurs

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Rarely in the life of older, urban cities do its leaders have a chance to clear the slate and begin anew. With the relocation of I-195, that is exactly what we are doing.

A decade ago, traffic circulation problems plagued Providence's downtown, so state highway officials began the challenging work of redesigning our interstates. That effort led to many exciting changes: relocation of I-195, construction of a new bridge at the head of Narragansett Bay, removal of more than half-a-dozen overpasses, and the opening up of hundreds of acres.

The significance of the change - in a predominantly built capital city - resonated throughout the state, and the opportunities for this land seemed endless.

Neighborhoods, severed for decades by interstate, would be reunited. Residents would regain access to their waterfront. The downtown and emerging Knowledge District would once again rejoin. And the potential for development along the "Eds to "Meds" corridor would be boundless.

Because the redevelopment affected many beyond the city limits, the General Assembly appointed an Interstate-195 Commission in January 2011, led by chairman Colin Kane, with representatives of the city, state and community, to work together.

It was also clear redevelopment would require parallel action by the city to implement a Zoning Ordinance to implement this vision for the Downtown and the I-195 surplus land. With the extraordinary collaboration of city staff, committee members, the City Plan Commission, interested organizations - particularly the Providence Preservation Society, Providence Foundation, and Jewelry District Association - members of the public, City Council leadership and the guidance of consultants Perkins + Will, Zoning changes were completed nearly two months ahead of schedule.

This zoning improves existing regulations in many ways:

- * Promotes growth of the knowledge economy by allowing for research and development throughout Downtown, and the expansion of colleges and hospitals in the Knowledge District
- * Clear, illustrated regulations promoting outstanding urban design, and encouraging rehabilitation of our historic buildings
- * A series of new height zones throughout Downtown, which will allow for considerable development potential while respecting the scale of existing buildings
- * Incentives for mixed-use development, structured parking and an open space network
- * A predictable and transparent process, with many approvals subject to a streamlined, staff-level approval, and more complex discretionary reviews sent to a public design-review committee
- * And safeguards to ensure a rigorous review process for demolition, particularly of historic buildings.

The consequence of having these zoning changes mean appropriate and best use of the land within the Downtown and Knowledge District can be assured; business owners will have a clear, predictable and expedited process for dealing with government to develop their plans, and the

residents can have full confidence that the development of their city will be for the best interests of all.

Providence's transformation will mean we will be able to move quickly with expansion of our knowledge economy and assume our rightful role in this fast-growing regional economy. Our confluence of skilled talent, outstanding colleges and universities, remarkable quality of life and proximity to multi-billion dollar markets will support this growth.

We are excited about the opportunities before us, and encourage you to become part of this development. Learn more about our city's transformation at www.providenceri.com, and see how your business can be part of one of America's most exciting and diverse communities, and this region's emerging knowledge economy.

Angel Taveras is the mayor of Providence.

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