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## **Dredging project positions Quonset for more growth**

July 12, 2012 - Rhode Island

As Rhode Island's summer went into full swing last month, an initiative vitally important to our state's economy received the support of Governor Chafee, the General Assembly, and the Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. (RIEDC). It's the kind of initiative that will help keep momentum going strong at Quonset Business Park, where 168 companies, 8,800 employees, and the 7th largest auto-importer in North America already reside.

On June 25th, the RIEDC's board approved the issuance of \$7.5 million in bonds for a crucial dredging project at Quonset Business Park's Port of Davisville. The move was preceded by approval of the dredging project from the General Assembly, and it was signed by Gov. Chafee at the close of the session. We are extremely grateful for their support of this project that will benefit Rhode Island for generations to come - and all with NO taxpayer funding.

The dredging within the vicinity of the Port of Davisville piers is important because it will allow us to continue to capitalize on the momentum of business activity at the port, which has emerged as an important cog in the state's engine of economic development. This project will greatly improve our ability to expand the auto import activity, which currently sees some 150,000 autos imported by ship annually. The auto import activity at the Port of Davisville, which has quadrupled over the past 15 years, makes us the 7th busiest auto port in the country.

The approval of the dredging project is also an example of the state investing in something it already does well. Along with Quonset Business Park, the Port of Davisville is an economic success story, and important job creator for Rhode Island. Currently, the port creates \$119 million in business output annually for the state, supports 1,105 direct and indirect induced jobs, and generates approximately \$42.6 million in house hold income. The port also contributes about \$4 million in state taxes and \$5 million in local taxes to our local economy.

The Davisville channel has not been dredged since its original construction in the 1940s. This dredging work will re-establish a depth of minus 32' below mean low water in and around the berthing facilities at the port. This depth will accommodate the design draft of the pure car carriers that call on the port. Now is the time to ensure that the port's infrastructure is improved so that it can continue to be a success into the future with a continued generation of economic activity.

In terms of details, the project itself entails dredging the channel depth adjacent to the Davisville piers to 32' feet, and moving 260,000 cubic yards of dredging materials to the Rhode Island sound disposal site located approximately 6.5 miles East of Block Island. In advance of the dredging, a testing and sampling plan of sediment was approved by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) in May 2011. The testing of sediment and organisms was completed by November 2011.

No significant issues or contaminants were identified, and the sediment was approved for off-shore

disposal. The final permits both federal and state regulators are expected to be finalized this month. The project needs to be performed between October 15 and January 31 in order to accommodate environmental requirements.

Taxpayers should also appreciate the fact that the dredging project requires no taxpayer funding - now, or at any time in the future. The bond debt will be serviced entirely by the Quonset Development Corporation (QDC) from its operating funds and increased revenues from the port.

With the completion of this dredging, as well as \$22.3 million in federal TIGER grant improvements at the Port - including a new mobile crane - we anticipate that the port will continue to grow in the coming years. These investments will help expand the port's current auto business, but also position us for greater growth in new areas, including container feeder services, wind energy, project cargo, and break bulk materials.

The Quonset Business Park's unprecedented success is a function of sound investment in infrastructure improvements, coupled with the QDC's professional management of that infrastructure. Quonset Business Park is a model for the state in how to attract and retain businesses, and what we see as a true Rhode Island success story. This dredging project at the Port of Davisville is a vital component to building on that success and ensures greater growth for our state's future. We appreciate the support of our state leaders, and we look forward to the project's completion this winter.

Steven King, PE, is the managing director of the Quonset Development Corp., North Kingstown.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540