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I-195 land presents unprecedented opportunity

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Today Rhode Island is presented with an unprecedented opportunity to develop 20 contiguous acres in downtown Providence. The land, freed up with the relocation of I-195, arches around the city's riverfront abutting neighborhoods, downtown, and the city campuses of Brown University, Johnson and Wales University, Rhode Island School of Design, and the University of Rhode Island. The vision for the redevelopment of the 195 land has, in some ways, its genesis in the area's history. Like many early American cities, Providence's urban heartbeat included workplaces, residences, and recreation. As the immigrant population grew, new neighborhoods were formed and the emerging community flourished until the late 1950s. Then with war over, the availability of shiny new American automobiles, and the lure of the suburbs Providence residents moved out in record numbers. At the time it was unintended, and perhaps inconsequential, that the new I-195 that carried them on their exodus, cut through the heart of the city. It split neighborhoods, chopped streets in half and created a line of concrete and steel between the riverfront and down city.

Today we are reknitting those areas and creating vibrant neighborhoods that link existing communities, and bring a new vitality into downtown. The land is master permitted, includes 8 acres of gorgeous parkland and a new pedestrian bridge that is a sculpture in its own right. The mixed-use new urban model combines workplaces, with residential living, and recreational opportunities. It is designed to create jobs and economic development growth for the state.

We've already begun the work, and with universal support and political will, the project is fast tracked. The 195 Redevelopment Commission is the owner and permitting authority for the 19 parcels and benefits from flexible re-zoning plan put in place in summer 2012. We have received endorsement of the district-wide permitting from the state environmental management agencies and are creating a structure for expedited planning and zoning approvals.

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation, Providence Water and Sewer, National Grid, and Cox Communications have been under construction since April of this year building roads and installing utility infrastructure to serve the new parcels.

Our urban design team is drawing up the specifications for developers and we anticipate opening our doors for development RFPs in January of 2014.

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