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Forbes Street solar farm receives Grow Smart Rhode Island Outstanding Project Award - by James Moran

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James Moran, City of
East Providence

Renewable energy and the burgeoning growth of new wind and solar energy facilities in the State of Rhode Island has drawn a great deal of public attention recently. Because of a number of regulatory changes in Rhode Island that have made the installation of new wind and solar developments more profitable, the proliferation of new and proposed projects has been dramatic, particularly within the last 1 to 2 years. Recent discussion regarding the installation of wind turbines and solar arrays on existing forested and agricultural land, have become increasingly common and have generated significant controversy in many local communities in Rhode Island.

What makes East Providence's solar facility at Forbes St. somewhat unique in Rhode Island is that it represents one of the first examples of a former landfill being repurposed for a solar farm in the state. Located on the closed 70 acre Forbes St. municipal landfill, the 3.7 MW solar farm has been successful on two fronts. First, was the cooperative effort between the developer and the city to finalize a RIDEM approved closure plan for the landfill and second, to successfully re-use the landfill as a renewable energy resource that currently provides enough electricity to power 500 single family homes. The facility, containing nearly 13,000 photovoltaic panels, is still the largest of its kind in the state. With the installation of an additional 4.1 MW in the second phase, its current size will be more than doubled. This project represents a model for how other disturbed and reused properties throughout the state can be repurposed into a productive and profitable endeavor for both local governments and private renewable energy developers. The site minimally impacts neighbors with sufficient buffering and the landfill reclamation has maintained natural resources and urban wildlife habitat.

The property has been so important in what it represents to the future of renewable and smart growth in Rhode Island as to be recently recognized by Grow Smart Rhode Island as an outstanding Smart Growth Project. The award, presented at this year's Grow Smart Rhode Island Power of Place Summit held on March 29th, recognized the project as "an excellent example of reusing developed and disturbed sites for renewable energy, while avoiding the loss of RI's natural resources." Partners in the development of this project included the city, CME Energy and Hectate Energy, LLC. The city is honored to receive this award from Grow Smart Rhode Island and looks

forward to the build-out and operation of Phase 2 of this exciting renewable energy project.

Those interested in learning more about the economic development activities occurring in East Providence are encouraged to visit the city's economic development website at www.eastprovidencebusiness.com or the City's Waterfront District website at www.eastprovidencewaterfront.com.

James Moran is the economic planner for the City of East Providence, R.I.

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