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## **East Providence has skilled labor and suitable land for manufacturing companies - by William Fazioli**

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East Providence is in a solid position to offer several important advantages to existing and prospective manufacturing companies. Although taxes and incentives can be important considerations in locating a business, a growing body of evidence indicates that there are more other prominent factors that affect a company's long-term success. First and foremost, the availability of a talented and skilled labor force is cited as the number one issue for site selection. Secondly, the readiness of suitable land and buildings to accommodate a manufacturing use is an extremely important element. Lastly, the accessibility to a strong transportation network is critical for manufacturing firms.

Currently, East Providence is fortunate to be home to several successful manufacturing firms, which have emerged as industry leaders in their respective industries. These companies participate in a wide range of markets including aerospace, textiles, defense, medical devices, injection molding and precision machinery. Overall, the manufacturing industry still comprises one of the largest employment sectors for the city and has enjoyed a resurgence since 2010 with sizable increases in total jobs and gross wages.

In an effort to further expand East Providence's industrial base, the city is developing partnerships to establish customized workforce development training opportunities. Workforce development efforts will include both technical and soft skills necessary to succeed in today's advanced manufacturing environment. Manufacturing jobs continue to provide above-average wages, especially for skilled positions that require on-the-job training, but not college degrees.

In addition, the new East Providence high school, which is currently under construction will include a Career Technical Center. This \$189 million project will be the first, completely new high school built in Rhode Island in decades. The city will leverage this resource to work with the manufacturing sector to address its major workforce challenges. The aging of the manufacturing workforce will create a shortage of as many as two million qualified manufacturing workers, especially among

skilled manufacturing positions. Yet, only a small percent of manufacturers recruit at high schools despite a workforce shortage that could be met by a new generation of high school graduates. (<https://www.brookings.edu/research/pathways-to-high-quality-jobs-for-young-adults/>)

This approach can help younger people to realize the “tonic” of a well-paying job. In terms of suitable sites, East Providence has created a database of industrially zoned parcels, which offer attractive qualities for manufacturing purposes. These locations offer both large building sizes and footprints to house a manufacturing enterprise. These parcels enable East Providence to realize a meaningful measure of scale and critical mass to support the further expansion of the manufacturing industry.

East Providence’s proximity to an excellent transportation system has always provided superb highway and rail access to support the manufacturing industry. This existing infrastructure will only become more efficient due to the \$54 million Henderson Bridge replacement, (completion date of 2021) and \$70 million I-195 Washington Bridge upgrade, (completion date of 2024). These infrastructure investments will provide vital access to Waterfront Dr., which will create a direct connection to more than 75 acres of prime, developable land.

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