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Critical infrastructure improvements will move forward - by Joseph Solomon

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Joseph Solomon

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on Warwick's residents and businesses alike. I am very mindful of that, so in an effort to mitigate financial pressure on our community members impacted by the crisis, when I submitted my FY 2021 budget to the city council, I made it my priority to ensure that there were no tax increases. I am pleased that the council unanimously adopted my budget as presented.

In light of these difficult economic times, preparing a budget without a tax increase was no easy task – but raising taxes was not an option when so many residents and businesses are struggling. Warwick's FY21 budget allows our city to continue providing the services and programs our residents expect and deserve, invests more in education, and ensures that critical infrastructure improvements – which will be funded with historically low interest rate bonds – will move forward. Our hardworking department directors have been doing more with less without skipping a beat, and will continue to do so for the good of our community, residents, and businesses.

Thankfully, we are now in the second phase of reopening our economy. And, while the pandemic has caused a temporary suspension of my Business One-on-One Outreach program, we remain in constant communication with our restaurants and retailers to determine their needs and help to promote those that are open in various capacities.

Throughout the pandemic, city departments have remained operational to ensure that new development project proposals and other construction can continue to move forward. In fact, while this crisis has temporarily shuttered many businesses, residential and commercial building permit applications have remained steady. From April 2019 through April 2020, the city issued 2,349 residential permits with a permit valuation of \$32,595,306, and 382 commercial properties with a permit value of \$49,544,402.

And, fortunately, large-scale projects in our city remain ongoing. The transformation of historic Pontiac Mills continues with the next phase of the mixed-use development within the mill complex.

Construction is underway for the OrthoRI development project at the Crowne Plaza Hotel campus, and the Carpionato Group has completed hotel renovations that will enhance the site as a premier biomedical destination. Greenwood Credit Union, which has called Warwick home for more than 70 years, is completing construction of a new operations center. In Apponaug Village, AAA Northeast continues its restoration of the historic “sawtooth” mill building, which will house operations and member services. Just these projects – not including many more underway throughout the city – represent well over \$90 million of investment in our community.

In addition, development of a new Dave’s Market, bank, and fast food establishment is underway, giving new life to the former Benny’s property on West Shore Rd., and a mixed retail development at the Showcase Cinema property is slated for completion this summer. A new Centerville Bank, Starbucks, Chase Bank, Dunkin’ Donuts, and solar park are among many other projects throughout the city that are in the review process.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly disrupted our economy, but I am heartened by our business community’s continued perseverance, innovation, and belief in our city as we continue to weather this crisis together. I know I speak for many of us when I say we are looking forward to the beginning of the next phase of reopening the economy, even as we all remain steadfast in our efforts to be safe and contain further spread of the COVID-19 virus.

As always, my office and the Department of Tourism, Culture, and Development stand ready to answer questions or assist our businesses in any way possible.

Joseph Solomon is the mayor of the city of Warwick, R.I.

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