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Innovation training & green redevelopment in Pawtucket - by mayor Donald Grebien

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Donald Grebien

Grant funding is flowing into the city of Pawtucket with the July announcement of federal and state grants totaling over \$630,000 being awarded to the city of Pawtucket to develop workforce training programs, and to construct green infrastructure improvements surrounding the new commuter rail station.

On July 23rd, Pawtucket and Central Falls received a total of \$230,000 in Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant funds. This federal grant will support a three-part project: A joint economic development plan for both cities, a workforce development, training, and innovation center feasibility study, and a study for the re-use of the former OSRAM Sylvania plant in Central Falls. Both Rhode Island cities will go out to bid and select consultants to work with the cities on crafting the plans over the next two years. This project will guide future economic growth in these two urban communities while examining the existing strengths and needs of our workforce.

EDA's project also has new significance since the COVID-19 outbreak as we seek to understand how the pandemic has affected the job market as we look to promote strategies that will allow our workforce to adapt to these changes. This grant also helps support the economic recovery from COVID-19 and put both cities in a position to take advantage of the latest job market trends and economic opportunities post-pandemic.

One-week later, Pawtucket received an even larger grant totaling \$400,000 from the Rhode Island Department of Environment Management (RIDEM) to bring green infrastructure to Pawtucket's new commuter rail station site.

Grant funding will be used to improve pedestrian access from a new commuter parking lot on Pine St. near Conant St. to Barton St. at which point pedestrians would cross the street to access the incoming train station. Green infrastructure retrofits will be used to define a pedestrian travel way in a narrow urban right-of-way in order to encourage people to utilize the commuter lot to access the train station.

This funding would also add green elements to the public right-of-way in order to improve neighborhood aesthetics and make the neighborhood more functional for residents and more attractive for future development. This project will incorporate street trees in an effort to continue to add tree cover in the city and reduce heat island impacts in urban neighborhoods. It would also reduce storm water loads to the CSO system which experiences frequent backups.

These grant funded projects are important to continue to enhance downtown Pawtucket in terms of both economic development and quality of life for our residents. These upcoming projects will also serve to complement ongoing downtown infrastructure improvements including the commuter rail station itself, RIPTA bus access along Exchange St., and streetscape improvements along Broad St. into Central Falls. We look forward to a Pawtucket that continues its tradition as a center of business innovation and embraces sustainable redevelopment for its residents and businesses.

The city of Pawtucket thanks our congressional delegation and RIDEM for their efforts in bringing these significant grants to our communities.

Donald Grebien is the mayor of city of Pawtucket, R.I.

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