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East Providence continues to make important investments - by Roberto DaSilva

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East Providence

It has been said that it is far better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. As we look back at 2020 with this thought in mind we should each light a thousand candles! This past year was monumental with every aspect of our lives being abruptly disrupted. It is still too soon to determine what the “new normal” will look like, but it will certainly be a time for adaption and innovation.

Fortunately, during 2020 East Providence made considerable strides to benefit from a pending economic recovery. We have adopted key policies that will continue to develop our tax base, provide job opportunities and promote important housing options for our residents.

One of the primary consequences of the pandemic was a renewed interest in industrial and large-scale commercial space. During this past year East Providence had a persistently active market in a variety of these properties. In total, approximately 500,000 s/f of industrial and commercial space was either purchased and/or redeveloped in 2020. These new businesses include industry leading health care providers, growing manufacturing companies, regional distribution centers, and locally started retailers.

On the residential front the city continues to experience extraordinarily strong development. There are hundreds of new living units under various stages of development and permitting. These projects will keep our community growing and further increase our ability to attract new residents that can support the local economy. Notably, included in these proposed housing starts are over 50 new affordable housing units that will be added to the city’s housing inventory. The need for affordable housing has reached a critical level in 2020. Home sale prices continue to surge and far outpace the growth in income levels.

Momentum will carry forward in 2021 as the city continues to make important investments in our municipal infrastructure. Over the past several years the city has made many strategic capital

investments in roads, public parks and municipal utilities. In particular, the city's robust FY 21 capital plan includes over \$2 million in sidewalk improvements. These planned pedestrian upgrades will enhance the city's connectivity for residents, visitors and businesses. This initiative is in step with an emerging vision that would allow residents to meet their daily needs within a 15 minute walk from their homes.

Finally, East Providence will be completing its comprehensive plan later in 2021. The comprehensive plan is a blueprint for the city's future, looking ahead 20 years. This important document is used by local officials and city departments to guide decisions that can help and support residents and grow local businesses.

It is time to move beyond merely providing an opportunity for the city to succeed. Instead it is now time to take affirmative steps to achieve tangible outcomes. Assertive actions now will echo for years to come.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence.

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