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Land use policies benefit our citizens and environment - by Roberto DaSilva

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Land use policies can play a pivotal role in helping to reduce the carbon footprint of a community. By promoting and allowing for higher density development, East Providence can foster an environment that ameliorates the built environment's impact on climate change.

The city is heavily focusing redevelopment efforts on several infill projects where commercial and retail buildings continue to remain vacant. With the recent adoption of progressive mixed-use zoning regulations, many of these underutilized sites can now be successfully developed with more flexible guidelines. The vacant properties are often entirely impervious, having been built prior to modern Low-Impact Development (LID), storm water management, and landscaping requirements. With redevelopment comes more rigorous design standards which will result in improved drainage and landscaping of formerly eyesore properties.

An excellent example of this type of climate-friendly development is a new multifamily project recently completed by Paragon Investments LLC. This project includes 17 new residential units located in the Rumford section of East Providence which is an amenity rich high opportunity neighborhood. These apartments range between 450 to 900 s/f and feature contemporary amenities. All 17 units have been leased prior to the project's completion which demonstrates the high demand for this type of housing in the city.

Buoyed by the strong market reception for this project, Paragon has submitted plans for another residential development in the center part of the city on Waterman Ave. This new multifamily dwelling will be built on a currently vacant lot which was the former home of a machine shop. The project will take advantage of the new zoning overlay district for this area which makes multifamily a by-right use. This project will consist of 25 apartment units that will include several smart features that will accommodate residents who are seeking a conducive work-from-home setting.

The location of the Waterman Ave. residential development is well placed along an existing public transportation network. A Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) bus runs on Waterman Ave.

every 15 minutes. Additionally, the project will offer residents a unique bike sharing experience. In combination with the reduced minimum parking requirements on Waterman Ave., East Providence is creating opportunities to reduce dependency on cars. As new residences become more densely located in mixed use areas, residents will have more transportation choices to bus, bike, or walk to perform daily errands.

In addition to transportation benefits, these new residential developments often include smaller units which require less energy for heating and cooling that allows for greater efficiency. The smaller dwelling size also serves to make these units less expensive to build and maintain which can result in lower rental costs. These projects will also utilize existing city infrastructure and utilities which will make these developments cost effective by not requiring significant new capital expenses for infrastructure upgrades.

Together, these land use policies incentivizing the reuse of vacant property, a mixture of uses, and more transportation choices will reduce the city's environmental impact and reliance on fossil fuel.

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