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Progress requires steadfast dedication and prudent actions - by William Fazioli

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Change may be inevitable, but growth is certainly optional. As we continue to face ever changing challenges, communities must earnestly commit to carving a path that will lead to improved conditions for its residents. Progress is not automatic. Instead, it happens because organizations choose to pursue it with a sense of purpose and intent. It requires steadfast dedication coupled with prudent actions threaded together to yield better outcomes.

East Providence continues to move forward with the recent groundbreaking of Newport Center. Schiavo Enterprises, LLC is the developer for this exciting project. This development will occupy a long vacant 8-acre parcel on a busy commercial section of Newport Ave. It will include 142 new rental units along with a gas station/convenience store and a future 19,000 s/f commercial outlet. A.R. Building Co., Inc. will construct the apartment buildings which will include 48 studios, 55 one bedroom and 39 two-bedroom units. AR Builders has a proven track record in East Providence based on their highly successful 228-unit residential project at Kettle Point.

The development was able to proceed by a timely rezoning of the property approved in 2020. The revised regulations modified the land use from purely commercial uses to a mixed-use development overlay which allowed for residential density. This additional zoning flexibility enabled the project to advance forward after decades of inactivity.

The review process of this development began in July 2020 with a master plan approval. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the city staff worked diligently on the review of this project during the ensuing months. Schiavo Enterprises was very attentive and responsive to the complex facets of this project. Upgrades to city utilities and sidewalks were agreed upon by the developer. In addition, two traffic studies were conducted by VHB and Pare Engineering to mitigate the impact of the project. Ultimately, the proposal received final approval from the city's planning board in May 2021 after a public hearing.

As part of the construction a 30-foot vegetated buffer on three sides of the property will be

maintained. This area will retain many existing mature trees. In addition, the landscaping design includes over 1,300 new plantings which will include 51 new trees and 100 evergreens. There will also be a 6-foot-high fence along the property lines to further ensure the privacy of the surrounding property owners.

The most significant aspect of this development is that it represents another step in the city's resurgence. This project will contribute to our city's growing and diversifying housing inventory. These additional units combined with other recent residential developments will help mitigate rising rents and housing costs. In addition, these current developments will bolster the city's economy by contributing to our labor force and population base. A growing population can boost a community's ability to support local businesses as well as to share in the costs of local government.

Fortunately, once progress is achieved it becomes easier to realize as momentum leads to a continuous cadence of success.

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