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East Providence is working to solve the affordable housing crisis - by Roberto DaSilva

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Roberto DaSilva

With each passing week, a new statistic highlighting the growing housing crisis in our country emerges, from reports about the lack of new housing units that were not built during the last recession, to an analysis that reveals that the available inventory of units for purchase or rent continues to be undersupplied. Most recently, we learned how demand from out-of-state buyers is causing housing pressure to continue to mount in R.I. As home prices and rents continue to escalate at an unaffordable pace, our economy and social well-being will be undermined. East Providence is addressing this problem by increasing the supply of housing through permitting both market rate and affordable housing units.

According to the 2021 Housing Fact Book prepared by HousingWorksRI, the median sale price of a single-family dwelling in East Providence is \$270,500. Households that exceed 30% of their income towards a mortgage are deemed as cost burdened. A \$270,500 mortgage requires a minimum household income of \$76,046 for a household not to exceed 30% of their income to be spent towards a mortgage. The average household income for East Providence is \$59,142, which is significantly below the needed income to afford the median sale price without being cost burdened. As a result, there is a high demand for affordable housing units.

Despite this trend, only a handful of communities are welcoming new housing opportunities. With over 1,200 housing units currently under construction or permitted, East Providence is addressing this problem head on.

In 2013, the city obtained ownership of the former VAMCO property, an industrial and contaminated parcel located at 336 Bullocks Point Ave. in Riverside Sq. The site has been remediated by the city but languished for years as an eyesore and a blight on the neighborhood as previous attempts to develop the parcel did not materialize. In 2020, our administration with a focus on expansion of affordable housing opportunities, issued a RFP for the property and reached an agreement with One Neighborhood Builders, a successful affordable housing developer, to develop the parcel.

The redevelopment of this site will revitalize a long-vacant and blighted property adjacent to the East Bay Bike Path and address East Providence's need for quality, safe, affordable housing; all while establishing an inviting gateway into Riverside Sq.'s commercial district.

One Neighborhood Builders is approved to construct a multi-story residential building that will have a total of 16 residential units containing a total of 26 bedrooms. The composition of units are four 2-bedroom town house units; six 1- bedroom flats; and six 2-bedroom flats. Additionally, a 16-space parking lot, concrete sidewalks, a bike rack, privacy fencing, landscaping and underground utilities are proposed.

This development was made possible by an innovative overlay zoning ordinance that encourages high density compact development. These new zoning regulations also provide for further dimensional relief including reduced parking requirements along with relaxed height, setback, and lot coverage restrictions. Complex problems such as meeting the need for affordable housing only

get solved when we stop ignoring them and we address them with energy and persistence.

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