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## **City of East Providence has the tools to help small businesses - by Victor Regino**

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Victor Regino

The city of East Providence is working to minimize the economic losses from the COVID-19 Pandemic while taking full advantage of economic growth opportunities that lie ahead.

As a new member of the East Providence Planning and Economic Development department working as East Providence's small business coordinator, I work with small businesses to help businesses reach their full potential.

The pandemic resulted in an increase in the number of small businesses opening in Rhode Island. In particular, there has been an increase of 30% in small business growth since the start of the pandemic. In East Providence, we are seeing an increased number of people taking an interest in finding ways to turn their hobbies into business.

As a planner and small business owner, I utilize my knowledge in municipal and state permitting, licensing, and business planning to help small businesses start and expand in East Providence. My role in the planning and economic development department includes one-on-one business planning, assistance with grant and loan applications, and connecting businesses to the organizations and resources they need to grow.

In addition to helping small businesses with planning, I work to create city-wide programs to improve the small business climate in East Providence. One opportunity that arose in the first quarter of 2022 was the release of grant funding from the R.I. Department of Commerce. East Providence was awarded \$150,000 from the Department of Commerce through the "Take It Outside" initiative. This grant will be used to provide financial assistance to small businesses in East Providence in amounts up to \$10,000. This financial assistance will be used to expand outdoor use and accommodation through a reimbursement process, helping businesses provide their services outside in a more socially distant environment. Businesses owned by women (WBEs), and minorities (MBEs), will be prioritized in the reimbursement process, as 20% of the grant will be allocated to MBEs and WBEs.

The city of East Providence continues to organize innovative ways to support the small business community through public and private partnerships. The city is partnering with HarborOne Bank, which is introducing its HarborOne U program. The HarborOne U program offers technical assistance to businesses in addition to a startup loan of \$5,000. This program meets the needs of some of the city's smallest startups, while helping those businesses to build the necessary foundation needed to grow.

By utilizing the funding and resources available at all levels of government and partnering with private organizations, the city of East Providence is helping small businesses navigate through the pandemic and take full advantage of the available opportunities to better position businesses for post-pandemic growth.

Victor Regino is the business development & economic opportunity coordinator/planner I for the city of East Providence, R.I.

