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Reflections on an exciting year marked by new opportunities - by Frank Picozzi

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Frank Picozzi

In the midst of the holiday season, in between all the shopping, baking, decorating, open houses and office parties, it's common for many to take a moment or two to reflect on the year that's rapidly coming to a close. Here in the city of Warwick, 2022 has been marked by a great deal of activity, with new developments, redevelopments, and exciting other opportunities that have come the community's way.

For some years now, several former public school buildings that were turned over to the city's custody by the Warwick School Department have remained vacant or under-utilized. Throughout the year, several RFPs were issued, resulting in the sale to date of three properties, which are slated for redevelopment as residential units: the former John Wickes Elementary School sold for \$2.1 million; the former Buttonwoods Municipal Annex and Community Center for \$600,000; and the former Randal Holden Elementary School for \$1.4 million. Stay tuned in the coming months for information regarding the issuance of RFPS for the former school administration building and the former Nelson Aldrich Junior High School. The city looks forward to seeing the end result of these properties' transformations into attractive parcels that will enhance the surrounding areas and add to our residential tax base.

Also on the residential front, a number of single-family, condominium, and apartment projects are under construction or continuing through the approval process. Some of the larger-scale projects will result in over 700 new housing units, and that's not counting single-house and smaller-scale development projects also underway in areas throughout the city.

As many are keenly aware, COVID-19 wreaked particular havoc on the hospitality and tourism industry, and here in Warwick was no exception. Happily, hotel occupancy rates in the city's 16 hotels are up significantly from last year, and far in advance from 2020, when travel was stopped and curtailed for such a long length of time.

There's also been good news at the newly-renamed Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport, which has announced, among other things, new non-stop service to Los Angeles beginning next year, trips to the Dominican Republic, and a number of new routes, including a number of non-stop destinations like Nashville, added by the variety of airlines who proudly fly into and out of the airport that Condé Nast readers named the fourth best in the nation in the publication's 2022 Readers' Choice Awards contest. Additionally, the state has announced \$12.9 million in landscaping and road resurfacing improvements along the Airport Connector and Post Rd.—a welcome addition to a number of infrastructure and aesthetic improvements underway in thoroughfares throughout the city. The airport's also celebrating a number of other upgrades and new programs anticipated within the terminal, including \$5 million enhancements to the terminal itself, public access and security improvements, taxiway reconstruction, runway protection zone land, free flying familiarization classes, the "Sunflower Project," and the recent completion of \$24.8 million in runway improvements and brand new restroom facilities, among other things.

In September, the city celebrated the long-awaited move of most municipal departments to the

restored historic “sawtooth” mill building in Apponaug Village. This move is making it more convenient for residents and companies to do business in Warwick, and is enhancing ongoing efforts to revitalize the village. Another exciting development is the anticipated construction of the City Hall Plaza, to be built behind City Hall and feature skating in the winter and space for any number of community events to be held in the warmer months. The project is presently in the conceptual pricing phase of the development process. In other city news, the McDermott pool and the therapeutic pool—known locally as the “hot pool”—have been repaired and have reopened, to the delight of the many pool patrons who visit the facility daily. An influx of ARPA funds and other federal funding is helping to pay for significant infrastructure improvements, including water and sewer infrastructure upgrades, roadway reconstruction and resurfacing, and a broadband initiative.

Those who live and work in Warwick, and those who visit here, already know that, with our 39 miles of coastline, great restaurants, endless shopping options, good municipal services and outstanding recreational facilities and programs, Warwick is a great place to live, work, and visit. This June, thousands more got to see just why our community has been named to Livability.com’s “Top 100 Best Places to Live in America” list, when we hosted the 39th The Great Race national competition. Locals and out-of-state guests alike had a fantastic time watching the drivers in antique cars head out from Rocky Point for a trip that eventually ended in North Dakota. We look forward to one day hosting this fabulous event again.

That’s all just a sampling of all that’s been happening in Warwick. To learn more, visit warwickri.gov and visitwarwickri.com. And speaking of community events, all are invited to attend the City’s second annual New Year’s Eve fireworks display at Rocky Point Park. The fun goes from 3 to 6 p.m., with food trucks on site and beginning to serve at 2 p.m. There will be giveaways, and glo sticks for the kids. A DJ will provide music, which you can enjoy listening to from the lawn or from the comfort of your car by tuning into an FM station. Likewise, you can view the fireworks outside or in your vehicle. Fireworks will begin promptly at 6 p.m.

From all of our city employees, we wish you and yours a very happy holiday season and a New Year filled with good health, great happiness, and good times with family and friends that will create memories for a lifetime.

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