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East Providence continues to support small businesses - by Roberto DaSilva

July 14, 2023 - Rhode Island



Roberto DaSilva

The city of East Providence is proud to be home to several major companies in various sectors, such as health care and advanced manufacturing, that each provide jobs for hundreds of residents. However, the city realizes that businesses come in all shapes and sizes. Small businesses are valued for the many benefits they bring to the community such as jobs, culture, diversity, tourism, community leadership and charitable activities. Income earned by small businesses stays in the community where it benefits all residents.

After struggling through the COVID pandemic, East Providence's small businesses are stronger than ever. The city's commercial areas offer easy connections to downtown Providence with excellent highway access. Affordable and safe commercial spaces are available ranging from office parks, to historic mill complexes, to traditional "Main Street" areas. The food industry has been particularly successful, with several new restaurants and food manufacturing businesses opening as the industry bounces back from COVID restrictions.

The city has taken a leadership role in helping the local business community grow through partnerships with employers, educators, economic developers and other community based organizations. City staff advocate for, and collaborate with, businesses at every stage of growth from startup to expansion. The city administers several programs to help fund local businesses including the city's Commercial Loan program, Micro Loan program and Storefront Improvement Grant program. The city can also assist in applications for state programs including RI Rebounds Technical Assistance, Workplace Accessibility Grants, Take It Outside and Ventilation Support funding. The city's Department of Planning and Economic Development also offers assistance for small businesses navigating the local and state permitting processes (building and fire codes, state liquor commission, etc). The city's Community Development Division offers Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to eligible non-profit organizations that meet specific criteria.

Over the past few years the city has fostered small businesses in several ways. A new Arts District was adopted in 2021 to spur economic development, increase tourism and foster a creative community. Artists, writers and composers residing in the district are exempt from income tax from the sale of their work. Recently enacted zoning changes have made it easier for businesses to operate on our commercial corridors. New public improvements in areas such as Riverside Sq. have benefited area businesses. Affordable live-work units will soon be available as part of the Ivy Place development currently under construction by NeighborWorks Blackstone Valley.

The city continues to support the small businesses that make up the backbone of the local economy. For more information please contact the department of planning and economic development at 401-654-4288 or visit the city's economic development website at www.eastprovidencebusiness.com.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence, R.I.