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## **City of East Providence builds on grant funding for opportunities - by Roberto DaSilva**

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Roberto DaSilva

The City of East Providence is successfully leveraging grant funding to improve the lives of its residents. Recent grant awards from the state and federal government are making exciting initiatives possible in the areas of education, economic development and climate change.

Thanks to the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the city has received a \$200,000 grant to prepare a feasibility study for a business incubator at the former Oldham School at 640 Bullocks Point Ave. The study will include market research, analysis of costs, and an action plan. The city envisions this vacant building revitalized as a center where local entrepreneurs can get their start and receive assistance to help with their long-term success. A community space will also be included for public use. This concept was developed out of invaluable community outreach done in the Riverside neighborhood. Much needed affordable housing units may also be added to the city-owned parcel.

Education is another area where funding is making a difference. East Providence is proud to have recently adopted governor Dan McKee's Learn365RI compact. Learn365RI is designed to shift learning to a 365 day learning concept by supporting partnerships between municipalities, education agencies and community organizations to expand high quality, learning experiences. The ultimate goals of the program are to increase math and language arts scores, and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates, and reduce chronic absenteeism. The city was recently awarded \$340,000 to implement a program to reach these goals by increasing after school and summer programming by partnering with the Boys and Girls Club of East Providence and other providers.

Our administration is also working hard to plan for a new, centrally located, community center adjacent to our senior center and new state of the art high school. With \$6.8 million in expected grant funding from a Congressional appropriation and the state's Multipurpose Community Facilities Municipal Grant program, we are looking to create a transformational center that will offer workforce training, health monitoring services, education and recreation. With an eye toward limiting local expenses, the city is planning for a facility that will be an excellent investment for the community.

East Providence is also leveraging a \$750,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to combat climate change by planting up to 1,500 trees over the next five years. This initiative will expand upon the city's efforts to plant trees – particularly in lower income neighborhoods, employ summer workforce participants, and deliver related education programs at public schools. This project will serve to reduce urban heat island effects, help manage stormwater and beautify our community.

The city of East Providence is constantly looking for ways to expand upon services for its residents and businesses using available grant funding.

Over the past few years, several other grant awards have also advanced projects related to transportation, environmental sustainability, housing, placemaking, historic preservation and

recreation. With the help of our partners, the city of East Providence will always seek to advance local projects in the most cost efficient ways possible.

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

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