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New developments to revitalize traditional Main Street areas - by Roberto DaSilva

January 12, 2024 - Rhode Island



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The city of East Providence is celebrating the construction of two new developments which will help revitalize its traditional “Main Street” areas. These developments in the Central City and Riverside areas of the city will provide affordable rental and home-ownership opportunities and serve as catalysts for future investment.

Located on Bullocks Point Ave. in the Riverside section of the city, the Residences at Riverside Sq. consists of 16 affordable rental apartments currently under construction by ONE Neighborhood Builders. All units will be rentals for very-low to moderate-income households. Three units will be reserved for young adults who have aged out of the foster care system. The development is located at the former VAMCO site in the heart of the city’s Riverside Sq. neighborhood. This abandoned jewelry factory was a blight on the Riverside Sq. commercial district. The city purchased this property and cleaned up the contamination left by the prior use. The property was then sold to affordable housing developer, ONE Neighborhood Builders. Additional funding came from a \$1.676 million grant from the R.I. Housing Resources Commission. This development is the latest manifestation of the ongoing revitalization of Riverside Sq. Significant investments have been made over the past several years by the city and local property owners to restore Riverside Sq. after years of disinvestment. Historic buildings have been restored and public art, lighting, and other outdoor amenities have been added along the popular East Bay Bike Path. Construction is expected to be complete in spring of 2024.

The Ivy Place development is located at the intersection of Taunton Ave. and Ivy St. in the Center City area of East Providence. This mixed-use development, currently under construction by NeighborWorks Blackstone Valley, consists of nine affordable housing units and four live/work units in three separate buildings. All units will provide home ownership opportunities to buyers who earn up to between 80% and 100% of the area median income. The development fills an important gap in the streetscape of the Taunton Ave. commercial district, left by the demolition of the former Hollywood Theater in 2008. Located in the city’s Waterfront District, this development was partially funded by nearly \$1 million in “fee in-lieu of affordable housing” funds, paid to the city’s Waterfront Commission as part of the market-rate development at Kettle Point. Funding was also provided through federal, state and private sources. The site is within walking distance of city hall, the Weaver Library, and several commercial businesses.

Both developments add tax revenue and economic activity in the city’s traditional business districts, infill key streetscapes, and add much-needed affordable housing units. These developments, along with several others that are under construction or are in the planning stages, show the city’s commitment to revitalizing its main commercial corridors and increasing housing opportunities for its residents.

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