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City of East Providence remains open for business - by Roberto DaSilva

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On December 11th 2023, I received an emergency call from the Rhode Island Department of Transportation informing me that the westbound span of the Washington Bridge carrying I-195 was to be immediately shut down due to serious safety concerns. This bridge is the main connection between Rhode Island's capital city and points east and is a crucial artery between the east and west sides of Narragansett Bay. Since then, two-way traffic has been restored to the bridge. The city continues to monitor the situation to best manage traffic and enhance safety on our roads. We have had continuous discussions with the state on the progress of this project and ways that the situation on the ground can be addressed. Small businesses can apply for low interest Economic Injury Disaster Loans recently made available by the Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA's Business Recovery Center, located in East Providence City Hall, is available to answer questions and help business owners complete their applications. See www.SBA.gov/disaster for more information.

The partial closure of the Washington Bridge has understandably garnered much media attention. But despite the focus on this issue, East Providence continues to thrive as a great place to live, learn, work and play. The city is experiencing significant growth in the areas of housing and business development. The demand to live in East Providence is shown by the nearly 1,000 new housing units under construction in the city. Over 400 of these new units are located in The Flatley Company's Christine Apartments development, which has reclaimed a former gravel pit on Wampanoag Trail. An almost equal number of units are under construction as part of Noble Development's East Point project. This development, on a former contaminated steel mill property, is a key piece of the East Providence waterfront's revitalization and will provide public access to the Seekonk River. In addition, proposals consisting of roughly 1,100 additional units throughout the city are currently making their way through the local permitting process. New businesses in many categories and sizes continue to see East Providence as an excellent place to locate. Nearly 500,000 s/f of planned commercial space is currently before local boards. The city is also investing millions in quality of life for its residents including upgrades to parks, schools and infrastructure. Public-private partnerships in the city's waterfront will lead to a riverfront concert venue similar to Boston's Leader Bank Pavilion, and a marine terminal for assembly of offshore wind turbines.

As we continue to navigate through this bridge closure our message is clear – East Providence remains open for business. We continue to celebrate the great assets we have in our city including the hundreds of small businesses that are ready, willing and able to continue to provide their services to the public. East Providence is a place worth visiting and investing in, even with some extra traffic. We are determined to get through this hurdle and will keep spreading the word about what makes our city so special.

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

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