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East Providence advances climate resilience projects - by Roberto DaSilva

August 09, 2024 - Rhode Island



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The effects of climate change are being felt by communities across the country. While East Providence is fortunate to have a lower risk of natural disasters than many other communities, the city is currently engaged in projects on several fronts to mitigate the effects of our changing climate on residents and the environment.

The most noticeable of these measures is the reclamation of several acres of a frequently flooded neighborhood north of Waterman Ave. into public open space. Through federal funding, the city has partnered with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the R.I. Association of Conservation Districts, who are managing this project. The federal government has purchased over a dozen homes at fair market value, offering an option for those struggling with repeated flooding. Homes are in the process of being removed and the land will be restored to its natural habitat to serve as flood storage along the Runnins River.

The city has also made strides in green energy, including the establishment of a 7.4 megawatt solar array at a former municipal landfill. This public-private partnership has benefitted the community through the payment of annual lease fees. In addition, a 2.8 kilowatt solar array system has been constructed on the site of a former petroleum storage facility, removing roughly 137.5 million pounds of carbon dioxide from the environment. The city is also part of a public-private partnership to create a wind energy hub at the waterfront property known as the South Quay. This site, which is currently under construction by R.I. Waterfront Enterprises, will serve as a hub for the region's growing offshore wind economy.

The city is also updating its infrastructure to better handle the changing environment. A new Citywide Stormwater Master Plan will examine existing infrastructure and recommend actionable improvements. As the severity and frequency of storms increase, this plan will serve as a first step in improving systems which were not designed for today's rainfall. Stormwater management installations incorporating green infrastructure are also planned in various areas throughout the city. The city and Save The Bay are finalizing plans for a major remediation project at Sabin Point Park which will improve water quality by treating runoff that currently discharges onto the beach. Sabin Point is also the location of dozens of artificial reef balls installed by the R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management and the Nature Conservancy, which have led to improved habitat for marine life.

The city is implementing several other projects that will help mitigate the effects of climate change. Millions have been invested in stabilizing the slope of Crescent Park, which has been repeatedly damaged by coastal erosion. Projects that will help mitigate increased summer heat include a major tree planting program funded through the USDA and construction of an additional city splash pad.

The city of East Providence looks to make good investments today that will lead to fewer costs tomorrow. We will continue to seek ways to become more resilient in the face of a changing climate.

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