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## **The benefits of municipal economic and residential growth - by Roberto DaSilva**

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East Providence is a community that recognizes the benefits of responsible economic and residential growth. In the years between 1980 and 2010, the city lost approximately 3,000 residents or about 8% of its population. Today the population is holding steady with some projections still forecasting a decline. However, past losses in population have not resulted in a corresponding need for less housing. Due to factors including a smaller number of residents per household, there is significant demand for housing in East Providence, and many residents are considered cost-burdened. The current housing crisis is largely the result of a lack of housing supply to meet demand, which has increased prices throughout the region and at all market levels. While some people decry new housing construction as a burden on the community, the opposite is typically true. The city considers housing to be a key part of economic development. Responsible housing development benefits the local community by contributing to the local economy and mitigating affordability issues. A common expression is that "housing is where jobs go at night." The addition of new residents means more customers and employees for local businesses.

Reducing the percentage of residents' income spent on housing costs, not only benefits those households but also the community at large as residents have more income to spend at local businesses. The city's experience is that new residential construction is not leading to negative impacts on the city's bottom line. Compared to previous decades, there are fewer people per household and young families are having fewer children. These trends are expected to continue. Enrollment data shows that the number of students in the public school system has decreased by nearly 1,100 over the past 20 years. A demographic study produced for the school district building committee projects a continued decline in enrollment, with another 200 fewer students by 2031.

The city also sees commercial economic development as benefitting the community as a whole. Municipalities have the same inflationary pressures as the business community and the general public. Additional tax revenue is needed to finance the increasing costs of providing the services residents need. The city is focusing on generating additional tax revenue through the productive and efficient use of land to support needed infrastructure and services. Redevelopment of underutilized commercial areas often leads to mitigation of existing problems, such as poor stormwater management, environmental contamination, lack of landscaping and outdated aesthetics. Compared to many other municipalities, East Providence is a community with ample public utilities, few natural impediments to development and few areas located in FEMA designated flood hazard areas. The city has continuously made improvements to its water and sewer infrastructure which has additional capacity for growth. The city welcomes investment opportunities that improve the community and offer a better quality of life for its residents.

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