



CELEBRATING
55 YEARS

nerej

City of East Providence distributes small business relief funds - by Roberto DaSilva

March 14, 2025 - Rhode Island



Roberto DaSilva

On December 11, 2023, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation abruptly announced the closure of the westbound span of the Washington Bridge due to structural deficiencies. This bridge carries Interstate 195 across the Providence River and is a crucial connection between the City of Providence and points east, including the East Bay communities of Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. Prior to the restoration of two-way traffic on the bridge, the City of East Providence experienced gridlock for several days. The city's businesses bore the brunt of this closure as residents limited their travel and those from neighboring communities opted to stay away. Businesses dealt with canceled appointments and deliveries, employees who could not make it to work and significantly reduced revenue. A recent study prepared by Salve Regina University for the Rhode Island Hospitality Association projected that the closure had a total statewide economic impact of \$114 million on hospitality businesses during the first twelve months after the closure.

Thanks to the Rhode Island Governor's Office, the Rhode Island Generally Assembly and Commerce RI, the city was granted \$1.2 million to reimburse local businesses that were economically harmed by the closure. Additional grant funding was made available to impacted businesses in other communities. The Washington Bridge Small Business Grant Program was developed to get money back into the hands of local businesses. Businesses could request funds to compensate for lost income during a period of three months after the bridge closure. The city worked with the non-profit organization, Skills for Rhode Island's Future to process the applications. The maximum dollar amount was increased from \$2,500 to \$10,000. Grants did not exceed the amount of revenue lost by the business. The city distributed over \$713,000 in funds to 92 small businesses. An event was held at East Providence City Hall on December 23, 2024, in which business owners received their checks. For those businesses that did not apply for funding, the City of East Providence is planning a second round later in 2025.

Construction of the new westbound span of the Washington Bridge will take years to complete. However, thanks to improvements to the flow of traffic on the bridge, the city remains "open for business" with congestion far below levels seen in the days following the bridge's closure. While some businesses may not be made whole through this program, the funds are intended to provide relief to their bottom line. The city's small businesses have rebounded from what was a challenging situation and the city's economy remains strong. In fact, the same Salve Regina study referenced earlier projects a long-term positive impact on the city's hospitality industry by 2029. My administration is grateful for the ability to administer this funding as well as the continued resilience of the local business community.

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

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540