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New commuter rail station and Tidewater Stadium driving revitalization - by Donald Grebien

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Donald Grebien

There is a tangible sense of excitement in Pawtucket as two of our most important economic development opportunities are now a reality and delivering on the promise of creating jobs, creating more housing, improving transit, and revitalizing city neighborhoods. This is an exciting time for our city.

First, the new Pawtucket - Central Falls Commuter Rail Station is thriving. Opened in 2023, the station has been seeing steady growth in daily ridership. So much so that we have needed to work with the R.I. Department of Transportation to add additional parking. Today, daily ridership is more than 1,300 passengers and the station's combined 440-spot parking lot is often full. We are also excited to see many people in the neighborhood walking to the station, a testament to the pedestrian infrastructure we have invested in around the area.

The new commuter rail station is also attracting tens of millions of dollars in residential development and mill conversion projects. Indeed, more than 1,000 housing units have been completed since 2017 or will soon be created in the district surrounding the commuter rail station. Projects like Dexter Street Commons broke ground in December. Being developed by Peyser Real Estate Group, the project will create 150 energy-efficient apartment units, 20% of which will be affordable workforce housing. And all just a short walk to the commuter rail station.

Nearby, RISE Pawtucket Apartments is also moving towards a groundbreaking. Pawtucket was recently awarded a \$1.2 million grant from the R.I. Infrastructure Bank's Housing Infrastructure Grant Program to prepare the project site at 258 Pine St. with green and stormwater infrastructure improvements. Being developed by Francisco Cruz Matos, RISE Pawtucket will add 177 new housing units to the neighborhood.

Our new commuter rail station is an excellent example of the power of transit-oriented development in creating a new neighborhood. We fully expect this trend to continue, with several adjacent parcels and old mill buildings being considered for residential and commercial redevelopment.

Our second major economic development opportunity that is now a reality is Tidewater Stadium. The new 10,000-seat stadium, located on the banks of the Seekonk River, will host its first game on May 3rd. I cannot tell you how excited I am to welcome Rhode Island FC to their new home in Pawtucket. This project has created jobs and incredible community excitement as evidenced by strong ticket sales and a passionate local Rhode Island FC fanbase.

And the Tidewater development is just getting started. Fortuitous Partners, the developer behind the stadium, is now looking at phase 2 of the project to include new housing units and commercial space.

Both of these projects show that public-private partnerships can work to provide both economic development and community revitalization.

Come May, we cannot wait to see people from around the region take a commuter rail ride to our new station and walk through downtown to our beautiful new Tidewater Stadium. Goal!

Donald Grebien is mayor of the city of Pawtucket, R.I.

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