



My Ward Report for August 29, 2019

Dear Fellow East Siders:

As Labor Day approaches, I wanted to discuss in this Ward Report several issues that have seen recent developments, including two issues I recently highlighted in my last Ward Report: the State's takeover of the Providence public schools, the proposed closure of the I-95 Gano Street exit, and over-occupancy of residential dwellings on College Hill.

Providence Schools

Update on Providence Public Schools

On August 8th, Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green released the order that proposes to empower the Commissioner to take over the Providence public schools. You can read the content of the order here: www.ride.ri.gov/providence.

The Commissioner issued the order pursuant to a state law called the Crowley Act. Some of my colleagues on the City Council and I have concerns about whether the order meets the requirements of the Crowley Act. In the first place, to take over a school district the Crowley Act requires that RIDE demonstrate it has provided three years of progressive support and intervention to the district in several different areas, but the support and intervention provided to Providence by RIDE has been neither comprehensive nor consistent. A good example of this is the fact that RIDE implemented three different student assessments (NECAP, PARCC and RICAS) between 2002 and 2018.

Our second concern is that the order does not specifically provide for student and parent involvement in either the hiring of the Turnaround Superintendent or in the formation and implementation of the Turnaround Plan. Instead, the order simply contains a general statement that the Turnaround Superintended "shall engage, be accessible, and be responsive to students, parents, families, educators and the public broadly." To me this statement is insufficient to require students and parents to have an affirmative and concrete role in the improvement of the schools.

The third concern I and some of my colleagues share is that the order gives the Commissioner broad authority to issue the Turnaround Plan without providing any way to hold her accountable. No one has held RIDE accountable for the ways in which it

has failed, in the past, to support our schools, and without more specific language in the order concerning the Commissioner's accountability, I fear that pattern may continue.

The order will go into effect in a few weeks unless a stakeholder successfully objects. Only four groups by law are permitted to object to the order: the City Council, the Superintendent, the Mayor, and the School Board. Objections must be filed by September 4th, and there is a hearing on any objections filed on September 13th. As I indicated, there has been discussion among some members of the City Council as to whether we should object to the order based on the concerns I outlined above. I'm not sure there is enough support on the City Council for the Council, as a body to file an objection, but I am hopeful that some of us on the Council will be able to meet with the Commissioner and/or her staff to raise and discuss our concerns. We support all efforts to improve the schools, but we want to make sure that the efforts are legal, include the community, and hold those in charge of the plan accountable for the result.

Update on the Closure of the Gano Street Exit

Thanks to the comments made by so many of the residents of Wards 1 and 2, RIDOT has hired an independent consultant to look at the closure of the Gano Street Exit as part of the overall plan to renovate the Washington Bridge. RIDOT will also conduct further traffic studies on the plan's impact on the proposed redesign of the Henderson Bridge (specifically the reduction of lanes from 4 to 2). RIDOT has also agreed to convene community meetings after the traffic studies are complete, which should be sometime in October. Councilman Seth Yurdin and I will host one of the community meetings in Ward 1 or Ward 2. In the meantime, if you oppose the closure of the Gano Street Exit, please continue to contact Governor Raimondo's office at (401) 222-2080 during office hours or leave a comment on her website (<http://www.governor.ri.gov/contact/>). Please also raise your concerns with Peter Alviti, Jr., Director of RIDOT, at (401) 222-2481. As you can see, your voices do make a meaningful difference.

Over-occupancy on College Hill (382 Thayer Street and 150 Lloyd Avenue)

As you are aware, many residents of College Hill and others are concerned about the over-occupancy of residential dwellings by undergraduate college students. While there is a proposed ordinance that will go a long way to remedy the situation, it is unfortunately still languishing in the Ordinance Committee. In the meantime, real estate developers are purchasing large residential homes in the College Hill area and turning them into what are essentially student dorms. Due to pending litigation, an ordinance on the books that might have helped with this problem by limiting the number of unrelated people living in a single apartment is not currently being enforced, and as a result the practice of converting houses to "dorms" is becoming widespread.

I am working with residents and City staff to oppose applications to the Planning Board and Zoning Board that would, if permitted, intensify uses in residential dwellings in the

College Hill area. Here again, your voices can make a difference, as illustrated by the following two examples:

On August 14th, owners of 382 Thayer Street presented an application for a use variance to the Zoning Board of Appeal, seeking a change of use for that building from two doctors' offices and two apartments to six dwelling units. Attorney John Garrahy represented the applicant. Planning department staff recommended denial of the Application. When Attorney Garrahy saw how many residents showed up in opposition, he withdrew the application.

Walter Bronhard, who is also represented by attorney Attorney John Garrahy, has filed an application for a use variance with the Zoning Board of Appeals with regard to 150 Lloyd Avenue (where the Suboxone Clinic was proposed). Mr. Bronhard seeks a change of use from two doctor's offices and two dwelling units to three dwelling units. The hearing has not been scheduled yet, but my hope is that the developers, including Mr. Bronhard, are getting the message that this practice is not acceptable and will be vigorously opposed by local residents.

Please feel free to call me at (401) 489-2470, visit www.helenanthony.com, and/or or email me at helen@helenanthony.com with questions or comments. Enjoy the rest of your summer, and I'll be in touch soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Anthony". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a mix of uppercase and lowercase letters.