



## **My Ward Report for August 4, 2019**

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are enjoying your summer. It's been an extraordinarily busy May, June, and July and I'm just trying to catch up. Thank you for your patience and understanding while I try to adjust the timing of my communications with the Ward. My goal is to have more frequent, less lengthy communications at least once a month.

This Ward Report will discuss three issues that I know have been on the minds of many of you: the City's budget, the State's takeover of the Providence Schools, and the proposed closing of the I-195 Gano Street exit.

### **Budget Follow-Up**

As you know, Finance Chairman John Iglizzi, with the support of Council President Sabina Matos and nine other councilmembers, proposed a single residential tax rate of \$24.56 per thousand with a graduated homestead exemption. A graduated homestead exemption would have unfairly imposed more of the City's tax burden on Ward 2. Thanks to many of you; as well as Council members LaFortune, Yurdin and Salvatore; Mayor Elorza and members of our House delegation, particularly Representatives Chris Blazejewski and Rebecca Kislak, we were able to prevent the enabling legislation from passing at the State House. Unfortunately, we were not able to prevent Chairman Iglizzi and the City Council from changing our two-tiered tax structure (owner occupied/non-owner occupied) to a single residential rate of \$24.56 per thousand with a flat homestead exemption of 40 percent.

On July 9<sup>th</sup>, the City Council passed a budget of \$751,500,919, of which more than half (\$394,155,414) was allocated to the Providence Public Schools. I voted against the budget. As a member of the Finance Committee who attended every meeting (with one exception when I had a community meeting regarding Jenckes Street), I was stunned at the appalling lack of process and transparency. Before next year's budget, I intend to propose a budget process that is transparent and allows all residents of Providence an opportunity to provide public comment, which I hope the leadership team will support.

Please make sure to check the calculation of your taxes, even if you have already paid them, as the Assessor's Office has made some errors when applying the 40% homestead exemption. If you do find an error, please call the Assessor's Office at (401) 680-5229.

## Providence Public Schools

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy released a devastating report on the status of Providence Public School System. If you'd like to read it, click here: <https://edpolicy.education.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PPSD-REVISED-FINAL-002.pdf>.

On July 24<sup>th</sup>, after convening listening sessions throughout the City, Rhode Island's new Commissioner of Education, Angelica Infante-Green, formally requested a state takeover of the Providence Public Schools. As the Commissioner said, "We failed an entire generation." If we can't provide a good quality public education, we're going to lose a lot of Providence residents, particularly our middle class. While the overhaul is a monumental undertaking, I'm cautiously optimistic that the new Commissioner will reduce the burdensome bureaucracy and implement consistent, quality education policy. The Johns Hopkins report identified the City Council's requirement that it must approve all school expenditures of \$5,000 and above as contributing to the amount of unnecessary bureaucracy that impedes effective operation of the schools. I will work with my Council colleagues to eliminate that requirement and hope to work collaboratively with the Commissioner in achieving the State's goals.

One of the other findings of the Johns Hopkins report is the appalling condition of our school buildings. While the Commissioner is focused on bureaucracy and policy, the City is still responsible for the condition of the schools. In November of 2018, city and statewide bonds were passed that will fund repairs to our schools' infrastructure. In the immediate future (in fact, beginning this summer), Providence will be spending \$20 million on those repairs and improvements.

## Closing of I-195 Gano Street Exit

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, RIDOT shared its plans to renovate the Washington Bridge with the Mayor and his staff. Councilman Yurdin and I were invited to attend the meeting. Part of the plan is to permanently close the Gano Street exit from I-195. Councilman Yurdin and I explicitly and strenuously expressed our opposition to the RIDOT representatives attending the meeting. I'm particularly upset that RIDOT withheld this information until after holding community meetings regarding the renovation of Henderson Bridge. I would never have supported RIDOT's plan to renovate the Henderson Bridge, which includes a proposal to reducing traffic to one lane in each direction, had I known RIDOT was proposing to close the Gano Street exit permanently.

Please 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/>), telling her that you strongly opposed RIDOT's plan to permanently close the Gano Street exit. I will let you know if and when community meetings about RIDOT's proposal will be held. This is a very important issue for the East Side and I need your help to address it effectively.

Finally, please feel free to call me at (401) 489-2470, visit [www.helenanthony.com](http://www.helenanthony.com),  
and/or email me at [helen@helenanthony.com](mailto:helen@helenanthony.com). Enjoy the rest of your summer, and I'll  
be in touch soon.

Sincerely,

*Helen Anthony*