

### Learning about Process the Hard Way

**By now**, we all thought we knew the drill. Every three years the State mandates a full real estate property revaluation in all of its cities and towns. Based on the results, each individual town then sets the appropriate tax rate to keep things running. Admittedly in Providence, the process is a little more complicated due to things like abatements, differences between commercial and residential rates, occupied versus unoccupied. But with the homestead exemption eliminated six years ago and with our housing values stabilizing all over town, it promised to be a simple calculation this time around.

Real estate in Providence seems to be a growth industry. Demand is improving. Building downtown is booming. The soon-to-be-opened Wexford project and Brown's continuing expansion suggests burgeoning economic opportunities may finally be in our future. Boston is on fire but so, too, are its housing prices, which mean exciting spillover possibilities for us. And the public

is discovering there is life, and a very exuberant one at that, in places around town besides the East Side. So, what could screw things up?

Enter our Providence City Council. With both the Mayor and half the council members themselves term limited, everyone seems to be exploring possible future career paths. For the council, what better way to curry favor than to play to their constituents? They are trying to find a way to lessen the pain of any increase or even better, pass it on somewhere else. The result was a lead-footed, last-minute plan led by Finance Committee Chairman John Iglizoi and Council President Sabina Matos to single out expensive houses, many on the East Side, for additional taxes. The Mayor isn't blameless either, as he added some \$20 million worth of increases at the last minute without offering offsetting budget cuts.

Progressive taxation isn't necessarily

a bad thing, but to develop a tax policy that's fair for everyone is difficult, complex, and not for the faint-hearted. And without transparency, without expert input, and without an open process that engages the neighborhoods it effects, it is impossible.

But hopefully, two important lessons have come out of the recent tax debacle. First, pitting ward against ward is rarely helpful in addressing citywide issues when they occur. Second, transparency and neighborhood input are essential to critical urban decision making. In short, process often is as important as product.

Both these lessons will be tested as we face the even more daunting upcoming challenge of dealing with public education in the city. And if Providence can't come up with actionable solutions that serve all of our wards, then maybe it's time to turn the process over to State and just admit defeat.

## LETTERS

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### To the editor:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank many of my neighbors and fellow residents of Providence for standing up and taking action on the two-tiered tax proposal that was presented with virtually no transparency or community input. Hundreds of us took the time to get involved and ensure that our voices would be heard. Working together, we were able to ensure that this backdoor piece of legislation that would have pitted neighborhood against neighborhood

wasn't passed at the eventh hour.

In particular, I would like to thank Representative Chris Blazejewski. His leadership helped make sure the council did not get the authorizing legislation they needed to pass the proposal. Thanks too to House Speaker Nick Mattello for recognizing that a tax policy of such importance in Providence deserved a much more thorough process of review than what had been proposed. And of course, thanks to our Councilmembers in Wards 1, 2 and 3 for standing for us throughout this entire process.

This was a win for now but we must continue to stay involved. There will inevitably be other proposals to create a tax structure that is both fiscally responsible to run our city effectively and yet fair to its taxpayers. But future legislation must be transparent, inclusive, thoroughly vetted, and have input from ALL the neighborhoods of the city.

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