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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Statement from Representative Christopher Markey Regarding the Withdrawal of the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth from the Star Store in New Bedford

(New Bedford) - While I am disappointed that the Center for Visual and Performing Arts is moving out of downtown New Bedford, I appreciate why the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth decided to re-center the CVPA on campus. The cost to maintain and rehabilitate that building was simply too costly. For many years, the Commonwealth has paid the rent for the property. While the funding was in the Governor's Budget and the House Budget it failed to make into the Senate Budget. One can try to place blame on the Senate, or the University; however, both would be wrong. Due to changes in enrollment, higher education, and the economy the Star Store proves too costly a facility to provide class space for the one hundred and sixteen students at the CVPA. Keeping the building operational was not a financially responsible choice for the State or the University. The building fulfilled a valuable purpose over the past two plus decades, but now it is time to move on. We should be grateful for the private sector investment that improved the property and the University's commitment to the arts in our community, that began two decades ago.

With the conclusion of this chapter, we must look to the possibilities of the future with excitement and ingenuity. The beautiful building remains in an ideal location at the heart of New Bedford. The Greater New Bedford economy has changed, and our community's needs have changed. The departure of the CVPA allows us to look for alternatives that could support the offshore wind industry, provide new housing, or convert the Star Store into the first location in New Bedford for the true Smart Growth that Governor Deval Patrick envisioned a decade ago.

The Star Store could provide commercial space in the basement and first floor, office space on the second floor and, housing on the top two floors. It would be a shining example of how New Bedford has evolved. The project would exemplify the city's ability to adjust and harness private and public stakeholders to make significant investments that meet our current and long-term needs.

The commercial real estate market in New Bedford is significantly less expensive than that of Boston. The building would be a great location for practical office space for any offshore wind affiliated company. The property has beautiful large, picturesque windows which would make for magnificent apartments, the basement and first floor would be a prime location for commercial retail space in our thriving downtown. All that is required is a vision and a dedication to our community.

This building is a blank canvass for new opportunities that are available to the private sector and the local, state, and federal governments. I have always believed in the people of New Bedford, I and have no doubt in our ability to find and materialize a beneficial outcome for this property. I maintain that New Bedford is the economic driver for our entire region and we have an obligation to look towards the future with plans of growth and development. We all have a stake in this community and the city deserves a creative and mutually beneficially solution that will be facilitated by its leadership.

I look forward to working with the Healy administration, the property owner, and any other government or non-government agencies that see the value in this unique opportunity.

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