

Providence, the Region And The New Urbanism

Part I: Origins

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Origins of this Report

New urbanism addresses the built environment and public spaces of cities and towns. It works to create: walkable places, mixed use, more density, and the preservation of the character of a place.

The 14th Congress of New Urbanism will be held in Providence, June 1 to 4, 2006. Providence's Cornish Associates is a major practitioner of new urbanism and has a major role in presenting the 14th Congress. Cornish and the local Congress executive committee engaged New Commons to prepare this report and launch a regional network of practitioners to dig into our towns and cities as a collaborative effort.

Twenty-seven regional thinkers and doers were chosen for conversations to gather views about the future of the city and region and how new urbanism can better impact the city and region. This report is the results of those interviews. One specific result of the interviews was the identification of over 40 urban issues that need attention, if the city and region are to evolve to the next level. (A list of those interviewed will be found at the end of this report.) A second report will be produced later on the specifics of new urbanism as it applies to the evolution of places.

Contributions to Providence's Vision

Here are the contributions of the people from Providence and State agencies interviewed and invited to join the first phase of the lab and place-making network that will begin by focusing on Providence metro urban issues.

Armory Revival is a development company in the city and RI, with a focus both on the built environment, the community, and public realm that supports it.

AS220: AS 220 is a community of people engaged at all levels of activity – an ecosystem – but first and foremost a community. It is our role to build community through the arts. But we don't just push that. AS220 reflects the demographics – Providence **IS** an arts based community – and sometimes we forget that! Just look around at our city – the theatres, artists, designers – we form a lot of the culture of this city.

Brown University: More integration between the city and the university and more people benefiting from it. We are in a city, we have neighbors. We have obligations and responsibilities to evolve both the institution and the city. Create a mixed-use environment, e.g., academics and housing with students and faculty in the same building. Do commercialization of Brown's knowledge base to grow the economy.

Department of Planning and Development: Planning and zoning the future city. Educate people to change with change being good. Encourage more developers to care about the city. (We have a good number now.) Design for less cars. Produce more housing. Increase tax base.

Providence Foundation: Private sector voice and advocate for right policies, programs and projects downtown in accord with what is right.

Providence Preservation Society: Preserving the character of the city.

Rhode Island Economic Development: Foster innovation; help people feel better about what we are blessed to have. Economic growth is about psychology: what does it take for one person to invest a dollar? Help Providence and the state be present with our human capital, attracting outside investment and telling stories. Our story plays well on Broadway.

Rhode Island Housing: Revitalizing neighborhoods, encouraging mixed use with retail on first floor and residential above. We do mixed income development. Foster life on the street. Increase the amount of density because it is important for security, walk-ability, and interaction with others. Do it all based on community based-development. We are thinking thru the concept of “new villagism.”

RI Policy Council: Charting long-term policy issues for RI and the region keeping score of progress for the state.

RIPTA: Transportation of people with less congestion and more mobility.

RISD: Graduate students in city projects; interdisciplinary seminars on the city; do courses on urban labs after CNU; begin to produce more entrepreneurial students who want to stay in the city and build companies.

Save the Bay: Protect, restore, and evolve the watershed as resource for the economy and quality of life.

Statewide Community Development and Planning: Develop, statewide, both the land use and strategic housing plans.

Struever Brothers, Eceles and Rouse: Big city enthusiasts with cities being central to our survival and our democracy as a country. Believe and work in neighborhoods – our identity – embrace the community priorities and make them partners. Artists welcome, immigrants welcome; diversity of income and housing prices; local merchants present to preserve the authentic character. Pursue a double bottom line – social and financial – to counter the unattended consequences of a market only bottom line. We are committed to 10 to 20% of our development revenues to be used to establish a civic trust for dual bottom line programs.