

Providence, the Region And The New Urbanism

Part II: Visions for the City & Region

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A Collection of Vision Fragments For the Next Providence and Region

“Our vision is fuzzy and not shared among citizens.”

These fragments are organized in the full words of those interviewed. You read their complete thought. The individual visions can be broken up into more precise thematic sections at a later time. Further, the visions are yet to be integrated as aligned visions by the leaders of the city to guide the city.

Our Sense of Place

Providence is like an east coast Portland Oregon because it doesn't look like anything else. It has reasons for people to come to it. It wasn't vibrant enough in the 60's to get ruined.

People feel the value of why they live here.

It is physically beautiful – a walking city – where you always have a view both short and long. There is a sense of unique scale of being both large (expanding) and small (village feeling). It is the process of coming into its own – realizing itself.

Always been a walking, pedestrian city. It has small scale with large city characteristics.

Evolve to be a leading mid-size city, if not world class with less division – cultural, ethnic, economy, and neighborhoods. East Side comes to see that we have the third largest poverty rate in US. They go experience the neat restaurants on Broad Street. In effect, there is better understanding both ways.

Evolve all the neighborhoods to be more connected – a city of neighborhoods (where each has been isolated for too long). Connect us to the bordering communities: Pawtucket and Cranston. Develop alternatives to cars. Make it more pedestrian friendly (the tunnels under 195 are not people friendly). Hop on and off trolleys with a fixed schedule. Make the trolleys free to speed things along. Develop free transit zones downtown, assuming we can create longer term commuters to use them. Union eliminates parking as a benefit and state omits cafeterias inside buildings to get more people on the street and eating lunch in the city.

The goal of the city is to become dynamic and provide interesting places to live. To do this with inclusiveness is vital.

Integrate the physical and non-physical. In the future, there will be connectivity among all different types of people so they feel connected and part of the whole. More open to diverse life-styles. We want more bike paths and a lively waterfront. There has to be young people everywhere with a built environment for them and not just baby boomers. In 5 years, 40% of the workforce will be under 30: what do they want? We need great public schools to hold and attract young creators with families.

The city will be strong and dense, with a high nucleus. It has transit that works. We need live and work places. We need to evolve each neighborhood as vital and independent with its own commercial and entertainment areas. Neighborhoods connected to each other and with the downtown as core. Stabilize Providence first then metro – Pawtucket, Warwick and so on – and do it with a new way to do government, regionally. Consider the Toronto example where they did greater metro government first for regional issues, but kept local government and then blended later.

Build on our city strengths, ala Michael Porter, to grow a regional economy for jobs. Use the jet fuel of the three cities idea with the downtown dense, diverse, mixed use (office, housing and street retail), social fabric and street live, day and evening activities.

We embrace the city-state idea. There is a need to figure out nodes and steer growth to the nodes. There are three big nodes – Providence, Westerly, and Newport. They need visions of growth and strong design fabric for each one. Providence will develop as a big urban city. Westerly and Newport won't embrace themselves as urban design cities. Define ourselves by our region which includes Worcester, Fall River and Route 146.

What if we had a place making strategy for the Narragansett Bay? We establish a general handle on the overall bay and then individual place making strategies for all from Blackstone to Taunton. EPA is organized around land, water, and toxins – NOT Place – and they say a lot and do little around this issue, i.e., Aquidneck Island, Fall River, Westerly, Watch Hill, which are all individual places.

Though I work primarily in the environmental area the two most important issues are: poverty and affordability of housing. These two issues relate directly to revitalization and the city. In this situation, I see a community that provides for jobs, affordable housing, and then I get to the next two key issues: the environment and open spaces. I think it is a fallacy and question the thinking that because economic development needs land, that feeds environmental breakdown. If you want to focus on improving the quality of land, air, and water, you need people's support. You won't get support from a community if all they are worried about is basic survival. (No economic development occurring.)

Economics

City will serve as a catalyst for how the entire state is positioned. The city moves from recovering from loss to leading the way with open collaboration. What is good for Providence is good for the state. Get both sides of the top of the bay right – East Providence and Providence waterfront down Allen's Avenue – this is key. Better balance of jobs and people and people living and working in the city. City acts as a catalyst for innovation in health care, public safety, education. Diversity of our population comes to be viewed as an advantage. State and city are collaborating.

There is lots of development, yet economically can we pull it off because there is a huge hump (of doubt, not enough capabilities, and self-esteem) yet to get over?

Create a city driven more by young people and not just college age, but 25 to 34 year olds. Reduce the brain drain (now one out of three don't stay after college) so there is more flow in and out, but a net positive in the city of young people. Ok for them to leave, but get Providence under their skin so they want to come back. They are our future leaders, our future entrepreneurs, our future knowledge workers.

Big projects are already underway and people want to live here.

We are prosperous with the ability to make money and contribute back to the community – a feeling of wealth we can tap into.

We need to link our economy to a 21st century knowledge-base economy because we lost our manual labor base. People can locate anywhere that provides a great quality of life. That is an advantage we need to build on.

Social and Cultural

Risk takers come and settle here.

Today, people believe in Providence – civic pride has come back. But population growth (Hispanics) is disengaged from the city. We are two different cities; make it one city with many neighborhoods.

My vision: People from all walks of life, meet, share and learn from each other. Going forward, citizens have to bang ideas around with each other. People have to look each other in the eyes to build a community together. The city has a great opportunity to do this.

Ecology and Environment

Ensure a working waterfront and upscale, mixed-use living. Can the state afford to let waterfront go? I don't think so. If not Providence, where?

Education

“Inclusionary” education, e.g., if there was in place an honest belief across all sectors that every kid could achieve his ultimate best there would be an immediate increase in investment in education for everyone.

Transportation

Providence is walkable. But the conversation seems to be on cars and parking garages. We need to move away from our focus on cars.

Build regional transportation so there is ease of mobility from East Providence to the East Side and Providence into Cranston and Pawtucket. To do rapid transit or light rail it must have the will of the people to pursue this. Up to now it has been absent. Going up above

the road for rail, costs more than on the ground, but both are pricey. Rail is sexy, but pricey. For both options, the road width matters and there are few roads that work. For example nothing between the East Side and downtown is wide enough. Allen's Avenue and Promenade areas are wide enough and most likely. It is hard for RIPTA to talk about the future, e.g., rail, when the state doesn't support busses. RIPTA's current charter is "to take over failing bus systems" so their charter needs reworking to focus on a transit policy that fights congestion and reduces pollution. The public perception is RIPTA is only for indigent (elderly and all RITE care people ride free). RIPTA is now at peak rider ship all day and at times busses leave riders behind. When Kennedy Plaza was reopened three years ago, there were 17 million riders and at the end of 2005, 25 million. RIPTA is over-extended.

What is Next for Providence and the Region

This section identifies what people interviewed think is missing from the city and region in terms of capability, emotional will, and resources.

Define What Providence and the Region will Become

Not sure Providence has reached beyond the first level of movement. Lot's of plans but not much has happened and not mindful of possibilities. It is in a downward spiral from what it could be. People sense there is no vision given the debate over master planning and zoning. There are clear trends and plans, yes, but not yet a vision. Weak planning department because it gets bottlenecked, which is historical. And what page is the Mayor on? How strong is the Administration to lead the way of going forward?

Tell our story more confidently. Opportunity is here. We must blow by old minds and skeptics now. Strengthen our communication and connectivity. We must have programs collaborating across neighborhoods.

Don't necessarily want to bog down in visioning - grabbing low hanging fruit is just as important as the focus on the millennium change.

Regain the ambition of the people that created the city. We are now asked to think bigger.

Understand How Cities Change

Determine what does it mean to be a changing urban environment? Be an experiment for change. What capabilities are required? Our systems were built, historically, to do something different. Urban environment requires constant change. What capacity do you need to make constant change? Capacity includes enablers defined as those who change rapidly so others will follow.

There are different levels of bureaucracy for Providence than in smaller towns. There must be flexibility. General policies DON'T work at any level – need to be applicable to local conditions. We must tweak the regulations, by geography, to allow creative process to work to different scales. Burrillville is not seen as urban, but has these characteristics. It doesn't have normal low incomes – but still needs assistance and adaptive re-use – a whole new area to visit.

Missing in the world of city building and renaissance is a source of on-going advice on key issues for cities like: transit, sewer and water, school system, road and parking management, street lights, transportation, and housing. There is no similar center of excellence on these issues. We need a “Center for Cities” with hard-boiled best practices, hard to find that information in one place – it could revolutionize all cities and towns.

Think More like a Designer

The Sasaki plan was both too big and too small. How does it connect to people? No clear design principles declared (only inferred), which is what caused the most trouble.

Can Providence learn from the design principles Brown University uses: put public space on first floor, connect building to the land, ensure environmental sensitivity, and don't turn our back to the city?

What are the benefits to growth, the good side of growth? Currently, too many long-standing community leaders think we are “too wild” because there are too many people downtown on the weekend. They have to evolve their thinking from living in a small town (current idea) to a city (which is what we are).

We need to better understand the reasons why there is a Providence renaissance? Is it historical tax credit? Plans? Luck? Risk takers like Buff Chace? Buddy not there? Is it the presence of a vibrant cultural life? Changing demographics – empty nesters, wealthy college students buying condos or more immigrants present?

Hartford is dying and Providence is thriving, why? Should we now look to Hartford for lessons on what to avoid?

The city needs a structured, disciplined planning process to include a continuous forum for people—everyday citizens—to share their hopes and dreams.

The River walk is not worth walking, unless we set it on fire. We need to study what we can do to enliven it so more people walk it without the fires.

Grow the Economy

There is no solid business base. Lots of focus on housing, but where will the people work? The city can't be residential alone. What work do people come to Providence to do now? Without a business base, the city is overburdened with institutions and poor people.

How do you harness and amplify existing economic energies so that they concentrate and intensify activities and uses? Pull in, rather than push out, e.g., retail?

We need permitting and regulatory approaches that will embrace vision; we don't have them now.

We need innovative business models that deliver more value. People have lived with one business model all their lives and now it is time to change; there is resistance. The next generation will experience at least one, if not two, business model changes in their

business lifetime. This is our challenge: moving business to create innovative business models.

Upgrade street level retail. Hold a 12 month Foundry arts and craft sale. Embrace, and regulate hawkers and peddlers so they are present, making the streets more interesting.

We need the federal money we had 20 years ago, which fueled a lot off big projects, and the economy, like river and train station relocation. Every one of us is short-staffed, dealing with too much crap. Federal cuts in next budget will go deeper into both CDBG and transportation.

How do you enliven developers because developers are seen as destroying what was there originally? They generally have a terrible reputation – not seen as creative and good – more exploitive. So how do you get their image turned around and get developers positively received in an urban community, e.g., Buff Chace, Bill Struever, and Armory Revival? And get more of them to discover a core dynamic – good business and well received in community.

If we do want a progressive agenda, we need a new best practice - to think past focusing only on US capitalism and free market – and I am not saying necessarily socialism – but something that is primarily about people and their quality of life.

Educate Developers

We have three types of developers in Providence. There are home grown developers, new folks like Streuver, and the little guy (small increment developers). Our homegrown and “little developer” have to own the power of their role and the ripple effect they create. Related: reach out to local developers and small property owners so they think about new urbanist kind of stuff when they make changes in their buildings.

Foster a Social and Cultural Sense of Place

“People don’t feel safe walking in the city or is less safety a fact of contemporary city life?”

Improve walk-ability of the city and transit with less surface parking. Develop more west street storefronts. Teach civics: better drivers, pedestrians and cyclists.

Most progressive, diversified city the world – not only people but approach, offering employment – not a mono culture - “I mean diversity.”

We need to acknowledge the arts as a basis for whom and what this city is about.

There is also the issue of public space. We need spaces and places where the interior and exterior mix easily. Thus individuals come to “own” part of the public space. The public space must become equally good and attractive as private space. People come to realize they live in a neighborhood and reach out to meet people.

Need to highlight the lack of social interaction in past as a focus for development, e.g., porches. How they are designed counts! Use architecture in a way that fourteen people bump into each other e.g., building with multiple entrances.

Providence needs a middle class. Those who are coming into Providence are upper class and immigrants. We need schools and security. I think of Providence having to become like a Cambridge with good schools and a middle class.

We are not addressing demographics of the city, especially affordable housing. There is too much of a downtown focus and not an all neighborhood focus. We need low income neighborhoods and must plan for them. For example, what are the intentions of the West Side and North Main Street?

Unless we unpack the issues we can't attack the problems. Everything I am involved in (meetings, etc.), there is an elephant in the room – class issues don't get laid on the table or addressed. They just simmer under everything that happens. We all must learn to be straight with each other. We must get this OUT in the open – let us get the history out of the way – let us vent with each other – then start from a new trust.

Make Changes in Public Schools

Schools: blow up physical plant so it is redesigned to work for learning.

Rhode Island population is the same size as Fairfax, Virginia. In Fairfax, there is one school district. Rhode Island has thirty-seven! It shows how Rhode Island is fragmented and duplicated – we can't afford that – and it doesn't serve or leverage our size and scale.

There should be more school design – specific training.

Ecology and Environment

We need a deep commitment to sustainability, citywide.

Waterfront is an issue – CRMC demands arbitrary 200 foot set-backs. This is ok in some places but won't work in Providence. The land in East Providence is a prime location for redevelopment, i.e., Squantum Club, opposite S & B, has bike path thru it, and requires a low interest bond issue to clean up contaminated land - lots of land.

How do we green schools? We have to green our whole system that is going to sink unless we change it. Packaging and redesigning the outer side and inside of a school needs to be changed.

Design the Built Environment

Providence at one time wanted to be as ambitious as Boston and NY with corporate-identity buildings. Today, we have no opinions about what new striking buildings should look like; we want them to look like old buildings like the Marriott Courtyard as a new building designed to look like an old building. We borrowed old design vernacular so we build new red brick buildings to look like old ones. Stop doing this. Providence needs excellent contemporary architecture. We need our own overall urban appearance like Washington DC has.

One failure of our ancestors is the move away from mixed use. There were two districts downtown and factory. If RI were to learn these things and get a sense of the layers of

periods of the physically manifested actions that have been done nicely, this would be a major breakthrough. Amplify the energies and engage to create the real, new fit for now and going forward. We need to keep both the 18th and 19th century, and do bold moves with 21st century. Urban cities are hubs of transportation, e.g., Calthorpe and transportation oriented development (TOD.)

How do we build big box with an urban look? Is the parking on top?

We need new methods for people to discover Providence. Start from the foot and car patterns from the core and move out instead of the outside in. And change traffic flows accordingly, including more restrictions and better signage.

Get beyond we have always done it that way. I spend all my time selling, and hopefully you build trust and awareness. Need impacts at all levels of settlement. The toughest part is finding a way to get it done through the bureaucracy.

We need flexibility balanced with protection. Everyone worried about our litigious society. Katrina brought this out. People think about FEMA and the trailers in New Orleans, which has made everyone wary. Rules and protection – don't all work in such dynamic conditions.

We need neighborhood markets in Providence – Hudson Street Market (mom & pop). These relate to community making. Zoning code doesn't allow this to happen (markets).

Rework Zoning

Another layer for this discussion is the economics of development. The worst thing about what I would call the “Jane Jacobs Right Wing” is that they are trying to do planning without any real knowledge of what it takes to get things done in the real world. They plan as if the economics of development and zoning were acting in separate worlds, and they're not.

We are doing a master planning project in a city in Massachusetts right now that is trying to marry the economy and development. We are looking at the economic breakpoints for building. This is a good city in that they see that economics restricts what can be built in a neighborhood just as precisely as zoning regulations. So far we have identified that it doesn't matter if your zoning restrictions stipulate buildings higher than four stories but lower than ten. The economics around the Boston area just don't work; you don't start paying back for floors 5 through 9 until you get up the tenth floor.

We are currently working on a development project outside of Boston. The open space requirements there are silly, requiring front yard setbacks at the street that are just a kind of “mulch world.” It is suburban, but if you look at the rest of the street, built before this zoning; it is very urban – all the buildings come up to the sidewalk.

There is confusion in the zoning code between open space that can be provided by an individual project and open space that is provided with parks. When there is a dearth of parks, the Zoning Boards tends to impose more extreme setback regulations in order just get some green anywhere. If you were to codify a practice rather than a setback you

would want people to build to the lot line and then provide compensation. You would “incent” the development of real open spaces.

The flip side of all of this discussion about zoning is that around Boston almost nothing that gets built is built “as right” anyway. Most projects above 10 units are subject to City approval.

One of (government's) favorite things is zoning communities and especially in New England. It is the biggest impediment to thoughtful and new urbanist development. Decisions currently drive suburbs to sprawl. Has modern zoning outlived its use? Mixed use is favored, but in NE it must be preceded by modern zoning. How do we fix this? It is very difficult legislatively to change. We use all sorts of incentives to get communities to change. Ideas as examples: hinge grants on change in zoning and have thoughtful zoning regulation; see zoning changes before they get money. In Massachusetts we give \$500 million to towns every year: score towns on sustainable development agendas, and measure them on a sustainable and NU development scores. CNU-type sessions are about problems, there is a lot of opinion to change, but little discussion on process of change.

Single, most critical capability missing – give people visual clues that show issues. For example, create computer generated graphics that show how their town might look. Show walk through and show say density, as applied to their place.

We have an elaborated GIS - but projecting future change – we don't have it. We need to show and illustrate the new Concord or Nantucket. What comprehensive visualization is available and user friendly? Want to “show the picture.” When we can do that, they get it. There are 351 towns in Massachusetts. Vancouver has tools on this and it is very successful there. There is a very good website on this as well.

Compatibility of new urbanism, or traditional town design with the Americans with Disabilities Act: For example, in Boston recently, there was an ADA dispute over a large apartment building. It had a standard double loaded corridor, with all the first floor units, handicap accessible from that corridor. Later in the process the developer decided to add a front stoop/front door for every unit that was facing a street on grade. And they were brought before the Board of Review for violating the ADA requirement that “the front or main entrance of a unit has to be ADA accessible.” A suit was brought and the developer lost. Now the practical result of this ruling in Boston is that there will be no more stoops on apartment buildings with more than two units. We are already seeing the effect of this suit, one of our clients, which has a requirement in their design guidelines for stoops and porches will now only develop two-family housing projects because it's the only way to fulfill that requirement and avoid ADA.

It used to be that the Boston or Somerville triple-decker was the most cost efficient residential building type, now it's the least. Three stories begin to place you into more costly fire code restrictions, the necessity for a second means of egress, and ADA compliance. In meeting these requirements, you lose all of the economies of scale.

The new zoning must allow for more density and thus more transit to work in Providence. We need new transit options and won't get them until we get denser. We need to examine best practices from other cities where density makes public transit more real.

Understand Density

The revised RI state land use plan and strategic housing plan will come online in the spring of 2006 in time for consideration at CNUXIV. The land use plan is based on an urban/rural dichotomy. Big question driving both plans: When will the housing bubble burst? Another issue: On one hand people are looking for alternatives to the suburbs. On the other hand, there is something about the suburbs people like, isolation? Based on personal needs, the cities can't keep all the new growth. How much can we steer to the city from the suburbs? I am not hopeful there is a lot that will come to the city. The state has begun to spread out with low density, which is contrary to our history of concentrated growth. In effect, we are going in the opposite direction of where must head.

Our growth will be more about more density and we need a new standard for density: what is appropriate and where? We once had 275 thousand people in Providence, where and how did they live; can we learn from history to apply it to today?

The city is at a crossroads with density and growth – where does it need to go?

We don't have the attention of the city – law and regulator – they don't believe it?

Need to understand the economic of density, mixed uses, and lifestyle.

Build More Housing

What are the consequences of rising housing prices as the increase moves across all the neighborhoods of city? The city is not dealing with the social consequences of no affordable housing. Land is evolving in value and exceeding the rise in value of the building.

Look at 40-S – a smart growth program in Massachusetts to apply to RI. If you (town) do affordable housing, we the state will pay the additional educational costs.

In Providence, we also need inclusionary zoning to force affordability. In 2002-2005, 2,500 building permits were issued for residential units – 18% were for affordable housing. We want to increase this at a rate of six times from the decade before, but we MUST build up.

We need to increase housing production to offset loss of existing housing stock.

Rethink Taxation

We need a tax system that fuels the vision.

Historic tax credits are at risk. Legislature says: state of RI would be getting X more without them. I sense a cap will be set. The development community must make the case for keeping them as is by commissioning and publicizing an economic impact study of the net revenue for the state as a result of tax credits and not rely on the Grow Smart study alone; get more detailed about actual dollars in the till over the next two decades.

Reduction of corporate tax is in the pipeline in RI. Personal tax is high – we need to

address that. The cumulative cost of living here must be competitive – we are competing with Boston. The RI state Senate needs to assist us in becoming competitive.

We need to review and reform tax regime in RI. Question is where do you focus tax “reform” – tax mechanism or annual budget? Other issues come into it, e.g., Providence’s unfunded pension liability of \$600 million. Then there is a whole host of union issues. Need to consider Tax Expenditure Limit (TEL) – from Colorado.

We need a session at CNU on TIF (Tax Incremental Financing). It could be a session or workshop on TIF’s - what places have done it well. What are the NU examples around the USA? In Providence they say zone to 4 stories in a lot/area, but don’t do anything about supporting or facilitating it, e.g., there are no additional utilities, no improvements, lighting, or transport, etc. TIF’s are paid through bonds – point of this is to stimulate development through the raising of the bond to pay for utilities, which then attracts developers to develop in specific areas. TIF’s are to developers like “like musk scent to a deer,” e.g., Chicago. TIF’s will be the most significant economic development engine for City of Providence is next five years. Need to look at TIF’s from a design and economic point of view.

Make Transportation Work

Transportation in RI is in a bad state.

Reduce cheap parking and get people out of their cars and either walking or using public transportation. There is no grid and no useful mapping or signage to move people around. Portland Oregon is my model; they have light rail with 1 million people in the metro. Further, get the MBTA to do two-way trains with Providence as a destination.

Developers don’t connect with pedestrian walk ways and transit needs. They need to learn about how people walk and how wide and entrance a trolley needs to make a turn into a shopping center.

Transportation: think in new ways to change work and commuter patterns.

How do we think through a more interesting mix of transportation options? Centrifugal forces based on auto age – not to deny great value of autos, but further increase in auto use doesn’t appear promising way to proceed. What are the choices and options to use transportation to reinforce and amplify centripetal forces?

We need external experience from outside the region for comprehensive transportation plan.

Solve Parking

We must make it easier to do parking.

All rules of parking (ratios, etc.) are typically over rated. The cost is too high per development units. What are acceptable ratios? If we do TOD what does this mean to ratios? Where do other strategies fit, e.g., car pooling, etc.?

In Massachusetts, the other real problem is parking requirements. Historical neighborhoods that are considered pedestrian friendly were often planned for 3 or 4 cars for the entire neighborhood. Even just infilling a single house (fixing a broken tooth) is hard because of parking requirements.

Parking is at the forefront of every Providence community design review meeting. And frankly, people are rarely concerned about design – they are most worried about added competition for on-street parking.

Of course, parking is not only political; it is a site planning issue. In fact, it's the site planning issue. Whenever we start a new project the first thing that we look at is parking. Before we design the building we are designing the parking.

What would we do to reduce the importance of parking? Create more loop-holes? Allow for a zip car parking space, or more flexibility around the dimensional requirements. Or tie parking rights more strictly to the size of the units rather than the number. Or develop a sophisticated formula – a kind of “mean parking formula” – that is tied to the development’s proximity to public transit.

Whatever you do, the reality is that people need parking. That's why they buy condos – because they want to be able to park in their building, they want to have their urban lives and drive their suburban cars.

New Ways to Organize

This project aims to seed and build an ongoing network for the “place making” of first Providence and then the region. The network would focus on accelerating the sense of place of the city by addressing actual issues (as listed earlier) in ongoing laboratories and other types of learning and problem-solving sessions. The comments that follow are Providence centric. Regional issues would shape the expansion of the network, regionally.

We Need More Intense Leadership

In Providence, we need leadership with passion. No one has entered the mix with enough passion to make change happen. Not yet a person with passion who says: follow me with your energy and resources. It could be small collaborative- minded group of the Mayor, planning department (as guardian and shepherd), and who else?

What's missing: group leadership, coordination and working together, and an integrated approach across government, business and not for profits, and so on.

Our moving forward will not be because of a lack of intelligence. We have great support from Foundations and development communities. We have creative projects. We have presence. Who will step up and lead?

Act out more if the vision is here – act, feel, think. Next thing we will be looking back at what we have achieved. We need to be engaged in a variety of conversations. What legacy will we leave?

We have a NEW period. We must learn from past periods of concentration, for a new future – without repeating the mistakes or successes of past. Now it is our turn! Like our forebears made it wonderful and exciting in their time. Where did they succeed and fail in their time? What legacy did they leave us?

Declare Priorities

When you are in a city like Providence there is a lot of stuff on the plate – very complex. Assigning the right resources is a challenge and is particularly difficult with hard questions.

A lot of times what is an “easy read”, is not necessarily easy to articulate to those who have to change things. In Providence, we all have the answers, we just need to get on the same page and do it!

Given our scale we could have an urban agenda that is THE most progressive in the world. It would have a unified consensus on a progressive agenda. We take a simple minded approach to solving critical issues and application of our limited resources - transport, finance, money, corporations, etc., come first. We ignore the human potential inside. We could have the best, all working together to create a different set of practices – with a variety of thinkers and approaches. Imagine Mark Van Noppen (Amory), Buff Chace (Cornish), AS220, the best from the City, etc. We could build that agenda easily if we all worked together. Everyone is playing their own different game – but people are looking for something to happen! We will have to grope for the solution – it won't be easy. But we have the right people; we just need the right work and process to do!

Integrate Silos

Our model in RI for development is static and not dynamic.

Another critical element we are pursuing – breaking down the silos. No one has broken down the silos – but we have to keep working on this. In Massachusetts' Commonwealth Department: transportation, housing, environment, energy. In California – they have a department for housing and transportation. In Netherlands they have environment and transport. Bulk of money comes from silo-ed state agencies that in the end define everything we do. Must pay attention to how and why we spend money. Also need to understand what prevents agencies from working together.

Planning the future of Providence – yes we have a strong Mayor and a planning process. Important question marks are developers and Brown University.

We need major City Council and Mayoral cooperation, which we don't have. It is amazing what has occurred without it.

We need a new view to help the City Council. They focus on their own individual ward – don't see the city as a whole. They have a very low education in these matters and find it difficult to come to terms with the issues.

We have the know-how and everybody talks and works together. Yet the City Council refuses to accept rational thought – it is pandemic. We let parochialism rule. And we are not big enough to escape it. We are better off thinking and operating as a city/state so we get the scale we need.

Stop benchmarking process and progress based on the results of meetings with the usual suspects. We need to include more different folks in the process of agenda setting. There are too many under-lead under-resourced non-profit organizations. More mergers – boy do we need this badly.

Challenge for state – we do not have effective statewide planning. There is no economic planning that survives the Governor and serves the environment. Quonset is one good example. There is a vacuum of leadership: Is it a container port? Or what is it? Hard to pick the bigger picture the state is trying to develop.

We need to collaborate more – you cannot get growth through fragmentation!

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.

Aligning Visions for the City

The ideas below are drawn from interviews with 27 leading regional thinkers and doers shaping our sense of place. The interviews were done as part of a study to help set the stage for the 14th Congress of New Urbanism in Providence, June 1 to 4, 2006. Some ideas have been amplified and some ideas have been added by New Commons.

A vision is what is seen in the imagination or a dream or it is an imaginative insight into a problem or situation. Rather than one vision, consider aligning different visions, as not all people want the same things for our city and region. In trying for a single vision, the vision gets watered down.

Aspire to Being a Bigger, Bolder City

Stretch into our next future. Revive and regain the ambition of the elders that created Providence. Get bigger. Talk bigger. Step into the actual larger capabilities and strengths we have. Move beyond the current understating of our importance in the region and country. No more small town mind, but a city.

Regionalism is our future in three ways. First as a metro composed of the cities surrounding Providence. Secondly, regionalism is in performing as a city/state. Thirdly, regionalism is connecting the geographies of Southern New England.

Connect the 25 neighborhoods as a federation, ala Jane Jacobs, with each neighborhood holding a distinct in identity. Where it fits the neighborhoods bones, make village or city centers more present. Visually and actually connect the neighborhoods to each other.

Improve the Quality of Living for People

Continue to evolve the next economy of design, biomedicine, and ecology and where ever creativity, innovation, and design minds produce wealth and jobs.

Include and animate the many cultures present in the city. Separate, engage, and mix up the cultures so the city is intercultural – interconnected, overlapping for mutual benefit and at the same time, each culture on their own.

Be a green city. Overall, the city lives more sustainable. Reduce impacts on the environment and become resilient. Build sustainable buildings and use renewable energy sources.

Do compact growth of greater density both in building height and proximity by creating new villages and city centers within Providence. Use fewer cars and develop innovations in transit: light rail (where it fits), bicycles, zip cars, and more walking.

Animate all our public squares. Make our buildings part of the public realm by connecting more directly the inside of a building with its outside. Program the downtown places so each has a distinct role in the city. Make neighborhood squares and parks public places for people and cultures to mingle.

Be a Lively City Experiment for Change Invent New Processes

Retrofit our buildings to be 21st century schools and 21st century workplaces. Both our schools and workplaces require flexible layouts for constantly changing uses and needs. Both our schools and workplaces require technological sophistication.

Innovate to get beyond regulatory blocks and impasses. Create one smart, one stop process for bring regulatory bodies together, at the same time to work on a building or issue.

Innovate by using new building codes like form-based codes where the form of the building determines use and what can be done with it.

Innovate a scale¹: be the test bed our small size allows us to in the generation of new business models.

Conduct continuous planning and engagement of citizens in shaping their city. Move beyond a plan to ongoing planning and designing the city. As conditions change, the plan changes, if necessary.

¹ Innovation at Scale is the RI EDC's initiative, through the Business Innovation Factory, to grow the economy.