

PROVIDENCE RIVER RELOCATION PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

This is an excerpt from:

Creative Community Building: 2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

Bruner Foundation, Inc.

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with

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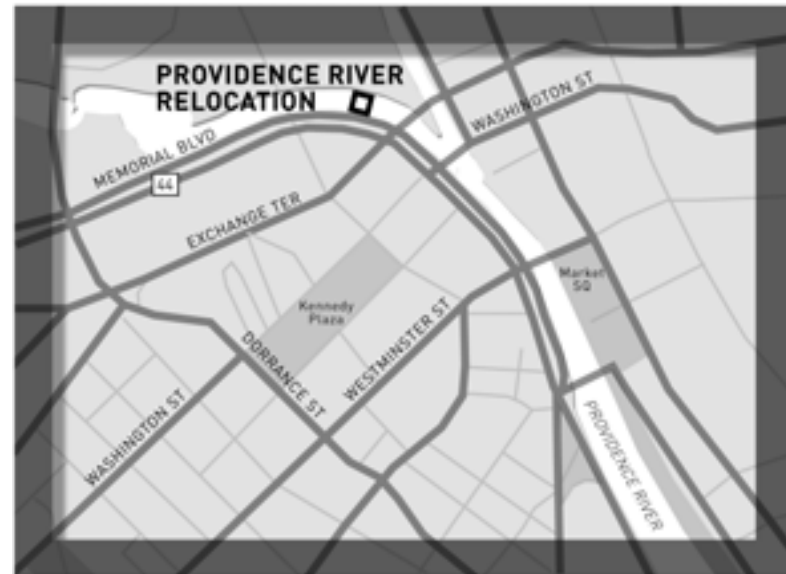
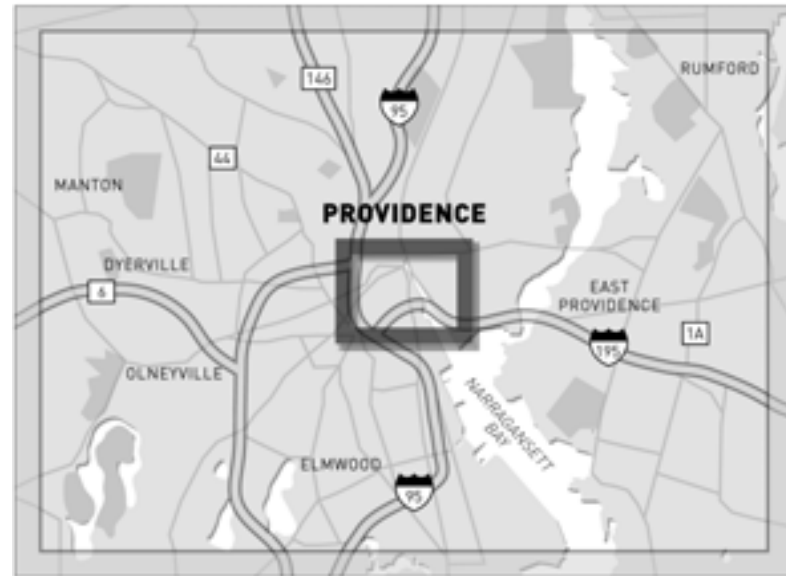
2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

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PROVIDENCE RIVER RELOCATION AT-A-GLANCE

WHAT IS THE PROVIDENCE RIVER RELOCATION?

Providence River Relocation is a transportation- and open space-based project that grew out of a 30-year history of bold planning efforts undertaken by a series of public and private entities. Known formally as the Memorial Boulevard Extension Project, river relocation was intended to improve pedestrian and vehicular traffic flows in and through downtown and to reclaim Providence's historic rivers, while setting the stage for an impressive public arts program (including the WaterFire events) and the dramatic revitalization of downtown. Part of the River Relocation Project overlaps the river corridor portion of an earlier (1979) *Capital Center Project Development Plan* and still earlier (1978) *Railroad Maintenance and Improvement Project*.

Part of the challenge in assessing this project is its complex history. As Ron Marcella, former director of the Providence Foundation, points out (in a letter to the Bruner Foundation), all of the pieces are inextricably linked. "WaterFire, as we know it, would not have been created had not the rivers been relocated. The rivers would not have been relocated had not the Providence Waterfront study been initiated and the railroad tracks been relocated. The railroad tracks would not have been relocated but for the opportunity to create the Capital Center project. The foregoing initiatives are inextricably connected, each succeeding initiative building on the success of the

preceding project.” The application submitted for Rudy Bruner Award describes a project referred to as the Providence River Relocation and that is the focus of this chapter – which, however, will also address the context within which the project unfolded.

The sequence of projects (both preceding and directly related to the river relocation) resulted in the following changes to downtown:

1. River-related infrastructure

- Relocation of the human-made confluence of the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck Rivers where they join to form the Providence River, including uncovering two-thirds of a mile of the rivers;
- Development of three docking sites for boat traffic (accommodated by new arched bridges and by river dredging).

2. Highway, rail, road and pedestrian systems

- Rail relocation to a new below-grade alignment with construction of a new train station above;
- Development of miles of auto-free riverwalks linking small parks and plazas, and twelve new bridges restoring historical pedestrian links among historical College Hill, downtown historical districts, and Capital Center;
- Construction of an interstate highway interchange between a previously dead-ended belt highway and new boulevard;
- Realignment of a major downtown arterial connected to a new boulevard, and construction of local roads that serve the Capital Center district.

3. Parks and open space

- Relocation of a World War I monument from a traffic roundabout known as “Suicide Circle” to Memorial Park;
- A new urban park (WaterPlace Park) with restaurant, amphitheatre, fountain, boat landing and multiple pedestrian connections (a total of 11 acres of new open space consisting of rivers, riverwalk and parks).

4. Management and economic development

- Public art programming in the new open spaces including “WaterFire” and “Convergence;”
- Creation of the 77-acre Capital Center Special Development District;
- Over \$1 billion of new investment in the Capital Center District with an additional \$182 million outside of it.

PROJECT GOALS

The Capital Center Special District (*Northeast Corridor Improvement Project, Providence, Rhode Island Railroad and Highway Improvements*, EIS, 1980)

- Address adverse impacts on historical resources through the creation of the Capital Center Commission as the enforcer of design guidelines that protect and enhance historical resources.
- Create new, marketable commercial land without demolishing existing buildings in the downtown national register district. Attract major new users who might not otherwise locate in Providence.
- Enhance vehicular access to the project area, the historic State House, and downtown.

- Create an ordered sense of public spaces in a high-density urban district where large, contiguous structures would define the space.
- Create a visual and physical linkage between downtown and the State House, emphasizing views of its massive Beaux Arts dome and the Independent Man statue on its peak.

River Relocation Project (*Memorial Boulevard Extension Environmental Assessment*, 1984), had the following goals and the 1983 *Providence Waterfront Study* adopted by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation and the City of Providence stated the following goals:

- Re-connect the College Hill and downtown historical districts by building twelve pedestrian and vehicular bridges over uncovered, relocated rivers.
- Create a linear park along the rivers anchored by WaterPlace and Memorial Parks, for use as community gathering places and for celebrating the arts.
- Create a multi-modal transportation corridor accommodating rail and bus mass transit, private vehicles, pedestrians, and boats.
- Celebrate the city's founding and its maritime heritage with graphic panels.

PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

1974

Publication of *Interface: Providence*, a multi-modal transit-oriented plan that proposed re-creating the former salt water cove while retaining train tracks, bridges and passenger station in place and expanding the use of the Union Station complex.

1978-1979

The Providence Foundation, under the leadership of Ron Marsella, re-examines the railroad relocation component of the Providence City Plan Commission's 1970 downtown master plan. The *Northeast Corridor Rail Improvement Plan's* proposal to rehabilitate existing tracks, bridges and Union Station head-house are shown to be comparable to relocating the train tracks and station. Relocation is also shown to permit RIDOT to carry out construction of long-delayed I-95 civic center interchange. Major political figures support this direction and convince the Federal Rail Administration to re-direct its funding and RIDOT and FHWA to fund the interchange and local road network. Mitigation of impacts on historical resources requires the plan to include the Capital Center land use master plan for the former freight yards and re-use of the Union Station complex for office and retail.

1980

Capital Center Commission formed as joint city, state and Providence Foundation body charged with enforcing design guidelines called for in land use master plan; approves design criteria for Capital Center Special Development District.

1980

Capital Center construction management team formed to administer jointly-funded and singly designed and contracted rail, road and other public improvements.

1982-1983

Capital Center Master Property Conveyance Agreement signed. Groundbreaking for Capital Center, February 16, 1983.

Providence Waterfront Study is conceived under the leadership of DEM director Bob Bendick and architect William Warner. Providence Foundation agrees to be sponsor. Planning grant received from NEA to be matched locally.

1984

Providence Waterfront Study completed. Its River Relocation and Memorial Blvd. extension component adopted by RIDOT director Ed Wood who then conducted an environmental assessment. The River Relocation alternative is selected and funding (federal, state and local) is committed.

1984-1986

The elevated 12 track station platform and railroad bridges behind Union Station separating the Capital Center from Downtown (“the Chinese Wall”) are demolished.

1985

Bob Bendick (DEM) secures funding for Waterfront Park.

1987

World War I monument dismantled and stored.

1988-1989:

Groundbreaking for Citizen’s Plaza and Gateway Center buildings in Capital Center. Start of work on relocation of the confluence of the rivers and construction of bridges.

1991

Construction begins on Memorial Boulevard Extension, relocation of the Woonasquatucket River and Waterplace Park.

1993

Memorial Boulevard opens to traffic.

1994

RI Convention Center/Westin Hotel and Waterplace Park open. First WaterFire.

1996

Dedication of Memorial Park and Providence River Waterfront.

1999

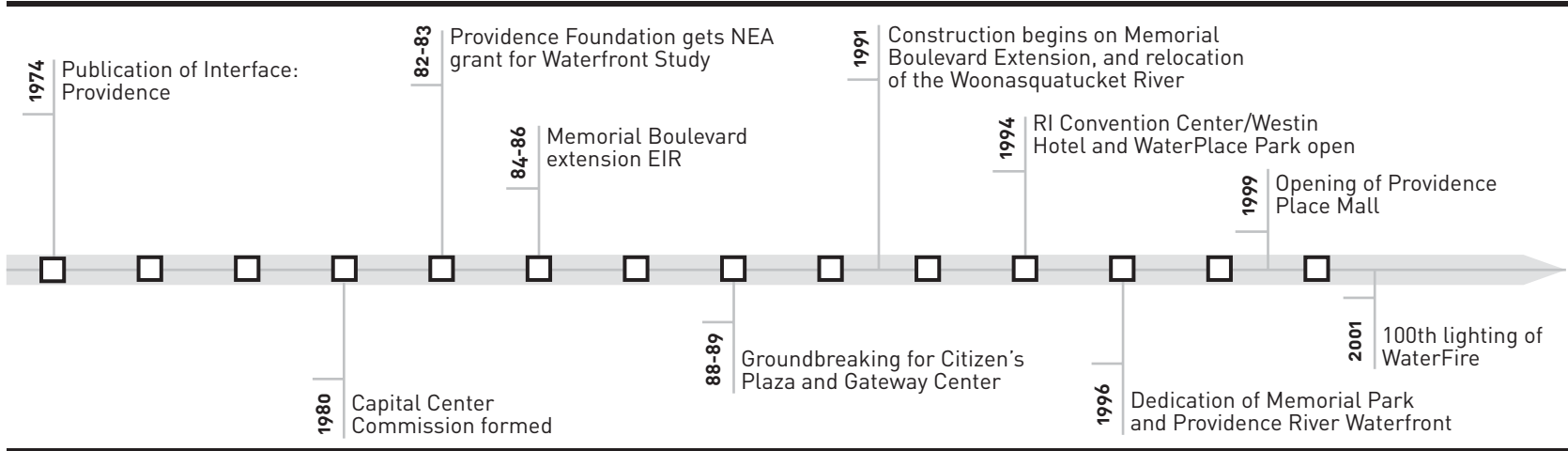
Opening of Providence Place Mall.

2001

100th lighting of WaterFire.

2002

Opening of the Providence River east bank riverwalk extension to the Old Harbor District.



KEY PARTICIPANTS

Persons interviewed indicated by an asterisk (*).

Public Agencies

Federal

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Daniel Berman, Assistant Division Administrator
Gordon Hoxie*, former Division Administrator

State

Governors

Hon. Lincoln Almond (1996-2001)
Hon. Bruce G. Sundlun (1991-95)
Hon. James DiPrete (1985-1991)
Hon. Joseph Garrahy (1977-1984)

Governors Office

James Gaffney*,
Capital Center Construction Management Office (CCCM)

Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT)

W. Edward (Ed) Wood*,
former Director, prior to DOT he was Director of the Rhode
Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Joseph Arruda*, Planner
Janis Louisselle*
Wendall (Wendy) Flanders*, Senior Project Director
Robert Brown*
Frederick Vincent*, Assistant Director (later of RIDEM)

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)

Robert Bendick, former Director
Judith Benedict*, Chief of the Division of Planning
and Development

Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission

Mrs. George F. (Antoinette) Downing, Chair (1968-95)
Frederick Williamson,
State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) (1969-present) and
Chair (1995-present)
Eric Hertfelder, Executive Director (1972-84)
Edward F. (Ted) Sanderson*, Executive Director (1984-)

City of Providence

Mayors

Walter H. Reynolds, January 1951 to January 1965
Joseph A. Doorley, January 1965 to January 1975
Vincent A. "Buddy" Cianci, January 1975 to April 1984
The Hon. Joseph R. Paolino, Jr., April 1984 to Jan. 1991
Vincent A. "Buddy" Cianci, January 1991 to Sept. 2002
John J. Lombardi, September 2002 to January 2003
David N. Cicilline, January 2003-

Providence Department of Planning and Development

Tom Deller*, Current Executive Director
Bonnie Lloyd*, Senior Planner
Stanley Bernstein, Director 1974-1984
Martha Bailey, Senior Planner 1975-1982
Bill Collins, Leader of the City's support of the
River Relocation Project 1982 -
Sam Shamoon*, former senior planner and Director

Providence Parks Department

Robert McMahan*, Deputy Director
Bob Rizzo, Director of the Office of Cultural Affairs and
Executive Director Capitol Arts Providence (an
independent non-profit wing of Parks Department)
Lynne McCormack*, Executive Director of Capitol
Arts Providence

Planning and Design

Architecture and Urban Design

Capital Center Plan

Marilyn Taylor, managing partner Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM) – Project director Capital Center Plan
David Dixon,
Goody Clancy, Architects – Revised guidelines for Capital Center

River Relocation and Waterplace Plan

William D. Warner Architects and Planners
William D. Warner*, Project Director
Glenn Fontecchio*, Project Architect
William H.(Holly) Whyte, Project for Public Spaces – Consulting
N.J. “Pete” Pointer, Corporate Services Inc. – EAS preparation

Engineering

Wilbur Smith,
Wilbur Smith Associates – Memorial Square traffic alternatives
Bob Greig, Structural Engineer,
C. E. McGuire Associates – River Relocation
David Freeman*, Transportation Engineer,
C. E. Maguire Associates

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Arts Based Organizations

Barnaby Evans*, Exec. Director and Designer,
WaterFire Providence

Preservation/ History Organizations

Barbara Barnes*, Rhode Island Historical Society, Tour Director
Wendy Nichols*, Providence Preservation Society
(past Executive Director)
Catherine Horsey*, Executive Director, Providence Preservation Society
Albert Klyberg, Rhode Island Historical Society,
Executive Director (1969-1999)

Environmental Organizations

Juan Mariscal*, Director of the Division of
Planning, Narragansett Bay Commission
Jenny Perriera*, Executive Director,
Woonasquatucket Watershed Council
Jane Sherman*, Executive Director,
Woonasquatucket Greenway Project

Business Organizations

The Providence Foundation
Ormolu (Ron) Marsella*, Executive Director (1975-1979)
Kenneth Orenstein, AIA*, Executive Director (1980-1987)
Robert P Freeman, Executive Director (1989 -1992)
Dan Baudouin, Executive Director (1993-present)

Capital Center Commission

Leslie Gardner, Board Chair (1992-)
Hon. Alfred Joslin, Chair (1980-1991)
Deborah Molino-Wender*, Executive Director (1994-)
Stanley Bernstein Executive Director (1986-1994)
Charlene B. Hall, Executive Director (1980-1985)
Wilfred L. Gates ASLA*, Design Review Committee Chair

Other Business NGOs

Kip Bergstrom*, Rhode Island Economic Policy Council
Peter Armato*, former Executive Director, Downcity Partnership
James Hagan*, Executive Director, Greater Providence
Chamber of Commerce

Business Owners

John Charters*, Manager, Providence Place Mall
Dmitri Kritikos*, Café Nuovo
Robert Burke*, Pot au Feu & Federal Reserve
Bruce Tillinghast*, New Rivers
Michael Metcalf, former Publisher of the Providence Journal

Colleges and Universities

Rhode Island School of Design

Gerald Howes, Department of Architecture –
Interface Study Director

William Harsh*, MIT/ Urban Systems Lab –
Interface Study collaborator

Colgate Searle*, Department of Landscape Architecture –
Project / public review

Friedrich St. Florian*, professor, Department of Architecture

Brown University

Pat Malone*, Archeology, History of Industry – survey
work with William Warner

Dietrich Neumann*, History of Art and Architecture

Rhode Island College

Mark Motte*, Prof. Political Science and Urban Geography at
Rhode Island College (co-author of: “Of railroads and regime
shifts: Downtown renewal in Providence, Rhode Island” and
upcoming book on Providence Renaissance with chapter on
river relocation).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

URBAN CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Providence, capital of Rhode Island, is one of the oldest cities in America, dating from 1636 when Roger Williams left Massachusetts in his search of religious freedom. It is the only major city that has placed its entire downtown on the National Register of Historic Places. With a population of 253,504 in 1940, dropping to 156,804 in 1980, it reached 176,168 in 2000 (source: US Census), and now advertises itself as a “Renaissance City.”



Aerial with railroad and roads before relocation



Completed Providence River relocation



River before



River after

Roger Williams located Providence at the head of Narragansett Bay, the second largest estuary on the East Coast, in 1636. Throughout its early history, Providence was a port city, with an inner harbor in the “Old Salt Cove” separated by Weybosset Neck from an outer harbor on the Providence River. In 1828, the opening of the Blackstone Canal between Providence and Worcester, Massachusetts allowed the trans-shipment of raw materials and manufactured products from steamship to barge or canal boat, beginning a rapid process of industrialization along its banks.

In 1835, a competing rail line was built, leading to the canal's demise. By 1849, the several regional rail lines that terminated in Providence jointly built the Union Terminal complex for passengers and freight along the southern shore of the salt cove. By the 1870s, increased passenger and freight traffic led to the construction of the Union Station Complex along elevated tracks and platforms just northwest of the terminal.

Construction of Union Station led to further filling in of the salt cove to create a circular rail turnaround, ending its use as an inner harbor. Industrial discharges from up-river mills and raw sewage turned the cove into a fetid pool and it was soon filled in, containing the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers which had emptied into it within stone wall channels as they flowed downstream to a human made confluence with the Providence River. By the 1930s bigger ships made the old outer harbor obsolete for all ship traffic except shallow draft coal barges and passenger steamships and the new down-river bayfront Port of Providence was created.

Between World Wars I and II, rail-to-truck trans-shipment became dominant and ever-increasing vehicular traffic led to more and more of the Providence River being built over until this bridgework gained the dubious distinction of being the “widest bridge in the world” (not the longest span), further obscuring the heavily polluted river below.

Just upstream, the river confluence was decked over by a new central post office and federal building annex in 1938. Hurricanes in 1938 and 1954 led to extensive flooding from tidal surges in the bay and overflowing rivers. The obsolete waterfront warehouses and shorelines further deteriorated so that by the 1960s an urban renewal plan called for many of these warehouses to be demolished and ramps serving I-195 to be placed along both banks of the Providence River. To prevent future flooding, a hurricane barrier was built across the mouth of the Providence River and portions of the Interstate were made a part of the barrier. The construction of the barrier, the highway, and its ramps completed a more than century long process of making the rivers, the very reason for Providence’s location, inaccessible, out of sight and out of mind.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Providence was the most industrialized city in the US and was known as the “armpit of New England.” From the decline of the textile industry in the 1920s and accelerating with the machine tool industry in the 1950s and the jewelry industry in the late 1970s, Providence experienced almost continual economic deterioration. Once again, by virtue of its decline through the 1980s, it had regained that dubious reputation.



River covered with tracks



River uncovered and planted

By the early 1970s, the 1891 State House (designed by McKim, Mead and White), originally overlooking a circular cove and promenade, was separated from the downtown by massive parking lots. The lots replaced the freight yards that had, in turn, replaced the cove, and elevated railroad tracks (four tracks wide at the narrowest, 12 at Union Station) came to be known as “the Chinese Wall.” In the downtown area, fifty to seventy percent of the rivers was covered with roadways and parking lots, leaving them to function, at best, as storm sewers. Travel between the east side and downtown involved navigating a traffic rotary near the confluence that the maps called Memorial Square but residents had named “Suicide Circle.”

Downtown was effectively “dead”. No major office building had been built since 1928. The last hotel had closed, followed by the last movie palace in 1976. There were very few restaurants and, with the closing of the last department store in 1982, retail was reduced to a few specialty stores. Residents, who had no reason to come downtown except to conduct business or go to a government office, elected to spend their leisure time elsewhere.

PLANNING PROCESS

The River Relocation Project is a blending of three separate and sequential capital construction programs and reflects a process of starting major initiatives then changing them in mid-stream. As one would imagine with large-scale, multi-agency, public-private projects, the changes were not comfortable or easy, yet conflicts were resolved and superior outcomes were achieved (see the section below on “Making Adjustments and Raising the Bar”).

The first program, in the late 1970s, was the federally-funded Northeast Corridor Project to upgrade the railroad tracks and twelve stations serving Amtrak between Washington, DC and Boston. In Providence, the Federal Rail Administration’s (FRA) plans called for the rehabilitation of the head-house of Union Station and the elevated tracks and platforms behind it. That project was interrupted to pursue the second, more ambitious, *Capital Center Plan* (prepared by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM)) that called for the relocation of the railroad tracks some 600 to 850 feet to the north and for burying them, creating large green areas gently rising to the Capitol in a bowl-like form. A new passenger station was placed over the tracks at the foot of the Capitol’s grounds and the old Union Station complex was proposed for commercial re-use. The Union Station parcel was one of eleven development parcels, Interstate ramps, local roadways, parks and open space in the 60-acre project area. This project was redesigned, even as early stages of construction had already begun, by the third program, the *River Relocation/Memorial Boulevard Extension Plan* (prepared by William D. Warner Architects and Planners) that uncovered and moved the rivers, reweave the street circulation pattern, added a dozen bridges, and created eleven acres of largely auto-free walkways and parks.

Early Plans

All of this work can be better understood in the context of three earlier planning efforts:



River basin site before relocation



Providence Mall and river basin after relocation

The College Hill Plan, a demonstration study of historical area renewal, conducted by the Providence City Plan Commission in cooperation with the Providence Preservation Society and the federal Urban Renewal Administration (1959; second edition, 1967). The plan established a historical district zoning ordinance and College Hill (later Providence) Historic District Commission, protecting historical resources in the area, including Benefit Street's "Mile of History" and portions of the Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) campuses. This area is immediately across the river from downtown.

Downtown Providence 1970 (published in 1961 but named for its ten-year planning horizon) was an old-school urban renewal plan produced by the Providence City Plan Commission, calling for clearance of much of downtown's historical fabric and the creation of several suburban-style residential and office campuses on downtown's perimeter. It also, recommended relocating the railroad tracks to the foot of the Capitol's grounds and constructing a new station and heliport, demolishing Union Station and replacing it with a new government center, and converting the former freight yards into a sea of parking lots. Several of this plan's elements, including the proposed track alignment, I-195 interchange, and boulevard would resurface in the Capital Center Plan.

Interface: Providence (1974). This plan was produced by RISD undergraduate architecture students under the direction of the late Gerald Howes. Howes and his team worked with the Urban Systems Laboratory at MIT to promote an inter-modal

transportation approach to downtown and recommended retaining the existing railroad station and tracks. Union Station was to become the intermodal facility. This plan also called for recapturing the city's historical connection to its waterfront by removing pavement and rail yards, adding new green space and creating a water feature recalling the historical salt cove, concepts that would resurface in the River Relocation project. Creation of this plan led to the formation of the Providence Foundation (the charitable tax-exempt successor to the Downtown Council of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce), an entity that was needed to obtain (and provide matching funds for) a National Endowment for the Arts funded follow-up study.

Integrated Plans

Some features from the prior plans were refined by the concepts implemented in the 1980s and 1990s.

Capital Center Project Development Plan (1979). Modifying the Downtown 1970 Master Plan, this award-winning SOM plan relocated the tracks and rail station, providing about 60 acres of land between the old Union Station and the State House. While this plan employs the Downtown 1970's track alignment and highway interchange, it proposed a dense urban mixed-use development on a road network that provided view corridors to the Capitol dome instead of the earlier plan's sea of parking lots.

Design and planning guidelines required the massive development projects to have active and transparent street frontage, with heavily

screened structured parking behind. Later modifications (based on the River Relocation plan) encouraged a greater mix of uses, higher densities, and building frontages facing the parks and riverwalks. The Commission's approval process includes extensive public presentations and workshops and, thus far, has overseen more than \$1 billion in public and private investments.

Providence Waterfront 1636-2000 (1985). Even as SOM was celebrated for the Capital Center Plan with a 1981 *Progressive Architecture* award, William Warner and others were critical of decisions that left the rivers covered and failed to provide pedestrian amenities. Ron Marsella attributes these design decisions the facts that the FRA and RIDOT/FHWA (Federal Highway Administration) were SOM's clients and that FRA's conditions for redirecting funds from rehabilitating existing bridges and re-using Union Station were not to cost more than the original plan. They were also not allowed to delay the Providence section of the Northeast Corridor Project. In addition, RIDOT/FHWA's funding was already stretched beyond the Civic Center Interchange to include local roadways in Capital Center. So the plan, though it called for a difficult-to-reach water park, did not have any funds to build it, nor did it address traffic problems at Suicide Circle and beyond created by what Ron Marsella described as "a mishmash of five streets converging on the circle." The circle and roadways beyond lay outside the project's boundaries. W. Edward Wood was director of RIDOT when the River Relocation Project was proposed and Marsella believes his leadership in advancing the proposal was essential in enabling it to proceed.

Much has been written about the sequence of collaborations created to address concerns about waterfront access and usage extending beyond Capital Center. While there are conflicts between written texts and oral interviews about who approached whom, most agree that there was concern about the more than five and one-half miles of Providence's tidal river and bay frontage. As a result of these concerns, Bob Bendick of DEM, worked with architect William Warner to produce a proposal for a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant for a waterfront study. The Providence Foundation agreed to act as sponsor and raise matching funds, acting as a buffer between the mayor and governor, and functioning as convener of an intergovernmental and interested-party Waterfront Design Committee. On May 19, 1983, NEA awarded the grant (with matching funds coming from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities, member organizations of the Providence Foundation, other local foundations, the State of Rhode Island, and the City of Providence – for a total of around \$137,500). William Warner served as the Project Planning Director to the Waterfront Committee and Orenstein its chairperson. By prior agreement, the study was not to include Capital Center and the traffic problems of Suicide Circle and beyond as the City of Providence had retained a traffic consultant to address those issues.

In February 1983 just before planning was to begin a separate Traffic Committee under pressure from a developer seeking to start construction on a new building located on an affected roadway, appeared ready to recommend that the existing pair of one-way roads on opposite sides of the river be widened to handle increased traffic. This move would require covering over the narrow gap



River with roadway covering water



River after roadway with new bridges and relocated World War I Memorial

between the roads, effectively paving over the Providence River for more than 1,350 feet.

Orenstein reports that he was very concerned about the committee stance and asked Warner to work outside the boundary of the original waterfront study area to address alternatives to “paving the river.” Warner and Orenstein both acknowledged the precedent of Boston’s Storrow Drive, which suggested to them eliminating the pair of one-way roads and creating a two-way extension of Memorial Boulevard on the downtown side of the river. That required a series of bridges connecting downtown to the east side that would wrap around two sides of the financial district and connect it to a two-way road further south.

Warner’s work on the above plan is said to have been done over a weekend, working with his wife, but did not include moving the rivers. In the spring of 1983 planning with the Waterfront Committee began. By November 1983, with vision well beyond the original brief, a boulevard extension plan was developed which eventually cost nearly \$35 million. Key elements of that plan included:

- Relocation and uncovering of sections of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers as they pass through Capital Center, moving their confluence out from under the post office;
- Uncovering the Providence River between Exchange and Crawford Streets;

- Continuation of Memorial Boulevard south of Suicide Circle;
- Detailed development of Waterplace;
- Increase in pedestrian circulation capacity with a riverwalk system and pedestrian and vehicular bridges.

In the spring of 1984 environmental assessment planning began with RIDOT. *The Providence River Relocation Project (1986-1996)* was selected as the preferred alternate in August 1984. It showed, in detail, the relocation of the rivers (creating a new development parcel out of former river bottom in Capital Center); the elimination of Suicide Circle and the relocation of the World War I memorial; the removal of the “world’s widest bridge” over the Providence River and its replacement with a number of much smaller bridges; the extension of Memorial Boulevard (which is again being further extended as originally envisioned as a result of the relocation of Interstate I-195); and the creation of WaterPlace park and the establishment of connecting riverwalks along the banks of the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck Rivers and the east bank of the Providence River.

Making Adjustments and Raising the Bar

A remarkable feature of the River Relocation and Capital Center Projects and is that their planners and designers engaged in a continuous, long-term process of exploring options to improve the result. As one planning effort moved into the next, new opportunities became apparent and decision-makers faced tough choices in order to take advantage of them. In many cases this

meant making significant adjustments to plans that were already advanced in their development and, in one instance, even implementation. None of these changes happened easily or without substantial resistance; there were long and complex negotiations associated with each advance. Still, planners, designers, and others held true to their vision against the temptations of expedience. Here is a summary of two of the key transition points.

Transition One (1978). A private freight railroad company with a half interest in Union Station had assembled a great majority of the land in what later became Capital Center. At the same time, the Federal Rail Administration (FRA) had committed substantial funds to railroad bridge maintenance and the rehabilitation of the Union Station head-house (jointly owned by FRA and the private railroad). With construction already underway, business leaders, the mayor and the governor all requested a delay while they reviewed the more radical option of relocating and burying the rail lines and building a new station above, taking down the “Chinese Wall.” They persuaded the FRA to wait while the *Capital Center Plan* was produced. This plan proposed relocating the tracks, freeing up 49 acres of developable land primarily owned by the railroad company, and improved both rail and road access. The move brought the resources of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to bear on the project through the Interstate Highway Transportation Transfer Act, which would fund construction of the civic center interchange, a boulevard to the interchange, and local roads within Capital Center.

Transition Two (1985). With the *Capital Center Plan* under construction, original and new members of the team came back with the River Relocation Plan, asserting that moving the rivers would make it easier to build needed roadways to handle civic center interchange traffic. It demonstrated that access to the highway system, as previously planned, was not efficient because the proposed boulevard dead-ended at Memorial Square. While the park and open space benefits were considered desirable, it was even more convincing because the project was fundable by FHWA, in spite of its dramatically greater costs, since it solved significant traffic issues better than the proposals that did not include river relocation. In addition, it was attractive to FHWA because it included a largely grade-separated pedestrian circulation system.



Walkway to basin with tiles by local school children

There is even a story about a late-night meeting in March 1981 in a restaurant with William Warner his wife, Peggy, Freidrich St. Florian and Irving Haynes (a RISD architecture professor with an active preservation-oriented practice) where sketches illustrated what the rivers, roads, and parks of Capital Center might look like. In his view, the actual concepts for river relocation were developed two years later and had little to do with the napkin. For him, the value of the meeting was as a discussion among colleagues about the limitations of the *Capital Center Plan* and the necessity to advance a stronger vision.

To make the Memorial Boulevard extension plan work, Warner and others saw that it was critical to remove Memorial Square altogether. They came up with the proposal to relocate the memorial to a park (which became Memorial Park) on the east side of the river in front of the 1933 Georgian Revival Providence County Courthouse. But this raised red flags to certain veterans' groups which were uncertain about how the move would physically be accomplished, what the result would be and whether to trust government to put it back up once taken down. Their resistance was overcome as it was demonstrated that the memorial would no longer be isolated by traffic but would be accessible in a landscaped plaza. However, the spot selected for the 75-foot tall obelisk was already occupied by a monument to Giovanni da Verrazzano an early explorer of Narragansett Bay. This resulted in extensive negotiations with the local Italo-American Association, which led to the sculpture's relocation.

These proposals also raised serious concerns and protests from those with development interests in Capital Center. Anticipating completion of Memorial Boulevard, the Providence and Worcester Railroad development group had entered into a long-term ground lease and had completed schematic design for the Citizens Bank Building. However, the parcel would be dramatically reconfigured as a result of river relocation, necessitating changes in the design and a significant delay. Understandably, the development group and the railroad feared that the changes and delay would possibly jeopardize the project. However, the owner was convinced to drop its opposition as a result of benefits including a land swap with the city and state that gained it an additional parcel and (court ordered) financial compensation.

Thus, while railroad relocation and construction of the civic center interchange continued, plans for the revised roadway and river relocation were put in place, giving the city back its waterfront and eliminating Suicide Circle. The project that had been in jeopardy became the highly visible Citizen's Bank building, with a plaza and restaurant seating facing the river.

Involving the Community

Community involvement was a thread weaving throughout the project. The Waterfront Study's extensive public participation process was expanded to include the River Relocation Project. A professionally-produced slide show with voice-over was prepared on the history of the city's waterfront, its current conditions, what other cities had done, and the benefits of reclaiming Providence's

riverfront. The slide show was presented to many community groups and on a local TV station. The *East Side Monthly*, a free periodical, devoted a back page to the Waterfront Study that included a mail-in questionnaire soliciting ideas and goals (several hundred were reviewed by the coordinating committee). In addition, a nearly ten-foot-long model of the city's reclaimed waterfront showing river relocation and other improvements was unveiled at CityFest '83 and viewed by nearly 1,000 people.

William Warner repeatedly refined his work based on feedback from these efforts and meetings with key stakeholders, without compromising the integrity of key ideas. He describes the above activities as a series of informational briefings held early in the river relocation planning process, followed by open workshops and still more public forums. There was, of course, the full regimen of environmental impact reviews and hearings, which received extensive television and local newspaper coverage. The *Journal*, the dominant newspaper in the state, devoted an issue of its Sunday *Gravure Magazine* to the waterfront and River Relocation Project.

With funds from a Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities grant, Albert Klyberg, executive director of the Rhode Island Historical Society, was retained as the project humanist. The history of the waterfront was researched. Warner's staff combined this research with maps and plans they unearthed, to create the annotated historical maps and markers now found throughout the project.

Ken Orenstein and colleagues at the Providence Foundation believe that, taken together, the community outreaches and supportive media coverage helped the politicians and funding agencies agree to the substantial added costs for relocating the rivers and constructing the parks and pedestrian circulation systems. He also suggests that the widespread public participation in planning presaged the high level of involvement in activities and programming in the completed project (see below). For example, well over 150 volunteers (and there is a waiting list), mount WaterFire which is viewed by thousands nearly every other week from late spring to early fall. Hundreds more support Shakespeare in the Park, Convergence, and other special events.



Section of finished walkway

DESIGN

SMALL URBAN SPACES

This project reads like textbook William H. Whyte, with small rather than large urban spaces and subtly themed areas related to aspects of railroad and waterfront history. The reference to

Whyte is not accidental; he was invited by the Downtown Improvement Association (a public space and streetscape maintenance affiliate of the Providence Foundation; since disbanded) to address its annual meeting and give his opinion about plans in the historical core, then returned in the mid-1980s at the invitation of William Warner and participated in a public review and a design workshop. He argued for even more porous design,



Paving at walkway



Granite beches with WaterFire braziers

linking the water to the city across several blocks, and for smaller spaces. Warner acknowledges taking much of his advice and feels that the project is better for it. After River Relocation was approved, Capital Center's Design Guidelines for buildings along the riverfront and riverwalks were amended to call for retail uses and a transparent face to the riverwalk (blank walls are not allowed). Water-related uses are encouraged, especially indoor and outdoor dining.



Looking toward RISD gazebo

MATERIAL SELECTION AND DETAILING

The project uses high quality materials throughout. The design of lighting, landscaping, street furniture, tree grates, signage and historical interpretation panels offers enough variety to remain interesting along with enough consistency to communicate that this is a special and unique place. The bridges are well designed and detailed with ceramic tiles depicting historical maps, photos and text in a theme consistent with each one's historical location. Cobblestone riverwalks are recycled from a street repair project and reference historical conditions, but they also make walking difficult in some areas and may not meet full accessibility requirements. Landscaping, even in early spring, is well-maintained and attractive. The careful detailing at all of these levels of public space communicate a feeling of a special and cared for space.

DESIGN CULTURE

Several people we interviewed spoke of the passion and long tenure of the participants in the planning process. During the interviews we heard transportation engineers, architects, structural engineers, public policy specialists, and business professionals at every level identify fourteen- and even twenty-plus-year-long histories with the project. They spoke with pride about the creativity of design work that led the planners to move the river, not destroy buildings. There was reference to a "design culture" and the passion of designers like William Warner and artists like Barnaby Evans, creator of WaterFire. Some also mentioned the depth of talent and interest as a function of decades of preservation work dating back to the College Hill Plan and the presence of Brown, RISD and other academic institutions.



Historic information at bridge

PRESERVATION ETHIC

Providence has a rich constructed heritage, in part because the marginal economy in the middle of the 20th Century left much of it intact. While a strong preservation ethic drove much of the River Relocation Project, it did not call for replication. There was a clear belief that they should “save what we can,” but Warner and his staff chose to incorporate historical references rather than copying historical models. Historical themes are part of the details along the riverwalk, suggesting the eras of the railroad and steamboat, but there is no attempt at literal emulation in their form or design. It is not uncommon to be looking at an historical panel and find the “you are here” star is in the middle of what used to be a river or the old salt cove. The history is carefully told and well illustrated, and historical references are effective, never conveying the sense of artificiality that tends to accompany a new building or element made with modern means while trying to look as if it were created in a different era.

PROGRAMS

An important part of bringing Providence to the water (and the region to Providence) has been the innovative programming along the river. The principal programming components are WaterFire and Convergence.

WaterFire

The major draw to the area has been the regular and very popular performances of Barnaby Evans’ WaterFire. This event is now offered from sundown to midnight and involves a haunting blend



WaterFire with gondola

PHOTO: B. Evans

of music, fire, water, and street theater, that *Providence Journal* columnist Bob Kerr refers to as “the only tribal rite performed by an entire state”. A sound system with speakers hidden strategically along the river and dozens of special braziers provide the infrastructure. Evans selects eclectic but often powerful music (from chants, to jazz, to opera) to set the mood. The braziers are stocked with a specially chosen mix of fire wood that smells wonderful, exudes intense heat, flares and sparks. The braziers are lit in a dramatic ceremony by trained volunteers dressed all in black from in boats that are totally black, making them almost invisible.



WaterFire

PHOTO: B. Evans

Thousands of people attend WaterFire each night that it is staged. People of all ages and backgrounds, from Providence and well beyond, walk along the entire riverwalk and in WaterPlace Park. Local restaurants are booked weeks in advance on WaterFire nights, often for double or triple seatings. Other art and cultural happenings are scattered along the river and at major gathering points in the downtown, creating opportunity for street theater, swing dance, mime, human sculpture, and other artistic activities. Attendance has been so great that WaterFire continues to encourage and add other art performances, including in small spaces throughout the downtown, in part to reduce crowding along the riverwalk. People may spend some time at WaterFire then go to a restaurant or the theater, visit one of the other outdoor performances, and perhaps return to WaterFire.

Comments by visitors are striking in the range and depth of their response. Patrons of the foundation supporting WaterFire see the program as essential to the vitality of downtown. WaterFire started with a single performance for First Night on December 31, 1994 and was intended as a one-time event. Instead, it ran its first season in 1996, and has just completed its ninth season. Although fund raising continues to be a priority, WaterFire is generally well supported with a large group of volunteers and contributors, and has staged performances in other cities in the US and abroad.

Convergence Arts Festival

A second important draw to the downtown also involves art. The Convergence Art Festival is a product of Capitol Arts Providence, an independent not-for-profit arm of the City Parks Department that the executive director, Bob Rizzo, curates. A program of art acquisition and placement throughout downtown, Convergence installs about one hundred pieces each year then returns them to the artists or owners to make way for the next exhibition. Rizzo also organizes a number of free concerts each summer which take place in one of the two parks that anchor the riverwalk that, depending upon the performers, attracts an ethnically- and racially-diverse crowd.

Other Programming

Other more conventional programming adds to the mix, like Trinity Repertory Company's conservatory-produced Shakespeare in the Park (using the WaterPlace amphitheater) and special events, such as music and ethnic festivals. Together with WaterFire and the Convergence Arts Festival, they show the wisdom of providing multiple spaces of varying sizes and quality design. The city has also aggressively promoted the development of locally-owned restaurants in the downtown, offering low interest loans in an effort to animate the area and avoid the banality of chain restaurants. The presence of Johnson and Wales, the internationally known cooking school, infuses Providence with young chefs, eager to apply their skills. This ready talent pool, together with supportive city policy, is a strategy that appears to be working, since it is popular wisdom that "the best restaurants in Boston are in Providence".

FINANCES AND IMPLEMENTATION

Following four years of construction on the Capital Center Project, work began on the Memorial Boulevard Extension in 1987 and on the River Relocation Project in the 1990s. The basic breakdown of sources and uses for the overall effort (as presented by the project nominators) is as follows:

To the core funding above, a number of other sources can be added including grants from the National Endowment for the Arts grant to the Providence Foundation for the “Waterfront Study” in 1983 (with matching funds and in-kind support from the City of Providence and the Governor’s office, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and

Heritage Commission), the RI Department of Transportation matching funds at 20% of the FHWA amounts, and numerous design, transportation and environmental assessment studies over the years by the City of Providence and the RI Department of Transportation.

The vast majority of resources for public improvements in the project came as a result of changes in the Federal Highway Act that allowed Rhode Island to develop a \$600 million-plus Highway Trust Fund. Even so, it took creative and flexible interpretations of federal and state programs in this pre-Transportation Equity Act environment to make this project possible. From a funding

Source	Amount	Use
Federal Railway Admin.	\$33,000,000	Rail relocation and new Amtrak station
Federal Highway Admin.	\$130,000,000	River relocation, highways and highway interchanges, WaterPlace Park, and river walk
City of Providence	\$6,000,000	The parts of the program not supportable by FHA related to historical interpretation, special landscape and streetscape
Total	\$169,000,000	



View toward river confluence

perspective, the River Relocation Project was done to facilitate transportation by improving the order and efficiency of the system. The wide pedestrian passage under Memorial Boulevard and the extensive riverwalk system that connect to it were 100% federally fundable because this grade-separated pedestrian system originated at the US Urban Mass Transit Administration-funded Kennedy Plaza Transit Mall (in turn funded by the state Public Transit Authority). Separate cross-river pedestrian bridges were fundable because they serve as “utility crossings” (supporting water and gas pipes and electrical and telephone conduits). These are examples of how planners worked to make pieces of the project fit the rules of the funding sources.



Walkway with bridge

Cooperation and Leadership

Wendall Flanders, of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, describes the Master Property Conveyance Contract involving 73 land swaps as, “a major accomplishment.” The complex land conveyance agreement was needed to make the *Capital Center Plan* work. It allowed roadways and other public improvements to be built on what had been privately owned land without reverting to a time consuming and expensive condemnation process. Orenstein believes such a condemnation process would not have been possible given the lack of local financial resources and the time available. The land swaps also created singly-owned development parcels and public open space. The swaps occurred among city, state and federal government units and agencies and private owners, most notably the railroad.

Another key aspect of project implementation was the governor’s decision to create a Capital Center construction program management team that coordinated all aspects of interagency involvement including funding. On the team, which reported directly to the governor, were staff from the state departments of transportation and environmental management, as well as contracted engineers, lawyers, public relations specialists, and a full time auditor. This arrangement assured a smooth flow of resources to the project, clear accountability, and coordination among diverse agencies. Many that we interviewed attributed the project’s success to the high level of inter-governmental and private sector cooperation that was achieved. And it may be inferred that in Providence, with its history of governmental graft and corruption,

this was also a means of keeping the project's finances clean. (Note that Buddy Cianci, who served as mayor during the planning for Capital Center, was forced to resign in the middle of River Relocation due to his conviction for assaulting a man he accused of being his ex-wife's lover. He was voted back into office just as construction was completed but was in federal prison for a conviction under the RICO statute for running the city as a criminal enterprise at the time of the site visit).

It is also important to observe that the process by which a routine rail maintenance and station rehabilitation project became the *Capital Center Plan* was advanced through a powerful consortium of local private sector leaders working closely with their political counterparts, in particular, Sen. Claiborne Pell, who co-authored the legislation creating the Northeast Corridor project and Amtrak. The presidents of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, the Providence Journal, and Citizen's Bank worked together promoting the project and advocated for the major adjustments it experienced when already underway. Starting with Senators Pell and John Chafee, whose importance grew when Republicans were in the White House, a succession of members of Rhode Island's congressional delegation, Providence mayors and state governors all provided continuous support for the project, a kind of continuity that does not always occur.

The story of the River Relocation project would not be complete without further mention of Mayor Buddy Cianci. Mike Stanton refers to Cianci as the "Prince of Providence" in a book of the same

title. Stanton reminds readers that the former mayor, and twice-convicted felon, used to make frequent presentations on the Providence revival where he attributed the turnaround to the power of the mayor's office and his ability to exercise real leadership. Ron Marcella feels that "there would be no WaterFire, River Relocation or Capital Center projects without his leadership and support. At his best, he was an imaginative risk taker who understood that great things could be achieved if one was willing to take great risks." On the other hand, commentators such as David Brussat at the *Providence Journal*, assert that the mostly federally funded revival of Providence would have been an even broader



Walkway with benches

entrepreneurial success without the pattern of corruption and the “coarse, petty, brutal, vindictive” style of Mayor Cianci. In short, according to Brussat, “it was Cianci’s vision of how a city should be run that really kept it down.”

It is also important to note the farsighted neighborhood and architectural preservation leadership of Antoinette Downing, the long-term chair of both the College Hill Historic District and RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commissions. Downing’s public career spanned 40 years and helped place preservation interests on the public agenda for Providence. For example, when the Providence Foundation unveiled plans to abandon Union Station, Downing used her agency’s statutory powers to enforce the requirement for federally funded transportation projects to mitigate the negative impacts on historical resources. In so doing she was able to support the project in exchange for the development of the *Capital Center Plan* to be enforced by the Capital Center Commission of which she was the first co-chair. She also extracted a promise from the Providence Foundation to support the expansion of a small downtown historical district to cover the rest of downtown and to take a lead in finding new uses for Union Station. This ultimately led to the restoration of the long-vacant West Building into the headquarters of the Greater Providence Chamber and its affiliates including the Providence Foundation.

And lastly, consider William Warner, who accrued influence by maintaining an interest and involvement in the fate of Providence’s waterfront from the time he arrived in Providence to work on the *College Hill Study*. With great perseverance, charm and skill, Warner created a legion of supporters for his vision. His continuous constituency-building proved crucial in overcoming various obstacles that arose during planning.

Operating Costs

The riverwalk and public areas are well supported by the city Parks Department, some contributions from the state, and through arts programming and maintenance. Neighboring financial, cultural and educational institutions also participate. Several abutting entities take care of the public property directly in front of them, WaterFire cleans up after itself with an army of volunteers, and the city Parks Department takes care of the rest while coordinating the other partners.

One concern raised about the high design standards is that hardware, while it will have a relatively long life, will be expensive to replace when the time comes. Robert McMahon, Deputy Director of the Parks Department, indicates that his office is considering developing an endowment in anticipation of these expenses. Meanwhile the Providence Foundation reports that building owners are discussing a business improvement district that would also be able to contribute to the management, marketing, and maintenance of the riverwalk and parks.

IMPACTS

QUALITY OF LIFE

Virtually all respondents to our interviews reported a sea change in environment and attitudes toward Providence, with ripple effects starting downtown and expanding outward to the city, Rhode Island, and southeastern Massachusetts. One indicator is its much-improved public realm. Another is the colleges, which are reinvesting in or creating a new presence in the downtown. Older buildings that long ago locked their waterfront-facing front doors

and turned their backs to the water have re-opened these doors. New buildings are being built with their main entrances facing the water. New residents are moving into student dorms, lofts and condominiums in new residential buildings and recycled historical buildings. Use of the park programs is much higher than expected, leaving some to wish they hadn't listened so carefully to William Whyte's design advice, while others agree with Whyte and see the crowded events as signs of success and reason to expand the riverwalk. As thousands of people now stream into downtown for WaterFire and other public events, a city that once appeared to be dying and was seen as an embarrassment, is now an attraction and source of pride throughout the region.



WaterFire with World War I Memorial

PHOTO: B. Evans

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Vacancy rates in all classes of office buildings downtown increased steadily in Providence from 1988 through 1995, then declined from a high of over 25% to a healthy 10.75% by 2001, with Class A office vacancies below 5%.

The market analysis for a proposed new hotel in downtown showed full service hotels growing from 514,285 available room-nights in 1998 to 593,490 in 2001, faster than demand, and attributed the imbalance to the events of September 11, the recession and the decline in conventions. Even so, the room rates charged have increased significantly since 1998, growing at a compound annual rate of 9.2% while most other markets in New England have been experiencing significant decline.

Restaurant owners report that, while there is more competition, they are all doing more business. One owner identified the summer as a traditionally slow season with one seating per table. Now, especially on WaterFire nights, he claims three seatings.

Employment statistics from the Chamber of Commerce show that eating and drinking establishments have increased the number of jobs and total wages from 1995 to 2000. Wages, for example, are 100 percent higher than the preceding five-years, while outside Providence the increase was 35%.

Another significant indication of success is the amount of construction activity and private investment. While there are now tax abatement incentives for job creation, the Planning Department

reports that these will become harder to get as municipal tax increases are needed to make up for previous fiscal mismanagement, a continuing increase in school population, a leveling of state education support, and decreasing federal support. The tables below speak to the range and types of investments made and planned for the phased implementation of the riverwalk (other than at Capital Center, which is reported separately).

DOWNTOWN AREA REAL ESTATE PROJECTS-IN PLANNING

Name	Notes	Cost
Grace Park Hotel – Re-Use of Lederer and Bell Hall Buildings	75-80 room hotel plus commercial	\$8-10,000,000
Peerless Building/ Westminster Street – Housing Conversion	80 housing units plus 20,000 sq. ft. commercial	\$20,000,000
Union Street/Clemence Street/Weybosset Street & Westminster Street Block – New Construction	Parking/retail complex	NA
Trinity Rep.'s Citizens Bank Theater/Empire Street Black Repertory Theater/Westminster Street	450 seat theater Developing plans	\$4,800,000 NA
Total		\$32-34,800,000

Downtown Area Real Estate Projects – Completed 1994-2002

Name	Notes	Cost
Smith Building Conversion	42,000 sq. ft. l – 36 housing units plus commercia	\$4,500,000
Empire Restaurant Rehab	5,000 sq. ft.	\$500,000
RI Housing Mortgage & Finance Company/Slade & Garr Building Rehab	48,000 sq. ft.	\$4,500,000
University of RI Downtown Facility/Shepard Building Rehab	220,000 sq. ft.	\$35,000,000
Johnson & Wales Investment		
Snowden Hall Dormitory – New Construction	270 dormitory units	\$9,000,000
McNaulty Hall Dormitory – New Construction	509 dormitory units	\$10,000,000
Library Administration Office Rehab		\$12,000,000
Burrill Building Rehab, Classrooms		\$1,000,000
Waite/Thresher Rehab, Classrooms		\$3,500,000
Gaebe Common		\$1,000,000
RISD: Union Fletcher Rehab/Graduate Student, Art Studio	37,000 sq. ft.	\$1,000,000
Grace Park Liner Building	5,000 sq. ft.	\$500,000
AS220 Arts Center Rehab – Empire Street	22,600 sq. ft.	\$800,000
Providence Performing Arts Center – Stage Enlargement, Sign and Improvements		\$8,000,000
Roger Williams University: Downtown Providence Campus	60,000 sq. ft.	\$5,000,000
Cherry & Webb Building – 275 Westminster Street – Office Rehab	37,000 sq. ft.	NA
Harkness Building – Office Rehab	33,000 sq. ft.	\$500,000
Biltmore Hotel – Modernization & Creation of Concierge Level		\$9,000,000
Alice Building Conversion	37 housing units plus 5,000 sq. ft. commercial	\$8,000,000
Earle Building – Office Rehab	12,100 sq. ft.	\$ 1,500,000
Trinity Repertory Theater Renovation – Washington Street		+/- \$4,000,000
AS220 Building Improvements/Empire Street		\$1,000,000
	Total	\$ 120,300,000

parcels in the Capital Center Special Development District from 1997 to 2002. During this time the Courtyard Hotel opened with 216 rooms and 372 parking spaces at a total investment of \$29 million and the Providence Place Mall opened 1.2 million square feet of retail with 4,000 structured spaces at a cost of \$450 million. So far, the managers of both establishments report good business and are very positive about the future. The Winter Garden central atrium of the Friedrich St. Florian-designed mall looks down upon and terminates the vista of WaterPlace Park and, through the riverwalk, has access to all of downtown. They see this as a great advantage in that they have all the “rubber tire access” of a conventional regional mall along with the amenities of a city – the best of both suburban and urban worlds.

By late 1999, Capital Center project fact sheets were reporting that private investments in their projects (including \$450 million for the mall) were over \$700 million and that public investment was \$741 million, which breaks out as follows:

Infrastructure and River Relocation:	\$115 million
Railroad Station and Tracks	\$33 million
WaterPlace Park/ River walks	\$21 million
Convention Center	\$572 million

The Convention Center includes 137,000 sf of exhibit space, 23 meeting rooms, 20,000 square feet of ballroom, a 2,400 car park and a Westin Hotel. They also projected impacts from the full build-out of the Capital Center plan of 10,000 jobs, two million square feet of office space, 500 residential units, 1,000 hotel rooms,

one million square feet of retail and 10,000 structured parking spaces. However, by December, 2002 with a weaker economy, they reduced their retail projection by 500,000 square feet and now project a total public/private investment of \$1.12 billion.

Most recently, Starwood Wasserman announced a new 265,000 square foot corporate headquarters for G-Tech, on a parcel fronting on WaterPlace Park and across the street from the mall. When corporate growth caused G-Tech, the World’s largest manufacturer and servicer of lottery machinery, to move from its current suburban highway-oriented headquarters, they selected this site over suburban locations in Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts. In addition to the \$65 million facility, the project will also support a



Basin with WaterFire lighting



Along the River

new hotel and a garage on nearby Capital Center parcels. Construction is scheduled to start Summer 2004. David Wasserman, a principal of Starwood Wasserman, suggests that one advantage of this kind of development is that it brings international capital to the local economy.

ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

While there is no claim for direct impact on water quality, agencies report that uncovering the rivers has had a dramatic effect on public

awareness of water quality issues. The Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC), for example, believes some of their advocacy work on remediating combined sewer overflows was helped by the increased awareness spawned by river relocation. The NBC did participate as a member of the Waterfront Study co-coordinating committee and currently is overseeing the implementation of a \$350 million, 1.5 mile-long combined sewer overflow diversion tunnel planned to run below grade, directly under WaterPlace Park. On the other hand, several people reported that the rivers are silting up faster than expected; after only four years, they need to be dredged again. The problem is under study with no easy resolution in sight.

The recently finished riverwalk is among the first completed elements benefiting from the relocation of Interstate 195. The \$450 million dollar project had its genesis during the Waterfront Study when plans to rehabilitate and expand the I-195's Providence River bridges were called into question. The initial plans would not have solved the current alignment's traffic problems, since the bridge ramps would have continued to block access and use of both banks of the river for more than a quarter mile downstream from the ends of River Relocation's riverwalks.

In the ensuing years, many of the same people and organizations that worked on Railroad Relocation and River Relocation collaborated on the I-195 merger with I-95. Once again, a higher cost and better quality project is underway, solving traffic problems, removing ramps from riverbanks and allowing their public re-use. The new I-195 relocation will re-knit city neighborhoods that were



Walkway with stair from street

severed by the current right-of-way and create new economic development in the abandoned ones. Moving the second-busiest vehicular intersection in New England to correct problems created by its current alignment made sense to a community that had already moved railroads and rivers for similar ends.

ASSESSING PROJECT SUCCESS

This project represents a very substantial accomplishment in its scale and its impact on the city and its residents. As a success, the project has “many parents” – a long list of people who feel they authored or contributed significantly to some important part of it. The following reviews the degree to which the project met stated goals.

MEETING PROJECT GOALS

From the *Capital Center Plan* and River Relocation Project:

- *Create new and marketable commercial land without demolishing existing historical downtown structures in order to attract major new users who might not otherwise locate in the Capital City.*

The project has exceeded this goal. Well over a billion dollars have been invested, with plans for further businesses, jobs and investment. Historical resources throughout the project site have been interpreted, many have been restored, and still others are planned for further reuse.

- *Enhance vehicular access to the project area, the State House, and downtown.*

Suicide Circle is gone, a new highway interchange and local road network have been constructed and are working well, and access to the project area and the State House has gone from a dreary encounter with the “Chinese Wall” and acres of parking to a much improved approach.



Walkway detail

- *Create an ordered sense of public spaces. (The district was intentionally created as a high-density urban district where large, contiguous structures would define diverse spaces.)*

The mall is turned toward the street and the riverwalk, with an active façade overlooking WaterPlace Park and defines that edge of the project. However, Capital Center still needs to complete development on several parcels that should improve the continuity of structures and the quality of the spaces they will contain.

- *Create a visual and physical linkage between downtown and the State House.*

The project has succeeded in reconnecting downtown and the State House. It is one continuous experience with good legibility.

From the *Providence Waterfront Study*:

- *Connect College Hill with downtown by uncovering and moving the river and building twelve pedestrian and vehicular bridges.*

The scale of the connection is much more intimate and fine-grained than in Capital Center, offering an appropriate variety of experience. Orenstein, of the Providence Foundation, reports that over 12% of downtown workers walk to work, making walking second (ahead of bus transit) to single occupancy private vehicles in commuting modes.

- *Create a linear park along the river anchored by WaterPlace Park and Memorial Park for use as community gathering places and for celebrating the arts.*

Both parks, and smaller ones in between, are extensively programmed and well used.

- *Create a multi-modal transportation corridor accommodating vehicles, pedestrians, and boats.*

The Memorial Boulevard extension appears to have resolved circulation and safety problems; pedestrians are very well accommodated; and boats have acceptable, if minimal, clearances.RIPTA has just completed a major re-design and expansion of the Kennedy Plaza transit mall. The expansion enabled regional and national bus lines to relocate their downtown bus stops and ticketing

functions to Kennedy Plaza thus creating the single bus transit terminus called for as part of the Interface: Providence plan some 30 years ago.

- *Celebrate the city's founding and its maritime heritage with historical site graphic panels along the riverwalk.*

The quality of historical interpretation is, according to Ed Sanderson, Director of the Rhode Island Historical Commission, “among the very best I have ever seen.” They are ubiquitous (without being obtrusive), elegantly designed, and informative.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The selection committee was impressed with a number of aspects of the River Relocation Project. They found it to be “a heroic project with epic proportions” providing a complete turnaround for Providence from its previously unfortunate reputation. The committee felt that many cities need to think on a more grand scale to achieve these kinds of impacts. In this way, Providence serves as a model and inspiration. It also shows what it takes to create a project of this magnitude – vision, persistence, and cooperation among all levels of government and many private parties. Despite the large amount of federal money that was tapped, the committee considered it to be modest for the results achieved. Finally, the committee found the area's programming to be excellent, and felt that WaterFire was unique and exceptional, bringing people from many walks of life into downtown Providence.



WaterFire

PHOTO: B. Evans



Tile with historic information at bridge

The selection committee also had some reservations about the River Relocation Project. The question of its replicability (due to unique financing and political circumstances, as well as scale) was raised. The committee wondered if the ability to accomplish the level of cooperation achieved might be unique to a setting like Providence, capital city of a small state with a powerful, well placed U.S. senator). Although it was noted that many cities have done creative work with river restoration, there was a concern that in times when financial resources are harder to find, the model might not be easily adapted to other cities. Finally, while the achievement is truly impressive, in selecting the Gold Medal winner, the committee wanted to emphasize newer, more innovative models of urban intervention.

NOTE

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