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June M. Bissell
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REVITALIZATION THROUGH URBAN DESIGN:
A STREETScape ENHANCEMENT PLAN
FOR
THE WEYBOSSET STREET RETAIL DISTRICT

BY

JUNE M. BISSELL

A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
COMMUNITY PLANNING

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

SPRING 1988

MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING
RESEARCH PROJECT
OF
JUNE M. BISSELL

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Weybosset Street is one of the oldest streets in Downtown Providence. The street was one of two major streets in the downtown area as it appeared in 1770. Originally an Indian trail which followed the lay of the land, Weybosset Street has a variety of widths and a curvilinear quality which has been retained through the centuries. These characteristics make it an anomaly in a cityscape in which streets are generally laid out in straight lines. The curves provide a sequence of urban vistas and wider portions of the street allow an excellent opportunity for viewing the historic structures which line the sidewalks.

In recent decades the exodus of manufacturing from the areas south of the central business district (CBD), coupled with the loss of the Outlet and Shepards, two anchor department stores, severely decreased the pedestrian population on Weybosset Street as well as other parts of Downtown Providence. Many stores have closed down or relocated elsewhere. Private offices, with blinds closed to the public, now constitute a sizeable portion of the land use along Weybosset Street. Several buildings have been allowed to deteriorate to an alarming degree. This neglect shown by property owners is augmented by dirt and litter, making several areas along the street unattractive to pedestrians. Safety is an issue in other areas where street furniture and motor vehicles interrupt pedestrian flow.

In contrast to these problems, there is emerging evidence of a local revitalization; several areas surrounding the CBD have experienced growth which point toward an urban renaissance within Providence. Illustrated on the next page, they are as follows:

1. The Jewelry District, an area favored by artists and design firms attracted by the character of the buildings.
2. Promenade Center, an industrial corridor extending west from I-95 along the Woonasquatucket River.
3. The Foundry, a mixed-use rehabilitation project on the 25-acre site of the historic Brown and Sharpe Complex.
4. Providence Place, a proposed upscale urban retail mall/mixed-use project.
5. The waterfront has been rediscovered where the Corliss Landing Improvement Project is reopening much of the area to a variety of uses.
6. The Providence Preservation Society is currently updating the College Hill Plan.
7. A convention center/hotel complex is proposed at the junction of Downtown Providence and Capital Center.
8. The Federal Hill Renewal project has spurred tourism and upscale retail and dining in this ethnic neighborhood.
9. The Capital Center Project is changing the face of the area between the State House and Downtown.
10. LaSalle Square consists of office/open space and the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul.
11. The high profile Outlet Building's residential rehabilitation will spur similar developments downtown.

Given the rehabilitation and new development currently occurring or proposed in many portions of the City, it may not be a surprise that the gradual decline of the Weybosset

streetscape in the area between Empire and Dorrance streets, hitherto termed the 'study area,' or 'the Weybosset Retail District,' has gone largely unnoticed. The City has not addressed the subject of street improvements since 1978, when, as part of the Westminster Centre project, brick pavers were added and street furniture 'improved' to link this area with the Westminster Street Pedestrian Mall.

It is now time to direct attention to the unmet potential of Downtown Providence, and, in particular, the Weybosset Street study area. This thesis project provides an in-depth urban design analysis of the study area. There are two primary goals. The first is to illustrate the basic concepts of urban design to readers who wish to improve their knowledge of this relatively recent planning discipline. The second is to provide analysis and recommendations which may be used by the City of Providence, property owners, and developers in shaping the street's future. It is believed that a comprehensive urban design analysis can play a major role in identifying problems and potentials which must be addressed in order to facilitate revitalization and preservation of the unique character of the street.

Recommendations will illustrate how the study area may be improved to take better advantage of the existing conditions in the surrounding downtown areas. The recommendations and proposals will be applicable to other areas within the entire historic core of Providence.

Emphasis will be placed on improvements geared to draw more businesses to the area, and improve public open space so that people will wish to spend more time on the street.

The analysis and recommendations will focus on the eight elements of urban design categorized by Hamid Shirvani in The Urban Design Process, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1985). These elements are land use; open space; building form and massing, called "streetscape architecture" in this report; circulation and parking; open space; pedestrian ways; activity support; signage; and preservation.

Urban design in Rhode Island has been considered a matter of aesthetics, a luxury that may not be practical in cities which are competing for economic development. For example, the Rhode Island legislature has voted against amendments to the state zoning enabling legislation which would have enabled municipalities in the state to legally implement official design review processes. This was largely due to lobbying efforts by the RI Builders Association and other professional organizations who argued that design is an aesthetic issue which should not enter the domain of public control.

This study hopes to settle this issue by illustrating that urban design is fundamental to city planning today, and must play an essential role in the ongoing revitalization of Downtown Providence, if the City is to make the most of the valuable architectural and historical resources which make it a unique place in Rhode Island.

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

CHAPTER ONE

LAND USE

Land use is fundamental to downtown urban design. The diversity of city land uses provide an attraction to and a destination for pedestrians; tax revenue to maintain the public infrastructure; economic activity that contributes to private income; and, most important to this study, provides visual and experiential qualities which give a city its urban character. The purpose of this section is to describe the land use in the study area and its relationships to land use in other parts of the City.

Land Use and Zoning

Land use in downtown Providence roughly corresponds to the existing zoning map. (See Maps 1.1 and 1.2) With regard to land use in the City overall, the Weybosset Retail District occupies a critical location, lying along the southern edge of the C-3 Downtown Commercial Zone which includes most of the downtown core. As one travels south through Downtown Providence, Weybosset Street is the final frontier, providing a continuous band of street level retail stores, eating and drinking places, and offices.

Just south of the street, distances between buildings increase, corresponding to the increase in surface parking. This, combined with vacant and rundown buildings in the C-4 and M-1 zones, few pedestrian amenities, and poor signage, contribute to the image of a "no-man's land."

- C-2: GENERAL COMMERCIAL ZONE
- C-3: DOWNTOWN COMMERCIAL ZONE
- C-4: HEAVY COMMERCIAL ZONE
- M-1: GENERAL INDUSTRIAL ZONE
- M-2: HEAVY INDUSTRIAL ZONE
- R-4: MULTIPLE DWELLING ZONE
- R-5: DOWNTOWN APARTMENT ZONE

MAP 1.1: DOWNTOWN ZONING DISTRICTS

MAP 1.2: GENERAL LAND USE DOWNTOWN

Building conditions improve significantly in the Jewelry District, which is located within the M-1 Zone immediately south of I 195. Much of the City's jewelry industry is located here, as well as a number of older industrial structures which have been rehabilitated as office space. The structures do not contain street level retail space, however. Smaller lofts have been rented by artists and design firms, giving the Jewelry District an emerging reputation as an artist's community.

Within the C-3 Zone immediately to the east of the study area is the Financial District. This area contains most of the grade A office space and the tallest buildings in the City. The arcade is located here, as well as several other restored buildings. In addition, this area generates the greatest number of downtown employees.

A Downtown Apartment Dwelling Zone lies just west of the study area. Within this district can be found affordably priced as well as luxury housing. An additional residential development is under construction in the Imperial Knife Building in the Jewelry District. This will contribute additional residential units to the area lying generally southwest of the study area.

To conclude, the Weybosset Street retail district lies at the junction of commercial, residential, and industrial land use districts within the City of Providence. The impact of these districts on varying conditions along Weybosset Street is multidimensional, and will be discussed

in subsequent chapters of the report. The following section describes the land use within the study area in greater detail.

Land use in the Study Area

The land use in the study area, as in the downtown C-1 Commercial District as a whole, consists of a mixture of retail, office, institutional, and vacant space. It is important, in an urban design analysis, to differentiate between general land use and street level land use. This is because window shopping is an important pedestrian activity, and street level land use can directly affect the routes chosen by pedestrians, as well as activity in public open spaces. Map 2.3 depicts land use in the study area. A detailed discussion of street level land use and its relevance to pedestrian activity may be found within the chapter entitled "Activity Support."

Retail

The bulk of the retail activity taking place along Weybosset Street is located at street level in the blocks between Dorrance and Mathewson Streets. This part of the study area is closest to the financial district and the Westminster Mall retail district, the areas most heavily travelled by lunchtime strollers. These establishments primarily serve the downtown office market and close-in residents. Clothing and accessories stores, convenience shops, and small luncheonettes predominate. Several shops contain imported oriental goods, suggesting that the

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

MAP 1.3 GENERAL LAND USE

north

- COMMERCIAL
- CIVIC/EDUCATION/RELIGION
- PARKING
- PUBLIC OPEN SPACE
- VACANT

relatively lower rents found here are affordable to fledgling minority businesses.

The east side of Mathewson Street contains a continuous band of retail shops which provide a strong link between Weybosset Street and the Westminster Mall. This retail corridor continues south to Richmond Street, although the condition and quality of this area of dilapidated storefronts may not be adequate to entice pedestrians south of Weybosset Street.

Office

Office space is located in the upper floors of most of the buildings. With the exception of the Outlet Building, upper floors are accessible through separate street-level entrances not related to the businesses occupying the ground level. This architectural feature is essential in renting upper floors. Rehabilitated structures within the southwest quarter of the study area, however, contain office space on the ground floor as well. The Fall 1986 Providence Occupancy Survey notes that, in general, well maintained older buildings and top quality rehabilitations are gaining tenants faster than prime buildings. Physicians offices, personal services, and financial organizations are the most common tenants along the street.

Office space in poorly maintained structures may rent for as little as \$2 per square foot. This has brought space on the street within the financial reach of such businesses as TiChi, TaiQuonDo, Karate, and dance classes.

Although these businesses may justifiably be considered an underutilization of downtown office space, they provide a positive function by generating pedestrian activity during evening hours, and may have a market which reaches beyond the immediate residential fringe or downtown office population.

Residential

At this time, the primary residential land use activity within the study area is the dormitory serving Johnson and Wales College. Occasionally, an upper story appears to contain a studio or loft-style living space. All activities permitted in Residential Land Use zones are allowed within the C-3 Commercial Zone. This, combined with strong support from the Mayor, and the formation of the Providence Company to promote downtown residential living will facilitate the transition to more residential land use in the upper floors of buildings. The Outlet Building is awaiting conversion to approximately 290 luxury apartments. This will generate a concentration of upscale residential activity on the eastern end of the study area.

Institutional - Civic - Educational

The study area contains a fairly large proportion of institutional land uses. The Roundtop Congregational Church and the St. Francis Chapel are two religious institutions along Weybosset Street. Johnson and Wales College occupies three buildings in the study area. The Providence Performing Arts Center is a major cultural facility.

Parking

The study area contains two parking decks and several surface lots. Most parking is located west of Mathewson and Richmond Streets. The majority of the surface lots are poorly maintained, suggesting that parking may be an interim use for these parcels.

Vacant Buildings

A significant percentage of the structures within the study area contain vacant space. The Outlet and the block of structures owned by the Boghossian Family, which are located west of Snow street, are completely vacant, awaiting redevelopment. The Heddison Building at the intersection of Weybosset and Union Streets, which is about fifty percent vacant, accounts for a significant portion of the vacant space in the study area.

The upper floors of many unrehabilitated structures are poorly maintained and appear to have the highest vacancy rate; broken and unkempt windows suggesting that landlords are not actively looking for tenants.

Daytime vs. Nighttime Land Use

Given the fact that most land use in the study area is office and related support retail, it becomes, for the most part, a "no man's land" after 6 PM. Johnson and Wales students, who live, study, and go to pubs in the area, are the primary users of the street in the evening hours. The study area is one of the few parts of downtown Providence with a large number of student residents to generate

evening activity.

When the Providence Performing Arts Center is host to an event, the street is filled with people, lights, and activity. The festival lights on the theatre marquee add to the welcome quality of the street. These times, however, are few and far between.

Summary

The above analysis shows that most of the retail activity in the study area is in the northeastern quarter of Weybosset Street. The Outlet Building in the southeast quarter holds the most immediate potential for residential use. Street level office use, and parking are predominantly located in the western half of the study area. West of Mathewson Street, office uses appear to be on the increase within street level facades.

While vacant space is located throughout the study area, it is concentrated in the Outlet Building, the redevelopment parcel at the western end of the street, and in the buildings in the center of the Retail District on the north side of Weybosset Street. However, the Outlet and the Boghossian parcels, if developed sensitively, would greatly enhance the street level land use and extend the hours during which the street is active.

CHAPTER TWO

PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

Pedestrian Circulation is a key element in any urban design analysis. A high concentration of people is one of the identifiable characteristics of a city. It is the presence of people -- not cars, landscaping, or colorful banners -- that identifies a vital urban environment. Therefore, one of the most important things a city can do is encourage pedestrian activity by providing a good environment for pedestrians.

A good pedestrian environment is one in which people feel comfortable physically and mentally. There should be room to walk on the sidewalk and places to sit down and rest. Window shopping is a key pedestrian activity; a good pedestrian environment will have retail at the sidewalk level. The streetspace should provide a sense of enclosure, forming an "exterior room" to contain the street and all activities which occur. The climate must be comfortable; high winds generated by tall buildings or uninterrupted open space are undesirable. Trees are important to provide shade in summer, deflect winds, clean the air, and screen unpleasant views. Signs should provide all necessary information without becoming a visual eyesore. One of the most important features of a good pedestrian environment is a clearly defined separation between areas designated for vehicular travel, and for pedestrian travel, so that people may walk without fear of

motor vehicles.

However, many cities place a higher priority on the needs of traffic and automobiles. Traffic signals are timed in such a fashion to speed traffic and limit the periods in which pedestrians may safely cross the street. Cars park on the crosswalk and across the sidewalk. Parking garages cut wide vehicular rights of way across the sidewalk. Streetlighting may not provide an hospitable environment for pedestrians at night. Crosswalks are not provided in all necessary locations. These problems are common to almost all cities in America. Each one of them may be found in the study area.

With regard to pedestrian amenities, Weybosset Street has the potential to be one of the most attractive streets in Downtown Providence. The street's slight slope and curvilinear direction provides a series of urban vistas, rather than a straight-line view from one end of the street to the other. Many of the buildings are significantly set back from the street on its northern side, resulting in an undulating sidewalk width which provides room for an assortment of pedestrian amenities. In addition, the architectural details of the historic structures provide visual interest above and beyond the storefronts which line the street.

This section will analyze several factors relevant to pedestrian circulation in the study area:

1. the pedestrian path network;

2. street crossings; and
3. pedestrian-vehicular conflicts.

Pedestrian Paths

In general, the pedestrian path network corresponds to the grid of streets within the study area. The degree to which certain streets are used for pedestrian travel is dependent on many factors which may vary in importance:

1. The origin and destination of the trip;
2. The window shopping along alternative routes;
3. The condition and maintenance of structures and sidewalks along alternative routes;
4. The amount of time available for the trip; and
5. Incidental points of interest adjacent to potential routes.

In addition to the above factors, the existing width/capacity of sidewalks will also, to a degree, determine the amount of pedestrian usage. The following quotation from P.A.S. Report Number 368, Designing Effective Pedestrian Improvements in Business Districts, describes the different zones which exist along the sidewalk. Each different zone must be considered in both analysis and recommendations pertaining to pedestrian flow.

"Sidewalks are divided into imaginary lanes: next to the store windows is a lane about two to three feet wide which is 'viewing space' used by window shoppers; at the curb, people generally allow 1 1/2 feet between themselves and any trees, signposts, traffic signs, etc., thus creating a second lane; in between is the 'walking space.' There is a minimum desirable width for this

walking space -- eight feet, or the amount of space necessary for two pairs of pedestrians to pass each other comfortably."

Sources of Pedestrians

The heaviest period of pedestrian activity in downtown Providence occurs during lunch hour on week days. At this time, the major source of pedestrians are the offices within the Financial District and Weybosset Hill, and Westminster Street, the commercial spine of the downtown. (See Map 2.1) People usually enter the study area from Dorrance, Eddy, Union, and Mathewson Streets. The northern side of Weybosset Street between Mathewson and Dorrance receives the heaviest pedestrian traffic. It is here that the best window shopping on the street is located. Union Street, a pedestrian street composed of the same paving material as Westminster Mall, was intended to provide a major link between the Mall and the Outlet.

Johnson and Wales students have a high profile on Weybosset Street from September to May. (Photos 2.1 and 2.2) Roughly 7500 students attend classes and live in the downtown area. Students travel down Pine and Weybosset Streets between classrooms and dorm, and back and forth along Mathewson Street, which connects with additional classroom and living areas to the north. Classes meet from 8 to 3, and change every hour, providing 8 peak periods of student pedestrian activity. The sidewalks on Mathewson Street receive very heavy traffic during these times. Pine Street receives a good share of student traffic as well.

MAP 2.1 SOURCES OF PEDESTRIANS

- **FINANCIAL DISTRICT**
- **JEWELRY DISTRICT**
- **JOHNSON & WALES COLLEGE**
- **WESTMINSTER STREET**
- **WEYBOSSET HILL**
- **CONVENTION CENTER (TO BE BUILT)**

Photo 2.1 Johnson and Wales students pack the sidewalks as they travel between classes.

Photo 2.2 ...They maintain a high profile on Weybosset Street.

The corner of Garnet and Pine is a waiting area for the shuttle bus which transports students to other class and dorm locations outside the downtown area.

The bulk of downtown industry is remotely located south of I-195. This, combined with the fact that factory employees generally receive only 1/2 hour for lunch, limits the number of lunchtime pedestrians arriving from the southern industrial area.

I-195 is a major physical barrier which separates the Commercial District from the commercial activity in the Jewelry District. (Photo 2.3) Richmond and Chestnut Streets provide linkage between the two areas, but conditions beneath the highway might deter most from making the trip. Bird droppings and trash are abundant; the highway underpinnings are supported by pieces of wood, and look as if they will give way at any moment; and the area contains a desolate sea of parking and barbed wire, with few welcoming facades within hailing distance.

Fewer pedestrians than might be expected travel down Weybosset Street from the Weybosset Hill office district. This may be due to two factors. First, the main pedestrian entrance to this district is at the junction of Cathedral Square and Westminster Street. A wide brick crosswalk and traffic signal suggest that this is a safe place to cross. Second, the intersection of Empire and Weybosset Streets (Photo 2.4) may be intimidating to pedestrians because Empire Street is four lanes wide at this point, vehicles

Photo 2.3 Interstate I 195 is a major physical barrier which separates the study area from areas to the south.

Photo 2.4 The intersection of Empire and Weybosset is a dangerous crossing point for pedestrians. Cars travel fast and make right turns without coming to a complete stop.

travel quite fast, and few come to a complete stop prior to turning right on red.

Crosswalks and Street Crossings

As mentioned above, the decorative brick sidewalk along Weybosset Street continues across side streets, functioning as a crosswalk. This provides generous, well marked crossing points where a pedestrian may feel confident in crossing the street. Curbs are ramped to accomodate wheelchairs. However, if one wishes to cross Weybosset Street, the situation changes. As demonstrated in Map 2.2, which illustrates the existing crosswalks and signals in the study area, pedestrians are provided only three points to cross Weybosset Street: at Dorrance, Union, and Empire streets. The crosswalk at Union Street, which dates to an earlier, more prosperous retail era, is placed mid-block to facilitate pedestrian traffic on Union Street between Westminster Mall and the Outlet.

Individuals wishing to cross Weybosset at other points must do so at their own risk. Weybosset Street is singular in that many streets terminate at it. There are eight T-intersections terminating on the street. One might question whether the paucity of crosswalks is simply due to the fact that the City's Traffic Department has no clear-cut policy on location of crosswalks at these intersections.

Existing signals slow vehicular movement on the street during most of the day. Therefore, people tend to cross

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 2.2 PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

- EXISTING CROSSWALK
- DETERIORATED CROSSWALK
- TRAFFIC SIGNAL
- NON-OPERATIVE WALK/WAIT SIGNAL
- BUS STOP

- MAJOR PEDESTRIAN PATH
- MINOR PEDESTRIAN PATH

when and where they choose, somewhat breaking down regular pedestrian patterns. (Photo 2.5) Regardless of whether a spot is a designated crossing point, one may cross without having to wait long.

A traffic signal located at the intersection of Richmond and Weybosset is only helpful to pedestrians travelling northward. Because Richmond, a northbound street, terminates at Weybosset, signals have been placed facing only southward towards this street. Persons wishing to cross the street in a southward direction cannot see the traffic signal from the sidewalk, and the curve in the street just west of this point makes it impossible to see oncoming vehicles. Because of this visibility problem, pedestrians cross the street at significant risk.

The same problem with traffic signals occurs when one wishes to cross Dorrance Street from the Financial District westward into the study area. The WALK/WAIT signal is non-functioning and no automotive signal lights may be viewed from the sidewalk; therefore, one must guess the appropriate time to cross the street.

Pedestrian-Vehicular Conflicts

The balance between the areas designated for pedestrians use vs. motor vehicles is one which must be addressed. Map 2.3 depicts the points at which motor vehicles interrupt pedestrian flow along the sidewalk. Intersecting side streets occur with much greater frequency here. This traffic, combined with the other conflict

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

MAP 2.3 PEDESTRIAN - VEHICULAR CONFLICTS

POINTS AT WHICH MOTOR VEHICLE CROSSES SIDEWALK

PEDESTRIAN STREET

Photo 2.5 People tend to cross Weybosset Street where and when they choose.

Photo 2.6 This crosswalk at Richmond Street is too faded to be easily discernable by motorists or pedestrians.

points, provides a constant hazard to pedestrians.

The frequency of curb cuts providing right-of-way to motor vehicles across the sidewalk is heaviest in western sections of the study area, where vehicles cross the sidewalk to gain access to parking. (Photo 2.7) The entrance to the surface lot at Clemence Street, and the entrance to the Shopper's Arcade Garage each provide a vehicular path across the sidewalk which is two vehicle-widths wide. Once the lot at Clemence Street is full, vehicles spill out onto the adjoining sidewalk, where they are often parked between the planting boxes in areas which were intended only for pedestrians.

A significant pedestrian hazard is located at the intersection of Read Street and Abbot Park. Abbot Park Place, the loop road which circles Abbot Park, brings vehicles into a zone which should be reserved for pedestrians. Vehicles who use Silva's Parking Station gain access where the loop road passes through a narrow opening between two buildings facing the park. This opening is also used by pedestrians. Because the buildings are so close together, visibility is minimal for both the pedestrian and the driver.

Street Furniture

Street furniture has been provided on Weybosset Street to enhance the street's functional and aesthetic value to pedestrians. Trees planted at grade and in brick/cement planting boxes shade the street and help to filter

Photo 2.7 Vehicles crossing the sidewalk to gain access to parking are a significant hazard to pedestrians.

Photo 2.8 These light fixtures take up altogether too much sidewalk space.

contaminates in the air. The edges of planting boxes also function as seating along the sidewalk. There are no benches on Weybosset Street or along any sidewalks in the study area.

Trash receptacles have been provided by the Downtown Providence Improvement Authority in various locations. However, they do not integrate with other streetscape elements, and are large, plastic, and dirty, with trash bags sticking out between lid and container. Although functional, they do not "Keep Providence Beautiful."

Some trees are more effective than others in providing shelter, shade, and screening of unsightly elements. The group of trees planted at the intersection of Empire and Weybosset Street is not effective in diminishing the effect of the sea of blacktop on the adjacent street and the Blue Cross Parking Lot. (Photo 2.9) In contrast, the wide overhanging branches of the trees in the Roundtop Church parking lot, combined with an attractive stone wall and variety of plantings, provide a sense of shelter and repose, often enjoyed by nearby office workers during coffee breaks. (Photo 2.10).

The maintenance of planters on Weybosset Street is inadequate and irregular. Planters containing evergreens seem to fair the best. However, the greenery is not pruned so that it extends outward from the planters, reducing the total available seating area. Other planting boxes are

Photo 2.9 These trees are not effective in screening the parking lot from view, nor do they provide much shelter.

Photo 2.10 The trees in the Roundtop Church lot provide welcome shade and an attractive backdrop for socializing.

barren, completely effacing any value they might have as "greenspace". (Photo 2.11) In addition, the ledges adjacent to these planters do not appear very clean, and, therefore, may intimidate use by office workers who must protect their clothing.

Granite bollards are used with great frequency along the street, presumably to prevent vehicles from parking on the sidewalk. In places where the sidewalk is wide, they function well in this capacity. Where the sidewalk narrows, as on Eddy Street, the bollards present barriers to pedestrians on the sidewalk. (Photo 2.12)

Lighting

Other street furniture in the study area does not completely meet its potential as a pedestrian amenity. Into this category falls the lighting fixtures. The most obtrusive are the tall rectilinear light-signposts of contemporary design located on Weybosset Street. These fixtures slice into the sidewalk from the curb, effectively removing over 2 feet from pedestrian use. In addition, a horizontal support beam located at human-neck level presents a safety hazard as well as to deter people from passing in between the two vertical portions of the fixture. In Photo 2.8, this bar is illustrated. During certain seasons and times of day, this horizontal beam is most hazardous when walking westward into the sun. At these times, pedestrians cannot see the beam and have walked right into it.

Photo 2.11 Some planting boxes are barren, completely effacing any value these areas may have as greenspace.

Photo 2.12 Bollards, trash receptacle, and sign reduce the effective travel lane for pedestrians.

The area south of Weybosset Street suffers from a lack of lighting fixtures. In this part of the city, the lights appear to be designed for use along vehicular streets. Similar fixtures may be found on highways throughout the nation. These lights are roughly two-stories high, and do not provide a welcoming light nor the perception of security to pedestrians.

Summary

Weybosset Street links two major downtown employment centers, the Financial District and Weybosset Hill. It runs parallel to Westminster Street, the commercial spine of Downtown Providence. Street crossing hazards at both Empire and Dorrance Streets may be reducing the number of pedestrians who enter the study area from the east and west. Additionally, pedestrian travel across Weybosset Street is discouraged due to a lack of crosswalks. This may have an impact on the success of retail activity on the south side of the street.

Once inside the study area, pedestrians are provided with minimal street furniture. Trash receptacles are unattractive; plantings are poorly maintained or non-existent, and stone seating ledges are not always clean.

Improvements will be required to facilitate safe pedestrian flow throughout the study area, and to improve the sidewalk conditions through the use of more attractive and "pedestrian friendly" street furniture.

CHAPTER THREE

VEHICULAR CIRCULATION AND PARKING

In recent decades, the automobile has had a tremendous impact on American cities. The need to accommodate increasing numbers of motor vehicles in and around central business districts has led to the demolition of buildings for surface and structural parking, the widening of streets to accommodate additional lanes of traffic, and timing traffic signals to favor speedy vehicular flow, all at the expense of pedestrian comfort and safety. "No amount of painted white lines, crosswalks, traffic lights, button operated signals, ever quite manage to change the fact that a car weighs a ton or more, and will run over any pedestrian, unless the driver brakes." (Alexander, p.281.)

The fact remains that cars are a necessity. The street network must function to facilitate traffic flow through the city and to parking areas which serve the businesses which are located there.

This chapter will address the vehicular circulation within the study area. The analysis will focus on circulation within the CBD and the role played by streets within the study area. Parking will also be addressed, as will the combined impact of circulation and parking on pedestrian circulation and open space.

The Street Network

Maps 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the street network within the Providence central business district and the study area. One-way streets predominate. Weybosset Street is

MAP 3.1 VEHICULAR CIRCULATION IN THE CBD

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
 MAP 3.2 VEHICULAR CIRCULATION AND PARKING

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

- MAJOR ARTERIAL
- CROSS-TOWN ROUTE
- LOCAL STREET
- PARKING

the only local eastbound street available to vehicles from South Providence who may wish to enter the central business district. In a sense, the intersection of Weybosset and Empire streets functions as a gateway into the CBD from the southwest. At this location, the streetscape undergoes a change from a less densely developed environment to one of closely packed structures and historic storefronts.

Persons familiar with the City know that it is not easy to traverse the CBD by car because there is a lack of continuity in the street network. The lack of continuity may readily be observed along Weybosset Street inside the study area. Vehicles travelling southward or northward across Weybosset Street are forced to stop at T-intersections and choose other streets. Although this makes a positive contribution to safety on the street, forcing vehicles to travel more slowly, individuals not familiar with the network of one-way streets are bound to become confused in attempts to traverse the area by car.

Richmond Street is the main route into the study area from the Courthouse and Jewelry District to the South. Mathewson and Dorrance Streets are the only routes northward out of the study area. Although Eddy Street is a northbound street, it is officially closed to all except buses and taxis.

Vehicular Circulation Within the Study Area

In downtown Providence, Weybosset Street travels in a generally eastward direction and is three lanes wide.

Parking is allowed in the left lane. Therefore, during most of the day, two lanes are available for travel. Eastward of Mathewson, on-street parking is permitted for service and delivery vehicles only. Parking is not allowed in the right lane in order to facilitate public transportation pick-up and drop-off along the length of the street.

Pine Street is a one-way westbound street which forms a portion of the Ring-Road Network. The Ring-Road Network is a route which has been devised in order to facilitate traffic around the perimeter of the CBD. Running in two directions, clockwise and counter clockwise, this route utilizes both major arterials such as Empire Street, and smaller streets which are not as well known to Providence residents. The Ring Road may be an enigma to many, because the signs which identify it are placed in a somewhat sporadic fashion. Once one leaves the Financial District, Pine Street deteriorates. Fewer businesses are located there, illegal parking is common, and street signs are lacking. In this condition, the street does little to promote the City to out-of-town visitors.

Richmond and Mathewson streets provide a major north bound route through downtown Providence. Other minor streets, Garnet and Page, appear to be used primarily for on-street parking. Eddy and Union streets are generally closed to traffic, although delivery vehicles use Union, and Eddy Street, available only to bus and taxi traffic, is

illegally used by private vehicles throughout the day.

Read Street does not fall into the grid pattern of streets in the study area. This street passes through an area of surface parking, Silva's Parking Station, and is physically indistinguishable from the parking area. It may be accessed either from Abbot Park or from Richmond Street. Its main function appears to be to provide access to the parking area.

Parking

Available parking which is available in the study area is more than adequate to meet the demand generated by businesses within its boundaries. (See, Wilbur Smith and Associates, Downtown Parking Garage Marketing Study, July 1987.) Three parking decks and several surface lots augment on-street parking which is allowed throughout the study area. The primary issues which must be addressed, therefore, relate to the physical and visual impact that legitimate parking areas as well as illegal parking may have on the health, safety, and welfare of the people of Providence.

Parking Structures

The Shoppers Arcade (325 spaces), the Blue Cross Garage (200 spaces), and the Snow Street Garage (180 spaces) are all located in the northwest corner of the study area. The Blue Cross lot, located at and below grade off Weybosset Street at Empire, has the visual impact of surface parking; approximately 24,200 square feet of

blacktop covers roughly half a city block. (Photo 3.1) No landscaping is present to screen views of the parked vehicles from the sidewalk or to reduce the heat generated by the lot. A wire security fence has been installed along a concrete ledge surrounding the lot. If not for the fence, this ledge could provide a long expanse of seating along the sidewalk. Vehicular access to the deck is gained from Chapel Street, which is relatively unused by pedestrians. This parking lot is situated in a key location, the previously mentioned "gateway to downtown." Open space at this location does not strengthen this entry point to the downtown streetscape. In addition, the lot provides pedestrians on Weybosset Street with no shelter from the wind which whips through the city in the winter months.

The Shopper's Arcade garage is one of the newest structures on Weybosset street. (Photo 3.2) Its brick and cement facade echoes materials used to construct many structures in the district; however, this building does little to contribute to the prevailing historic and urban character of Weybosset Street. (See Streetscape Architecture Chapter Four.) The structure is second only to the Outlet in terms of frontage on Weybosset Street; yet no retail space, plantings, or seating ledge are provided serve the needs or interests of pedestrians who pass by. In the past, vehicles gained access to the facility from Chapel Street. Currently, the only entrance to the lot cuts across the sidewalk on Weybosset Street,

Photo 3.1 The Blue Cross parking lot provides a 24,000 square foot sea of surface parking.

Photo 3.2 The Shoppers Arcade Garage does not contribute to the urban and historic character of Weybosset Street.

creating a significant pedestrian hazard.

The Snow Street Garage, located at the intersection of Snow and Chapel Streets, makes a quiet contribution to the urban character of the area without impinging on the rights of pedestrians. (Photo 3.3) Entry is gained from Chapel Street. In addition, the characteristics of the structure are such that it contributes to the urban character of its surroundings. The lack of retail at the street level is a less significant issue, because the garage does not front on a street used frequently by pedestrians.

Surface Parking Lots

Surface parking within the study area is primarily located at Clemence Street, Silva's Parking Station, and at the Roundtop Church. These lots contribute both positively and negatively to their adjacent environments.

Silva's Parking Station and other small parking areas in the vicinity of Read and Pine Streets have the appearance of interim parking lots. (Photo 3.4) These paved areas are obviously the sites of demolished buildings. The open spaces they create provide a view to the backs of structures which face Weybosset Street -- building faces which were not intended for view. Crumbling pavement, wire fences, and poorly maintained sidewalks add to the image of unwanted, "leftover space" which currently functions as parking. A significant pedestrian/vehicular conflict is located at the junction of Silva's Parking Station and Abbot Park. As in the Blue Cross Lot, no trees

Photo 3.3 The Snow Street Garage makes a quiet contribution to the urban character of the area.

Photo 3.4 Silva's Parking Station appears to be an interim lot utilizing "leftover space" within a city block.

or plantings are provided to buffer unpleasant views from the public eye and provide shade to cool the area in summertime.

The lot at Clemence Street would also appear to be a temporary use of the land. Its relatively small size may only accomodate 37 vehicles. No buffer strip or wall separates this lot from pedestrian areas along Weybosset and Clemence streets. In fact, the entire border of the lot is used by vehicles for access. In the summertime, a Frozen Lemonade truck is parked in the lot where it abuts the sidewalk, providing an amenity to the public. However, the sidewalk immediately across from the lemonade truck normally accomodates illegally parked vehicles, (Photo 3.5), which significantly reduce the attractiveness of the adjacent seating areas to individuals who may wish to sit down and eat.

The private lot at the Roundtop Church is one of the best parking lots in the city. (Photo 2.10) Previously functional entrances along Weybosset Street have been closed; entry points have been reduced to one on Chestnut Street, where it interferes less with pedestrian circulation. Attractive plantings and trees create a park-like atmosphere. A stone wall around the lot is suitable for seating, and persons often sit there during coffee breaks or at lunchtime. Aside from its function as a storage spot for cars, this lot provides shade and beauty to many pedestrians who pass through or stop to rest in the

Photo 3.5 This part of the sidewalk adjacent to Clemence Street regularly accomodates illegally parked vehicles.

Photo 3.6 Illegal parking on the sidewalk is a significant problem on Pine Street.

area. It is not fenced, and is therefore used as a shortcut by individuals who are travelling between Chestnut and Weybosset Street.

Economics play a major role in the range of amenities provided by parking lots in the study area. The Roundtop Church Lot is an accessory use, providing parking for church staff during the week. Other lots are in business to make money; any decorative plantings and buffer areas represent a diminution of income-earning space.

On-street Parking

On-street parking is allowed throughout most of the study area. As in most parts of downtown Providence, overtime and illegal parking is common. Private vehicles park in areas designated for delivery vehicles on Weybosset Street, causing double parking and congestion. Overtime parking throughout the study area is common. Downtown employees prefer to feed parking meters all day rather than park in a lot or garage. A limited number of free spaces are also used in this fashion by early arrivals downtown. The net result is that there are very few parking opportunities for patrons who may wish to make quick trips to shops and businesses in the area.

Illegal parking is a significant problem on Pine Street, where vehicles often park on both sides of the street and, worse, on the sidewalk, blocking the path of pedestrians. (Photo 3.6) This street has been designated a ring road to facilitate smooth vehicular travel around the

CBD, yet it is frequently too congested to function effectively in this role.

Signage and Street Furniture

There is a lack of uniformity in both the street furniture and signage which serve vehicles within the study area. Traffic signals, street signs, and street lights can make an important contribution to vehicular circulation and safety. Within the study area, there is a lack of uniformity in both their style and placement.

Signs identifying street names are not placed in a uniform fashion within the study area. They appear on light fixtures and sign posts. Several different styles of sign are used, and appearing to date from different periods in the City's recent history.

Signs are missing at several intersections along Pine Street. On this ring road, it is important to provide signs not only identifying street names, but the location of different downtown districts.

Summary

Within the study area, a significant amount of land is devoted to the storage of motor vehicles. With the exception of the Roundtop Church lot, and the summertime lemonade truck at Clemence Street, these surface lots and parking structures make no positive contribution to pedestrian street life or the historic character of the district.

Although the traffic is not congested on Weybosset

Street, double parking by delivery vehicles frequently reduces the number of lanes available for vehicular flow. Street signs are often inadequate in condition and placement. Uniformity is an important feature which is missing here.

Additionally, it should be noted that the views of surface lots from above are particularly unattractive. As part of an effort to create market rate housing in the upper floors of downtown buildings, the attractiveness of views, including parking lots, must be addressed as residential tenants are sought for the CBD.

CHAPTER FOUR

STREETSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Many factors contribute to the overall attractiveness and liveability of an urban street. The buildings which line the street play a vital role. The height, bulk, setback, scale, material, texture, and color of the existing architecture gives each part of the CBD its distinct character. Another important feature of the streetscape relates to the way the buildings interact with one another to affect the conscious and subconscious perceptions of persons who are walking along the street. An attribute of urban areas, in contrast to suburbs, is the sense of enclosure created by closely packed buildings which are generally taller than they are wide. This sense of enclosure may be viewed as a kind of "exterior room" which provides a sense of shelter and security to pedestrians on the sidewalk. (Photo 4.1)

The buildings which form the walls of an exterior room are responsible for giving the airspace between them spatial definition, a three-dimensional quality. For the most part, older city streets are the most successful in this. Decoration, which is most likely to be found on older structures, helps to hold and define space. Modern buildings are not as effective. "Light and airy buildings, ultraflat smooth facades, and polished reflective surfaces ... do not define space well." (Hedman, 1984)

The intention of this section is to discuss and define the indigenous architectural qualities that form the basis

Photo 4.1 The sense of enclosure created by building cornices contributes strongly to the sense of "exterior room."

Photo 4.2 The low-rise skyline along Weybosset Street contrasts sharply to the nearby Financial District.

for design on Weybosset Street -- height, architectural massing, street line setback, building ornamentation, building cornices, materials, rhythm, proportion, scale, and color -- in order to identify features which contribute most effectively to the creation of a specific neighborhood character. In addition, the analysis will address the perception of an exterior room in the street's open space, which plays a major role in its ability to provide a desirable pedestrian environment.

Height

Structures on Weybosset Street range from 1 to 8 stories in height, with structures of 3 and 4 stories predominating. As Photo 4.2 shows, the low-rise skyline along the street is considerably different from average building heights found in the Financial District, where much taller buildings predominate.

Low to moderate building height, therefore, may be said to be a characteristic of the Weybosset Retail District. This is primarily due to the fact that the area is one of the oldest parts of the City, dating back to the days when the height of buildings was limited by the number of flights of stairs people were willing to climb.

Low building heights make a positive contribution to the microclimate of the street. Tall buildings often generate high velocity winds down their faces. In addition, tall buildings side by side can turn a street into a wind tunnel, creating havoc with pedestrians

attempting to travel along the sidewalk.

There is no uniform building height along the street. For the most part, the height of adjacent structures does not vary by more than three stories at the most. Buildings generally vary by one or two stories from their neighbors. An exception is the block containing McNulty Hall and the St. Francis Chapel. The chapel is a modest three stories in height, in contrast to the eight story college building. Although the air space above the chapel lets natural light into the residential space of the Johnson and Wales building, the difference between building heights does not offer a beneficial visual contrast within the overall streetscape.

Architectural Massing and Proportion

Buildings on Weybosset Street are defined by a series of vertical walls perpendicular to the street. (Photo 4.3) Few of the structures contain projections, cantilevered overhangs, deep recesses, large horizontal openings -- features common to modern buildings. (Figure 4.4) Most older buildings have flat roofs which are not visible from the street.

Proportion refers to the height of a building with relation to its width. In older urban areas, buildings tend to emphasize vertical proportions. (Photo 4.3) In some instances, horizontally oriented buildings containing features which emphasize verticality. This is evident in the Outlet Building. Enlarged over the decades by a series

Photo 4.3 Buildings on Weybosset Street are defined by a series of vertical walls perpendicular to the street.

Photo 4.4 Broadcast House contains cantilevered overhangs, deep recesses and irregular roofline...modern features in conflict with the prevailing character of the street.

of additions, the facade of this structure has three distinct sections which, from a distance, have the visual affect of three separate buildings.

Street Line Setback

Street line setback refers to the distance from the edge of the street to the facade edge of a building. The streetline setback along Weybosset Street has a significant variation because of the differing width of the sidewalk. However, all building facades are lined up along the edge of the sidewalk. Structures completely fill the surface area of each parcel.

The continuous line of building facades along the sidewalk strongly contributes to the concept of a wall which helps to contain the outdoor space of the street. This wall is not completely intact, however. City blocks in this part of Providence are extremely short; therefore, intersecting streets frequently interrupt the wall of buildings. In addition, the parking lot at Clemence Street creates a gap.

Building Ornamentation

The buildings of downtown Providence contain numerous examples of ornamentation which would be costly to duplicate today. This type of ornament includes a variety of arches in windows and structural elements (Photos 4.5-4.7); quoins and beltcourses, (Photo 4.8); columns and pilasters with decorative bases and capitals (Photos 4.9-4.12); decorative domes and turrets (Photos 4.13

Photo 4.5 Arched windows and applied ornamentation.

Photo 4.6 Keystones and arches; rich terra-cotta brick.

Photo 4.7 Richness of ornament, texture, arches, and decoration, inadequately maintained.

Photo 4.8 Quoins and beltcourses.

Photo 4.9 Pillasters and corinthian capitals

Photo 4.10 ...and more pillasters.

Photo 4.11 Columns have a wide variety of themes, from ribbons and bows...

Photo 4.12 ...to Egyptian columns and capitals. Note the cornice on this building.

Photo 4.13 The dome of Roundtop Church is a well known landmark.

Photo 4.14 Turrets on Providence Performing Arts Center.

Photo 4.15 An Italianate bracketed cornice.

Photo 4.16 Note the emphasis and grandness given to the top of the Outlet Company. Compare to Photo 4.4.

Photo 4.17 Buildings on Weybosset are constructed of brick in a variety of warm colors with contrasting trim.

Photo 4.18 The building on the left provides a sense of rhythm and scale. The one on the right does not.

and 4.14); quoins and beltcourses; and elaborate carving.. These architectural features make a strong contribution to the architectural heritage of Providence and enrich the experience of walking down the street.

Building Cornices

Almost all buildings constructed between the mid 1800's and the mid 1900's have some form of decorative cornice at the top of the front facade. (See photos 4.3, 4.12, 4.15, 4.16) The cornice line along an urban street is one of the most important factors which contribute to the sense of exterior room. As one glances upward, the protruding cornice stops one's gaze, and establishes an imaginary ceiling line. The study area is characterized by the assortment of cornices found along the skyline.

Materials

The exterior walls of most of the buildings on Weybosset Street are constructed of brick. The majority of the historic structures on the street are colored in warm earth tones: salmon, terra-cotta, gold, and brown. Grey and tan predominate in newer buildings. Stone, wood, and glass are used as a compliment to the prevailing brick material.

Rythm

Rythm refers to the repetition or vertical elements such as windows, pillasters, or other features which may be found on the facades of buildings along the street. Rhythm can be perceived within a group of buildings (Photo 4.3) or

an individual building. (Photo 4.18) Building facades create a sense of rhythm using window openings and solid masonry surfaces. The rhythm of openings in a building's facade provides the pedestrian with a useful tool for gauging distances down the sidewalk. This rhythm is not found in as many modern structures. The contrast between rhythm, and non-rhythm is evident in photo 4.18 depicting the Outlet Company and the newer Broadcast House buildings.

Scale

Scale refers to the size or bulk of a building as it relates to the perceived size of the human body. Several types of building scale are used to describe architecture. Buildings which are monumental in scale have grand doors, openings, and building elements. An example of this is the new AT&T Building in LaSalle Square. (Photo 4.19) Large buildings which have very little surface articulation may be considered scaleless; unless a person is standing nearby, it is difficult to tell their size. The new Old Stone Building on South Main Street illustrates this concept. (Photo 4.20)

Buildings may also be human in scale. (Photo 4.17) Structures have color, texture, and decoration which reduces their apparent size. Buildings on Weybosset Street, therefore, are human in scale, a factor which makes a strong contribution to the liveability of the street.

Grand Entrances

Another architectural feature which may be found in

Photo 4.19 The AT&T building is monumental in scale.

Photo 4.20 The Old Stone Building is scaleless; unless someone is standing nearby, it is difficult to gauge its size.

Photo 4.21 Grand Entrance.

Photo 4.22 Grand Entrance.

Photo 4.23 Grand Entrance.

Photo 4.24 The Shopper's Arcade Garage is a conflicting structure which does not contribute to the district's character.

the study area is the emphasis on the entry point into a building. Entrances rich in detail or grandeur may be found throughout the historical portions of the downtown. Doorways provided yet another vehicle for the architect's and stonemason's creativity, as shown in Photos 4.21-4.23.

Inconsistent Buildings

Two structures on the street are in conflict with the predominating historical character. These are the Shoppers Arcade Garage and the Broadcast House. Both of these structures are more suburban than urban in appearance. It must be emphasized that nothing is wrong with these buildings per se. No doubt they serve their owners and users needs very nicely. However, when considered in urban design perspective, they fall somewhat short of ideal. The visual contrast they provide does not enhance the "genus loci," or "spirit of place," in the district.

Shoppers Arcade Garage

The Shoppers Arcade Garage is a 2 1/2 story parking deck located on the northern side of Weybosset Street. It is constructed of warm terra cotta brick with white cement detailing, colors and textures which harmonize well with the rest of the street. In addition, its setback follows the predominating sidewalk build-to line. However, this structure has other features which are not as positive, in the context of the overall streetscape.

A major problem with the building in its present

location is its overwhelming horizontality. Horizontal structural details have been emphasized and vertical supports minimized. The "windows," as the open portions of the structure may be called, continue in a long unbroken horizontal band across the facade of the structure, providing no sense of rhythm. The structure lacks the traditional storefronts located in the older buildings on the street.

The building's two-story height appears to be too low for this location; both adjacent structures are three stories in height. Visually, a continuation of the 3-story level would have helped the structure to integrate more effectively with its neighbors. There is no ornamental detail to hold the three dimensional street space and provide visual interest. The structure does not have a strong cornice. This, combined with its low height, allow the space of the street to "leak" out, reducing the effect of containment essential to an exterior room.

Broadcast House

The Broadcast House Building would be more at home in a suburban office park than within a historic district. The building contrasts negatively with the older buildings on the street. This contrast is common to contemporary architecture. Buildings are commissioned by clients who want a sense of corporate identity to be embodied in the buildings, and architects are striving to achieve originality in their designs. These are both valid

considerations; however, in an area such as the Weybosset Retail District, in which one of the major assets is its historic ambiance, structures such as this can be extremely harmful and disrupt streetscape continuity.

Vast amounts of reflective glass and polished black granite, a saw-tooth setback and extremely irregular roof line are in sharp contrast with the predominating architectural features of the area, described earlier in this chapter. Whereas most buildings emphasize their upper terminus with a strong decorative cornice, this building's uppermost level consists of glass which reflects the sky and therefore in a way blends with it. Additionally, radio transmitting equipment on the building's roof are clearly visible from the street, an additional reminder that this structure is very "20th century."

Summary

The buildings which line Weybosset Street contain an array of architectural features which contribute to the historic character of the street and are a source of visual interest to passers by. In general they include the following:

- arched window openings
- uniform set-back to edge of sidewalk
- low to moderate height
- sense of verticality
- variety of ornamental detail
- natural materials, warm colors and non-reflective

textures

- human scale
- strong cornice line
- rhythmic repetition of windows or other

architectural features on the facade

Two structures which contain few of the above characteristics, the Broadcast House and the Shopper's Arcade Garage, are in conflict with the overall character of the street and embody characteristics which should be discouraged in future redevelopment or infill structures.

CHAPTER FIVE

OPEN SPACE

Introduction

There are several types of public open space in a city; parks and plazas most immediately come to mind. Streets and sidewalks are also open space.

"Collectively, a city's abundant small spaces have a major impact on the quality of life. If those spaces are unattractive, people will likely retreat from the city street, perhaps from the city itself.... But if we learn to take advantage of our small urban spaces, if we design new ones well, and fix up the old ones, we will keep the streets alive."

William K. Reily, President,
Conservation Foundation 1980.

This study will concentrate on a study of three open spaces within the study area: Abbot Park, the pedestrian mall between Clemence and Mathewson Streets, and the RIPTA bus stop at the corner of Dorrance and Weybosset Streets. A fourth open space, the architecturally designed Sinclair Plaza, is currently inaccessible due to the fire in the adjacent Outlet building, and will therefore not be analyzed in this chapter.

Criteria for Successful Urban Spaces

In the early 1970's, William H. Wyte, Director of the Street Life Project in New York City, conducted scientific research to determine why some urban spaces "work" and why some "don't work." (See, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, Conservation Foundation, 1980.) Whyte's findings provide important guidelines to assist in the evaluation of

open space in the Weybosset Retail District. The following elements have been determined by Whyte's study to be the most important components of a successful urban space.

Summarized briefly, they are as follows:

- Peak hours of use are between noon and 2 PM.
- People watching is a major open space recreational activity as are eating and socializing.
- The key to plaza use is its amount and variety of seating.
- The amount of seating required roughly corresponds to the number of linear feet in the perimeter of the space.
- The best places to sit are often the simplest: ledges and steps.
- Open spaces used by lots of people are safer than empty ones.
- Sidewalk food vendors are vital to a plaza.
- A water source is highly desirable.

Aside from these factors, the location of a public space is important. The ideal location is along a busy corner, so that one cannot necessarily tell where the sidewalk ends and the plaza begins. This provides lots of people to watch, and can generate spontaneous use of the space by passers by.

From the above, it is evident that the success of a space is partially dependent on the physical amenities within the space --e.g. seating, water, trees, etc.-- and activity supports which may be nearby if not on-site:

people, food, and the street. All will be considered in the following analysis.

Abbot Park

Abbot Park is the oldest existing park in Providence, dating back to 1746. (Photos 5.1 to 5.4) It was rehabilitated by the City in 1974.

The park has many attractive features. It is sheltered and enclosed by attractive well kept buildings, which provide a strong sense of enclosure and protection. It is set back from the street, which promotes relaxation and quiet contemplation. An ornate fountain provides a focal point in the park's center. Three rustic stone benches face the fountain. Two historic lamps and a trash receptacle are provided for safety and cleanliness. Despite these factors, the park receives little use. The possible reasons for this are discussed below.

The sidewalk on Weybosset which abuts the park is heavily used by Johnson and Wales students at peak periods throughout the day. Two of the structures which frame the park belong to the College. This nearby pedestrian activity could provide a major source of people watching entertainment for park users. However, only one bench faces this activity, and is removed quite a distance from the sidewalk action. Two of Whyte's requirements for a well-used open space -- people-to-watch and closeness to "the action," are inadequately provided.

The central portion of the park may be viewed by

Photo 5.1 Looking across Abbot Park Place to the Park. Weybosset Street is in the background.

Photo 5.2 View of Abbot Park from across Weybosset Street. Johnson and Wales students often pass by the park.

Photo 5.3 Two fixed benches in the park face inwards, instead of out to the street where most of the action is.

Photo 5.4 Abbot Park Place dominates the enclosed area. Poorly maintained, it is more likely to accommodate cars than pedestrians. Silva's Parking Station can be seen at right.

passers-by, but is not immediately accessible. The planted area appears to be off-limits to pedestrians. Access to the park is gained from Abbot Park Place, a loop road which surrounds the landscaped area. From this, small paths enter the park proper.

To meet the minimum seating requirement established by Whyte, the park would have to contain approximately 230 linear feet of seating. Only 18 feet are provided. The benches are anchored in position facing the fountain, which limits the choice of seating orientation. Unfortunately, the fountain does not contain water. Un-operational fountains have minimal value as an activity to watch, and create no audible sounds to lull those seated near by.

The park contains a fine selection of trees, which, along with a flag, present an attractive view from some distance down the street. The trees provide valuable greenery and shade. However, the park may have too much shade. Because it is situated on the north side of the adjacent buildings, they cast heavy shade into the park during most of the day. On those occasions when sunlight enters the park, seated individuals prefer the sunny locations.

The landscaped area within the park suffers from a lack of ground cover. Bare earth and dead shrubs combine to impart the ground with a brown color, instead of green. There is no grass. Bricks have been placed on the ground to suggest the perimeter of planting boxes, but nothing is

Photo 5.5 The steps of the Roundtop Church next door provide better people-watching than within the park.

Photo 5.6 The sense of "exterior room" is very weak in the area where the Weybosset mall is located (at right).

planted inside.

At a glance, the park appears to fill the area between the buildings which shelter it. In reality, Abbot Park Place passes completely around the rear of the landscaped area. Despite "NO PARKING" signs, this area is usually filled with parked vehicles. Read Street and Silva's Parking Station is accessed from the rear of the park. Vehicles en route to this parking area from Weybosset Street pass through the park. It is debatable whether vehicular or human activity predominates in this area.

The small park is completely surrounded by vehicular travel lanes. Given the unattractiveness of much of the ground area when viewed from close up, it almost seems that the major amenity it provides to citizens is the quick glimpse which may be viewed as vehicles pass through the area.

Weybosset Mall

In contrast to the sense of containment, shelter, and solitude offered by Abbot Park, the Weybosset mall lies in an exposed, poorly defined space. In this portion of the study area, the sense of an exterior room is weak. The wide distance between north and south sides of the street and the relatively low height of the structures does not sufficiently contain the street space. (Photo 5.6)

The mall is actually a wide expanse of sidewalk that has been provided with a few trees and several large planting boxes designed to function as seating in addition

to holding vegetation. Here, the sidewalk is exceptionally wide, and easily accomodates large planters, structures, and open space, in addition to the pedestrian travel lane which runs beside the buildings. (Photo 5.7)

This public area is on the southern side of the adjacent buildings, and receives sunlight throughout the day. Seating is provided on several low planting boxes which contain trees and, in some instances, shrubbery. These planters have several positive features: they incorporate a ledge which is an appropriate height and width for seating; and they provide sitters with a choice of seating orientation and view. The planters, combined, contain roughly 510 linear feet of seating, compared to a perimiter of approximately 650. This will accomodate many people; yet, the area is little used and often vacant.

This is due to a combination of factors. The seating surface is stone, limiting its seasonal comfort range to the warmer months. The vegetation in the planters is not well maintained. Several planters contain no other vegetation than a tree or two, resulting in a large brown expanse of bare earth. Popular with pigeons, this may deter humans from using the seating because of the droppings on the seating surface. In other areas, evergreen shrubs are overgrown and prevent adjacent ledges from being used as seating.

Dirt and litter are familiar sights here. Although some trash receptacles are provided, litter lies on the pavement and in the planters. The trash barrels themselves

Photo 5.7 On Weybosset mall, the sidewalk easily accomodates planters and openspace in addition to pedestrian travel lanes.

Photo 5.8 This dilapidated storefront on the Dyer Block compounds the general atmosphere of neglect on the mall.

are unsightly and unkempt. The historic Dyer Block, which adjoins the mall, is the most poorly maintained building on the street. (Photo 5.8) Its dilapidated facade contributes significantly to the mall's general atmosphere of neglect, as does the comfort station (Photo 7.12), a major eyesore on the mall.

The mall's function is that of a sidewalk; it is accessible to pedestrians from all directions. This provides the potential for people-watching on the mall. The businesses located in the Dyer Block -- a hairdresser, antique shop, oriental accessories shop, and pizza parlor, do not provide significant activity to watch. Johnson and Wales students pass through the mall regularly. Photo 5.9 shows the most common route taken as students cross the space from Mathewson Street to McNulty Hall.

A major shortcoming of this open space is the fact that the mall contains no areas which could provide a sense of enclosure or protection. The entire area is open and exposed. Individuals seated in the area may be more likely to perceive themselves as the viewed rather than the viewers of pedestrians who pass by. This, combined with the dilapidated structures and lack of maintenance, may be major reasons for the mall's underutilization.

Because there are few people to watch in this area, the amenities provided on the mall, and the nearby scenery, must take on greater importance in attracting pedestrians.

Two retail establishments provide activity which could

Photo 5.9 Trails through the snow show the most common route taken by students from Mathewson Street to McNulty Hall.

Photo 5.10 The RIPTA bus stop provides adequate sidewalk space, but little shelter to those who wait for the bus.

enhance the use of the mall. A magazine vendor occupies a permanent location adjacent to the street, and Saki's Pizza, in the Dyer Block, provides take-out food which may be eaten outdoors. Although these businesses constitute an important source of activity support for mall users, it is not enough. More food sources and a cleaner appearance are needed to draw a larger lunch time crowd.

To conclude, the Weybosset mall suffers from unmet potential. An inadequate number of people currently pass through the area, an inadequate number of food sources are immediately nearby, and inadequate sense of shelter or protection is provided for those who may wish to sit down and rest in a relatively inconspicuous location. In addition, poor maintenance and dilapidated buildings combine to give the area a blighted appearance.

RIPTA Bus Stop

A major R.I. Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) bus stop is located on the southern side of Weybosset Street, adjacent to the CWT store which is in the Outlet Broadcasting Building. It is discussed in this chapter because it is a part of the street's open space which receives moderate to heavy use throughout the day, and could greatly benefit from improvements.

As photo 5.11 shows, this bus stop is patronized predominantly by senior citizens. Quite a few who wait for the bus have bulky parcels from the Food Basket grocery store. Observations at this location suggest that the Food

Photo 5.11 This bus stop is heavily used by senior citizens.

Photo 5.12 This overhang provides moderate shelter, but is exposed to the north.

Basket serves a market which extends beyond the immediate downtown office market.

Several features of this location recommends its use as a bus stop. The building is set back quite a distance from the curb, leaving room for pedestrians who pass by as well as for those waiting to board the bus. A second story overhang extends about four feet over the sidewalk, providing modest shelter to those standing against the building. Many take advantage of this.

However, the overwhelming impact of this spot is bleak and windswept. Given the space available on the sidewalk and against the building, some seating should be provided, especially because of the older age of many bus stop patrons. It is possible that seating or shelter have not been provided because they would clutter the entrance route to the store or conflict with the stark smooth design of the building. However, the frequency of use, and characteristics of the users of this space suggest that a number of amenities would be appropriate for this location. These will be discussed in later sections of this report.

Summary

The three public spaces which have been discussed here each have great unmet potential. Abbot Park, as the oldest existing City Park, deserves more care than it currently receives. The Weybosset mall is in need of rehabilitation. The RIPTA bus stop provides a bare minimum of comfort to the senior citizens who spend time here. In Part II of this report, recommendations will address these concerns.

CHAPTER SIX

SIGNAGE

During the century or so that Weybosset Street has provided a setting for retail activity, the style of signage has evolved as technology and modes of transportation were improved. Photo 6.1 shows the street in the late 19th century, when commercial uses began to replace residential. Many small scale residential structures, located at what is now the Blue Cross Parking Deck, were converted for retail use. In the street's early retail days, modest advertising signs were painted on storefront awnings and on the front or sides of buildings. At that time, transportation, by foot or horse, progressed at a leisurely pace along the street, enabling the viewer to absorb all messages, no matter how modestly presented. In the photograph, signs appear integrated with the architecture, and do not overwhelm the architecture.

By the 20th century, the widespread use of both automobiles and electricity was to have a monumental impact on the size, design and placement of signs. Because of the increased speed of cars, signs were required to make a big impact in a small space of time. They were larger, brighter, and lighted with electricity. They were placed in new locations, and suspended away from the facades of buildings. Photo 6.1 shows the street around the start of the Depression. Pendant signs project from the Crown Hotel, YWCA, and restaurant on the right. Billboards are placed on the roofs of buildings, advertizing products not

for sale on the premises. A large sign advertizing furniture wraps completely around the cornice of another structure, completely obliterating the decorative detailing. In this picture, signs dominate the buildings, overwhelming and obliterating many fine architectural features.

Weybosset Street Today

Today, the street's overall appearance is significantly less cluttered with signs than in earlier times. An increased interest in historic preservation and the restoration of many buildings have created a sensitivity to sign scale, design, placement, and materials. These signs are most often found painted on the glass of the buildings storefront (Photo 6.2), or applied or painted to the buildings transom or cornice (Photo 6.3).

The street also has its share of inappropriate signs. These include signs which are applied to the upper facade of the building (Photo 6.4); signs which cover architectural or ornamental details (Photos 6.5 and 6.6); and oversized signs (Photo 6.7). It has also become fairly common to advertize through the use of placards or pedestal signs placed on the sidewalk. Although these signs add a touch of color and vitality to the streetscape, they interfere with pedestrian circulation as well as contributing to clutter at the sidewalk level. (Photo 6.8)

Many signs today have been created by private sign companies who mass produce signs which usually consist of a

translucent plastic box lit from within which may then be suspended or attached to a building. (Photo 6.6) These are fairly inexpensive, but seldom relate to the particulars of the business, building, or neighborhood.

Problems may also occur when a modest establishment locates in a storefront which formerly contained a more prosperous firm. This is the case in the Dyer Block. When earlier businesses left, they took their signs with them, leaving a vast expanse of brown metal armature, which does little for the building's appearance. (Photo 6.9). In other areas, signs pasted on the window glass take the place of storefront displays. (Photo 6.10).

The study area contains one billboard, shown in Photo 6.11. Located on the roof of a two story building, it stands out clearly from the sidewalk and combines with the structure's remodeled facade to create a visual conflict in between two historic structures..

Summary

The trend toward historic preservation has brought with it an increase of attractive signage which makes a positive contribution to the street. However, there are still problems to correct which will greatly improve the appearance of the street. Recommendations to ameliorate the problems identified in this section will be presented in Part II of this report.

Source: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Photo 6.1 A few decades ago, there were far more signs than may be found on the street today. This photo is c. 1929.

Photo 6.2 Historic preservation of buildings has brought a sensitivity to sign scale, design, placement, and material.

Photo 6.3 Asset: The signs on this restored structure are well done.

Photo 6.4 Liability: signs which are applied to the upper facade of buildings.

Photo 6.5 Liability: signs which cover architectural details.

Photo 6.6 Liability: signs which cover ornamental details; mass-produced "translucent box" signs.

Photo 6.7 Liability: oversized signs (Food Basket) and "translucent box" signs (Nautilus).

Photo 6.8 Liability: placard signs which interfere with pedestrean circulation.

Photo 6.9 Liability: Signs which are not large enough to cover supports remaining from previous large signs.

Photo 6.10 Liability: signs pasted onto store window glass.

Photo 6.11 Liability: Billboards.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PRESERVATION

Weybosset Street owes its character to its historic buildings, most of which were constructed prior to 1930. The historic importance of Downtown Providence as a center of commerce, particularly in the years after the Civil War and prior to the Depression, is evident in the fine commercial buildings which have been preserved. Unlike College Hill, internationally famous for its large collection of rehabilitated 18th and 19th century buildings, Downtown Providence has not been the target of an area-wide preservation strategy. The rehabilitation and renovation of old structures has been primarily due to the efforts of individual property owners and the efforts of the Providence Preservation Society. The Preservation Society has encouraged public appreciation of the downtown area through seminars and programs to promote an interest and awareness of Providence historic architecture..

Weybosset Street has greatly benefitted from the upkeep and/or rehabilitation of several of its historic buildings. (See Photos 7.1-7.6)

Weybosset Street is by no means the only part of Downtown Providence worthy of serious preservation efforts; however, it is one of the most important because the street reflects the City's earliest commercial days.

National Register Buildings

A total of 14 structures within the study area on

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

MAP 7.1 NATIONAL REGISTER BUILDINGS

- 1 - ABBOT PARK (1746)
- 2 - BENEVOLENT CONGREGATIONAL "ROUND TOP" CHURCH (1809)
- 3 - PLANTATIONS CLUB (1926)
- 4 - SUMMERFIELD BUILDING (1913)
- 5 - RICHMOND BUILDING (1876)
- 6 - ABBOT PARK HOTEL (1902)
- 7 - LEOW'S THEATRE (1928)

- 8 - BENJAMIN DYER BLOCK (1820)
- 9 - WEYBOSSET STREET COMFORT STATION (1913)
- 10 - BUSH COMPANY BUILDING (1873)
- 11 - PROVIDENCE ATHELETIC ASSOCIATION (1894)
- 12 - STEPHEN WATERMAN HOUSE (1823)
- 13 - OUTLET COMPANY (1891)
- 14 - SECOND UNIVERSALIST CHURCH (1847)

Photo 7.1 Asset: the Richmond Building (1876).

Photo 7.2 Asset: The Roundtop Congregational Church (1809).

Photo 7.3 Asset: Corner of Dorrance and Weybosset Street.

Photo 7.4 Asset: the Summerfield Building (1913).

Photo 7.5 Asset: Leowe's Theatre (1928), now Providence Performing Arts Center.

Photo 7.6 Asset: west facade, Leowe's Theatre.

Weybosset Street are listed in the National Register. These are identified in Map 7.1. "Entry on the National Register assures that the property will not be altered or destroyed by federally funded or licensed projects without careful consideration by the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. National Register listing does not require the owner of the listed property to preserve or maintain the property." (Woodward and Sanderson, 1986.)

National Register status is granted to buildings having significant historical or archeological value, and which are determined to be of national, state, or local significance and are worthy of preservation and consideration in planning and development decisions.

Survey of Buildings

The preservation analysis will focus on structures on Weybosset Street which currently do not meet their full potential in contributing to the historic character of the street. To facilitate identification of these structures, the buildings which line Weybosset Street have been categorized according to building type as follows:

Type A - HISTORIC - buildings distinguished by consistent design from an architectural style or period of the past, which is native to the CBD, community, and/or region.

TYPE B - DEFACED - a type 'A' building partially covered or remodeled, thereby obscuring or omitting original historic detailing.

TYPE C - UNDISTINGUISHED - characterless, plain buildings, generally without historic styling, but traditional in proportion and architectural details.

TYPE D - FOREIGN - buildings with strong character or design features, yet out of harmony with the street character because of foreign materials, style, form, etc.

The above four categories are adapted from Berk (1976).

The Map 7.2 depicts the results of the survey. Of the 33 buildings on Weybosset Street in the study area, 14 fall within type 'A'; 13 within type 'B'; 4 within type 'C'; and 2 within type 'D.' This illustrates the consistently historic nature of the street.

In addition, general building condition was noted and appears on the same map. Buildings were rated numerically:

- 1 - 'good'
- 2 - 'fair'
- 3 - 'poor'

The combination of historic structure rating and condition enable the analyst to prioritize areas which are in most immediate need of historic rehabilitation. For example, an A3 building, (historic and in poor condition) should be targeted for assistance before a C3 building (undistinguished and in poor condition). It must be understood that this system of priorities is totally based on the value of the structure as it contributes to the historic character of the district's streetscape. All other considerations (economic, social, fiscal, etc.) relating to a building's function do not enter into this analysis.

If it were possible to prioritize repairs or renovation needed within the study area, the order of

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

MAP 7.2 HISTORIC BUILDING TYPE AND CONDITION

	TYPE A - HISTORIC
	TYPE B - DEFACED (HISTORIC)
	TYPE C - UNDISTINGUISHED
	TYPE D - FOREIGN

CONDITION:

1	- GOOD
2	- FAIR
3	- POOR

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 7.3 HISTORIC REHAB TARGET ZONES

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

- ZONE 1 - THE OUTLET COMPANY**
- ZONE 2 - THE DYER BLOCK AND COMFORT STATION**
- ZONE 3 - THE ABBOT PARK HOTEL BLOCK**
- ZONE 4 - THE SECOND UNIVERSALIST CHURCH BLOCK**

priority would follow the following categories which appear on the map: A3, B3, A2, B2, B1, C1. Buildings having the highest priority ratings tend to occur in clusters. These are identified in Map 7.3. Called 'Historic Rehab Target Zones,' these are key areas which must be addressed in the preservation of the historic streetscape and revitalization of the area.

Zone 1 - The Outlet Company

The Outlet Building, ravaged by fire and exposed to the elements inside as well as out, is in immediate need of attention. (Photos 7.7, 7.8) It is forthcoming. Historic Landmarks for Living, a Philadelphia based preservation development firm, will soon begin a complete rehabilitation of the structure, which will contain 290 upscale residential units and office and retail at the street level.

Zone 2 - The Dyer Block and Comfort Station

The rehabilitation of this structure is of critical importance to the street. Occupying an entire city block between Clemence and Mathewson Streets, the building lies adjacent to the Weybosset Mall, an architecturally designed open space discussed at length in Chapter 5. The building, originally a residential row house, is one of the oldest remaining structures in the CBD, built in 1820 by John Holden Greene, a famous Providence architect-builder of the Federal period. (Photos 7.9, 7.11)

The entire eastern half of the building was updated

Photo 7.7 The Outlet Building, today.

Source: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Photo 7.8 The Outlet Building, in happier times.

Photo 7.9 The Dyer Block, today.

Photo 7.10 The Weybosset Street Comfort Station, today.

Source: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Photo 7.11 The Dyer Block, as built.

Photo 7.12 The Weybosset Comfort Station, c.1915.

in the 1880's, giving it a Second Empire Style. The building's street level facade has long been converted to storefronts which have been altered over the years. Currently, the street level of this building reveals none of its historic past. Shown in Photo 7.9, the skeletal remains of previous signs and establishments present a brown, bleak, and depressing view to the street.

The Weybosset Comfort Station, once a valuable public amenity, has been boarded up for years. (Photo 7.10) The intricate leaded glass of its windows remains largely intact. Its other windows are boarded and barred, and provide an excellent location for graffiti. As seen in photo 7.12, it was once a graceful little building. In its present condition, it contributes to the overall deteriorated quality of this city block.

Zone 3 - The Abbot Park Hotel Block

This block of four buildings has lain vacant for several years, awaiting sale and redevelopment. Photos 7.14 and 7.15 show the Champlin Building (most recently the Paris Theatre), in 1905 and as it is today. The original storefront in this structure is truly grand.

At the other end of this group of buildings is the Abbot Park Hotel. This structure has many broken windows and, as Photo 7.16 shows, the building has a wealth of architectural and ornamental detail which is deteriorating.

The two inner structures in this block are three-story office buildings. The white building dates prior to 1874

Photo 7.13 Preservation Rehab Target Zone 3: the Abbot Park Hotel Block.

Photo 7.14 The Champlin Building, today.

Source: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Photo 7.15 The Champlin Building, showing original storefront.

Photo 7.16 This detail illustrates the fine architectural features which have been allowed to deteriorate in the Abbot Park Hotel.

and the larger structure to 1905. These two structures are valuable "background buildings" in that they incorporate those characteristics identified in Chapter 6 as integral elements contributing to the character of the street: human scale, sidewalk line set back; rhythm, modest height, and building materials which are in sympathy with adjacent structures. All buildings on a street should not be primadonnas. It is important for some to provide a background function, so that others may shine.

It has been mentioned that this block of buildings await redevelopment. It is hoped that preservation, not demolition, will be their fate. As photo 7.17 illustrates, this block marks the western edge of the Weybosset historic retail district. Immediately west of the Champlin Building is the Blue Cross Parking Lot. In the background to the left of center, the new Blue Cross Office Building can be seen. It has a different character altogether. To maintain the character of the Weybosset retail district, and the historic ambiance of Abbot Park which lies across the street, it is essential that these structures be preserved.

Zone 4 - The Second Universalist Church Block

The block of buildings located on the north side of Weybosset Street between Union and Eddy streets contains four historic structures which have been modernized over the years, particularly at the street level. (Photos 7.18-7.22) The Second Universalist Church is the most altered of the four. Photos 7.21 and 7.22 show the building as it appeared in 1885 and 1888. Its tall arched

Photo 7.17 The Abbot Park Hotel Block is the northwest boundary of the historic Weybosset Retail District. See the contemporary Blue Cross building in the distance.

Photo 7.18 Brown paint has been employed to cover many historic structural features in the Ross Simons Building.

Photo 7.19 Upper story windows have been filled in, and aluminum and tile veneer have been employed in attempts to update this storefront.

Photo 7.20 The Ross Simons storefront is attractive, but does not enhance the historic character of the building.

Photo 7.21 The Second Universalist Church, today.

Source: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Photo 7.22 The Second Universalist Church, c. 1880.

windows have been bricked in on the front and side walls. Aluminum architectural details, tile veneer, and large plate glass windows add to the nondescript character the building has been forced to assume over the years. An assortment of pendant signs protrude from the side wall on Eddy Street.

The next building in this group contains the Food Basket grocery store, shown in Photo 6.6. Individuals who take the time to look up over the huge sign will see some beautiful egyptoid architectural details. These along with the fine detail at the building's cornice, are in poor condition. At the street level, the bold brown and yellow of the Food Basket sign are in conflict with the sensitive architectural detailing of this structure.

The Ross Simons building (Photo 7.23) is one of the more successful income producers on the street. It has been renovated on the interior and is fully leased. The street level storefront containing a jewelry store is in excellent condition, although contemporary in style. The building's upper stories are in good condition; however, brown paint has been employed in an attempt to cover the vertical architectural features which mark this building as belonging to an earlier era.

The use of brown paint and brown sheet metal seems to be popular with other study area property owners who wish to "modernize" their buildings. As Photos 7.24 and 7.25 illustrate, the Axlerod and the Children's Friend and Service buildings each have been defaced with brown metal which

Photo 7.23 The Ross Simons Building.

Photo 7.24 Brown sheet metal and plate glass have been used in attempts to modernize the Axlerod Building facade.

Photo 7.25 This storefront has been filled in with the same unattractive material as the Axlerod Building

Photo 7.26 Poor maintenance is evident in both the interior and exterior of the Heddison Building.

Photo 7.27 Garishly modern street furniture and a storefront which has been significantly filled-in obscure the historic potential of the Heddison Building at street level.

Photo 7.28 Preservation Nightmare: the Stephen Waterman House today.

Source: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Photo 7.29 The Stephen Waterman House, as built.

covers their original architectural details.

The last building in this zone is the Heddison Building. This building suffers from neglect in its upper stories, an abundance of street furniture (Photo 7.27), and contemporary storefronts at the street level. Note the grand entrance to this structure in Photo 4.21. Fine details such as these have an impact which is, unfortunately, secondary to the brightly handpainted signs and proliferation of verbal messages on the side of the building.

Summary

Weybosset Street contains many fine historic buildings. Many have been restored, bringing increased vitality and beauty to the street. More work remains to be done, however, in order for the street to meet its full potential as a historic showcase. Steps must be taken to protect and rehabilitate the buildings. Preservation "nightmares" such as the transformation of the Stephen Waterman House, Photos 7.29 and 7.30, should never occur again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ACTIVITY SUPPORT

Activity support refers to those things in an urban environment which enhance or promote the human activities which take place or are intended to occur. For example, people like to sit down to eat. The presence of street vendors on or nearby a plaza or other public space will increase the use of the space by individuals who purchase food from them. The vendor, therefore, provides activity support to the plaza.

Pedestrians like to window shop and, if forced to choose between several routes to a destination, are likely to choose the route which provides visual interest. Window displays are, therefore, an activity support for pedestrian activity.

Within the context of this study, the section discussing activity support will focus on those storefront attributes and activities which will attract pedestrians, the goal being to enhance conditions along the sidewalk so that more pedestrians enter the study area, and, once there, remain for a longer period of time.

Activity support is also critical to the success of public open space. This has been discussed in the Open Space chapter of this report.

Street Level Land Use

The land use at street level has a major effect on pedestrian activity. As discussed in Chapter One, offices provide the greatest source of pedestrians in the CBD.

Most pedestrian activity occurs during the coffee break and luncheon hours of the day, roughly between 10 AM and 2 PM. Eating and drinking places and an assortment of retail stores are most often the destination of pedestrian trips. Map 8.1 identifies the varied street level land uses throughout the study area. In general, the study area storefronts which will have the greatest impact on pedestrian activity are those identified with the letter 'r'; in particular, miscellaneous retail (r-m); eating and drinking places (r-e); and clothing and accessories (r-c). These are the most likely destination for a noon hour stroll.

As the map shows, the highest concentration of retail establishments on Weybosset Street is between Matthewson and Dorrance, where thirteen retail stores are located. It is not surprising that this area receives relatively heavy pedestrian traffic. Matthewson, Richmond and Union Streets also have a good share of the study area's retail activity. Matthewson is heavily travelled by Johnson and Wales students.

At night, it is the pubs which are the most likely to generate pedestrian activity. Within the study area, these are generally geared to the nearby resident student population, and do not bring a significant number of individuals into the CBD from other parts of the City or state. The Ocean State Performing Arts Center is one of the biggest nighttime draws to downtown Providence.

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 8.1 STOREFRONT LANDUSE ACTIVITIES

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

rf> RETAIL - FOOD AND DRINK PRODUCTS
 rm> RETAIL - MISCELLANEOUS
 re> RETAIL - EATING AND DRINKING PLACES
 rc> RETAIL - CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES
 sm> SERVICES - MISCELLANEOUS
 sf> SERVICES - FINANCIAL

ss> SERVICES - SOCIAL
 c> COLLEGE
 v> VACANT
 p> PARKING
 o> OFFICE
 a> CULTURAL/ARTS

Unfortunately, shows are not frequent enough to encourage upscale restaurants to locate in the blocks nearby.

Window Shopping

Window shopping is closely tied to retail land use. However, many retail establishments do not fully meet their potential relative to window shopping. The window shopping opportunities in the study area range from excellent to poor. Aside from window shopping, pedestrians may also derive recreational benefit from views through the large shopfront windows to building interiors. Map 8.2 presents building frontage and window storefronts ranked according to the recreational/activity support they provide to pedestrians. Each building face adjacent to the sidewalk was graded from excellent to poor, depending upon the quality of storefront displays and visual access to interiors.

As might be expected, the retail stores generally provide the best activity support along the sidewalk. However, many shops have not made maximum use of their window display area. Problems include paper signs posted on window glass (Photo 8.1); inappropriate display surfaces such as unfinished chipboard (Photo 8.2); and an inadequate amount of merchandise on display relative to the window space (Photo 8.3)

Many of the rehabilitated historic structures along Weybosset Street now house offices at the street level. These businesses make an important contribution to the

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY CPAD - URI
 MAP 8.2 VISUAL ACCESS INTO BUILDINGS/STOREFRONTS

scale 1" = 160'

- PEDESTRIAN WAY
- ▨ EXCELLENT VISUAL ACCESS OR WINDOW SHOPPING
- ▤ SOME VISUAL ACCESS
- NO VISUAL ACCESS

Photo 8.1 Paper signs posted on window glass interfere with visual access to building interiors.

Photo 8.2 This budget conscious display involves a rather heavy-handed use of unfinished chipboard.

economy and survival of the street, but, contribute little towards the vitality of the street. For the most part, the large shop windows are filled with a white expanse of curtains or blinds. There is nothing for a pedestrian to look at. One exception to this is an architectural firm recently located at the intersection of Pine and Richmond. This business utilizes the large window as a display area for artistic installations which cause pedestrians to stop and spend some time in recreational viewing.

Summary: A Noonday Stroll

Retail land use along the sidewalk is a strong support for pedestrian circulation. In general, the blocks closest to the Financial District - from Union to Dorrance - contain the most retail activity. This is good, because they may act as a draw to lure pedestrians to the study area from the more-active Financial District. Individuals taking a noon day stroll after a lunch at the Arcade may start westward on Weybosset Street. At Dorrance Street there is no pedestrian signal to aid street crossing. At this point, some individuals may turn right onto Dorrance, then travel to Westminster where a flamboyant policeman stops traffic for pedestrians. He is a major source of entertainment in the CBD.

If one risks the intersection and continues on Weybosset Street, s/he is rewarded with a block of retail shops, illustrated in Photo 12.1, which provides window shopping and browsing opportunities. The next block also

Photo 8.3 This window display does not contain enough merchandise to attract persons from a distance.

Photo 8.4 Blinds are boring to look at.

contains clothing accessories and jewelry to view. After passing Union Street things begin to thin out. Some individuals will prefer to stroll down Union Street, which provides a retail corridor leading to Westminster Street.

The Dunkin' Donut shop, adjacent bar/deli with darkened windows, and parking lot at Clemence Street do not provide strong activity support for pedestrians. Nor does the Dyer Block. When one arrives at Mathewson Street, the long expanse of the Shopper's Arcade Garage presents a boring facade. To the left, one might consider crossing Weybosset and traveling down Richmond Street, but it does not look promising from Weybosset. No signal is provided to assist a pedestrian in crossing the street at this point.

Looking to the right down Mathewson Street, one can see heavier pedestrian activity, bright storefront displays, and, a block down at Westminster Street, a hot dog vendor. It seems likely that, at this point, Weybosset Street will lose its hold on the stroller, who leaves to pursue more interesting views.

This hypothetical pedestrian trip has been provided to illustrate the potential effect of window shopping, views down side streets, and street crossings upon the routes chosen by pedestrians who are walking with no particular destination in mind. Of course, if a window display looks particularly interesting, there is an excellent chance that one will enter a store. This is a major objective. The

continued survival and financial health of the district's existing establishments will be critical to the improvement of the business climate and to attract more businesses to the downtown area.

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

What follows is a concise summary of the primary assets and liabilities which have come to light during the preceding analysis. It must be emphasized that, in this context, liabilities are areas which hold the greatest potential for improvement. They should not be viewed as buildings, street furniture, etc, to be removed from the study area.

Land Use

Assets:

- The study area lies at the junction of several different land use districts in Downtown Providence.
- Many different uses are permitted in a C-3 zone, which characterizes the study area.
- Johnson and Wales provides important residential land use within the study area.

Liabilities:

- Many buildings have vacant or underutilized upper stories.
- Parking lots which dominate the area south and west of the study area are not major generators of pedestrians.
- Vacant buildings contribute significantly to a blighted or forgotten image.

Pedestrian Circulation

Assets:

- Blocks are short, providing a large number of choices of side streets which may be utilized to walk north or south from Weybosset Street.
- Brick pavers create excellent crosswalks along Weybosset Street.
- Wide sidewalks on Weybosset Street easily accomodate the current levels of pedestrian flow.
- Johnson and Wales students provide needed pedestrian activity in the western end of the study area.

Liabilities:

- Pedestrian crossing signals are not operative at major intersections.
- There is a lack of crosswalks to assist in crossing Weybosset Street.
- Street furniture is visually unattractive, and interferes with pedestrian flows.
- There are no benches in the study area.
- Vehicular access to parking lots and garages across sidewalks presents a significant hazard to pedestrians.

Vehicular Circulation

Assets:

- Weybosset Street provides a major route into the City from South Providence; it is not interrupted by

the Interstate I-95.

-- The wide width of Weybosset Street provides two lanes for vehicular travel.

-- The short length of streets and lack of continuity slows the speed at which cars may travel, making the area safer for pedestrians.

-- The Roundtop Church parking lot is a major asset along the western border of the study area because of the greenspace and seating it provides.

-- The lemonade truck which locates in the Clemence Street lot in summertime provides an amenity to the public.

Liabilities:

-- There is a serious shortage of traffic signs on Pine Street.

-- The style, color, and placement of traffic signs is not consistent throughout the study area, making them more difficult to find.

-- Surface lots, particularly Silva's Parking Station and the Clemence Street lot, are obviously "leftover space" remaining after demolition of buildings.

-- There are no buffers to screen unpleasant views of parking lots from the sidewalk.

-- Illegal and overtime parking is more often the norm than the exception.

Streetscape Architecture:

Assets:

- Low to moderate building height allows sunlight to reach the sidewalk throughout the day and creates a human scale in the district.
- An emphasis on vertical proportions in the historic structures contributes to the urban character of the area and links structures visually down the length of the street.
- Flat building faces, and a sidewalk build-to line, provide a good wall to contain the space of the "exterior room," and facilitate window shopping from the sidewalk.
- A rich variety of building ornamentation provides visual interest and reduces the apparent size of buildings, making them more human in scale.
- The emphasis on the historic structures' cornice line assists in creating a sense of enclosed street space, and is a strong identifying characteristic of study area buildings.
- The rich colors and variety of textures creates a diverse atmosphere and friendly streetscape.
- The repetition of windows and other architectural features creates rhythm from structure to structure to assist pedestrians in gauging distances down the street.

Liabilities:

-- Broadcast House and the Shopper's Arcade Garage are two buildings which seriously conflict with their neighbors, and weaken the cohesive historical character along Weybosset Street.

-- Banes and Company is a conflicting structure.

However, because it is modest in proportion it has a less significant impact than the previously mentioned buildings.

Open Space

Abbot Park Assets:

-- The Park provides a strong sense of enclosure and tranquility because of its set back from the street.

-- It is surrounded by well kept historic structures.

-- The adjacent Johnson and Wales facilities provide a nearby source of park users and people to watch..

-- The park is listed on the National Register.

-- An ornate fountain provides a focal point in the park's center.

Abbot Park Liabilities:

-- There is inadequate seating, and two of the three existing benches are not oriented toward the sidewalk, which provides the major source of entertainment.

-- The fountain does not work.

-- Cars travel through Abbot Park Place and use it to park, diminishing the value of the area as a "getaway" for pedestrians and posing a significant hazard.

- The ground is bare. No grass is in the landscaped area to encourage people to sit on the ground.
- There is no food source adjacent to the park.

Weybosset Mall Assets:

- Because it is on the south side of the Dyer Block, the mall receives sun throughout the day.
- The wide sidewalk leaves room for a variety of activities in addition to the pedestrian travel lane.
- Several planters provide a variety of seating choices with regard to orientation to the sun and view.
- The mall falls within a more retail-dominated part of the study area, and therefore receives pedestrian traffic throughout the day.
- Saki's Pizza is an on-site food source.
- The Comfort Station is a unique structure with strong redevelopment potential.
- The magazine vendor provides an additional activity for leisure on the mall.
- The Dyer Block is an important historic structure by John Holden Greene, an important Federal Period architect/builder.

Weybosset Mall Liabilities:

- It is an exposed, poorly defined space, having a weak sense of exterior room.
- There is a significant lack of maintenance in the planters, with regard to both planting and pruning of

vegetation.

-- Both the Dyer Block and the Comfort Station are severely dilapidated structures, giving the mall a blighted atmosphere.

RIPTA Bus Stop Assets:

-- There is room on the sidewalk for persons and activity aside from the pedestrian travel lane.

-- The stop is nearby an important retail block, including the Food Basket grocery store. This provides excellent people-watching to entertain persons who wait for the bus.

-- It is a major bus stop and therefore acts to draw some persons into the study area.

-- The building overhangs the sidewalk, creating a slight shelter, to provide a perceived, if not actual sense of protection from the elements.

RIPTA Bus Stop Liabilities:

-- There is no place to sit.

-- The most commonly utilized waiting area is in the shade on the north side of the building, a very cold spot in the winter.

-- The building is stark and unfriendly.

Signage

Assets:

-- Many buildings have undergone historic restoration and contain signs which have been designed to integrate, in terms of color, materials, design, and

placement, with the buildings on which they are placed.

Liabilities:

- The Fred Astaire dance studio sign is located on the upper facade of the Dyer Block.
- Signs should not cover architectural details.
- Plackard and pedestal signs on sidewalk significantly reduce the space available for pedestrian circulation.
- Inexpensive white "plastic box" signs, lighted from within, are not consistent with the historic character of the district.
- The billboard mounted on the Banes and Company building does not enhance the historic character of the buildings on either side.

Preservation

Assets:

- Weybosset Street and the surrounding area contains a large inventory of historic structures which provide a competitive asset in marketing the area to shoppers and to businesses.
- Many of the buildings on Weybosset Street are well maintained and/or restored.

Liabilities:

- Several structures are in desperate need of maintenance, repairs, and rehabilitation. The following Weybosset Street buildings are most in need

of exterior renovation/restoration:

The Outlet Company

The Dyer Block

The (entire) Abbot Park Hotel Block

The Heddison Building

The Food Basket

The Second Universalist Church Building

The Weybosset Street Comfort Station

Activity Support

Assets:

-- The northeast section of the study area contains good retail stores and window shopping to lure pedestrians from other parts of the downtown.

-- Richmond and Mathewson streets contain an increasing amount of retail shops, suggesting that they will strengthen the study area's linkage to other parts of the City.

-- Compared to other streets in downtown Providence, there are relatively few vacant storefronts on Weybosset Street.

-- The historic structures which dominate the area contain storefronts with large windows to facilitate display of goods to the public.

Liabilities:

-- In western portions of the study area, ground floor office uses use curtains and blinds to screen their interiors from public view.

-- Service alleys connecting different commercial areas to one another generally contain blank walls or filled windows in addition to garbage to intimidate pedestrians who may wish to pass through.

-- Many of the shops located in the study area have an inadequate amount of goods on display relative to the amount of display area provided in the storefront.

THE URBAN DESIGN PLAN

INTRODUCTION

In Part I of this report, the analysis of existing conditions has highlighted assets as well as problem areas which will provide the basis for proposals and recommendations to improve the Weybosset Retail District. The three primary goals of this Urban Design Plan are to attract more people into the study area; to improve the street life within the area, so that once there, people will remain longer; and to preserve and enhance the factors which contribute to the historic character of the street. As time passes, the importance of the historic buildings will become increasingly evident and useful as a marketing tool. The premise of this report is that urban design improvements based upon comprehensive analysis can provide the initial thrust to attain these goals of preservation and revitalization.

The proposals and recommendations presented here have been arranged into three groups, corresponding to the three principal goals:

- I: To attract more people into the study area
- II: To improve the street life and to keep people in the study area for a longer period of time
- III: To preserve and enhance the historic character of the study area

Each group will address problems which have been identified in the preceeding analysis. The recommendations include specific implementation strategies which address the original eight principal elements of urban design as set forth in Part One.

I: RECOMMENDATIONS

TO ATTRACT MORE PEOPLE INTO THE STUDY AREA

LAND USE

Problem: Upper floors of several buildings are underutilized. Aside from lost income to property owners, this vacant space represents a lost source of pedestrians who might work or live within the study area.

Recommendation: Encourage rehabilitation and occupancy of upper floors for both office and residential use. (Map 10.1) The City should conduct a study to determine why upper floors are vacant.

Problem: There is an inadequate amount of retail to give the study area an overall image as a "shopping district." Once out of the northeast section of the study area, institutional, office, and vacant space predominates. These uses are not a major destination for pedestrians during lunch hour, currently the most important time of day for pedestrian activity in Downtown Providence.

Recommendation: Induce more retail to locate on Weybosset Street and on side streets, particularly in western sections.

Project: Downtown Retail Market Study

The City should conduct a retail market study for the downtown commercial district to assess the actual potential for an increase in retail uses in the study area, and in the downtown as a whole. At a minimum, the project should include the following components:

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 10.1 UNDERUTILIZED UPPER FLOORS

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

north

(1) Assessment of primary market. existing and future. This would include downtown office workers, students, and, in the future, convention goers. It may be that retailers are unaware of the concentration of persons within a small radius of the downtown core.

(2) Inventory of all retail space. This is important in matching available spaces to potential business tenants.

(3) Survey of primary market population. This will enable the City to gather primary data relative to market demand.

(4) Contact retail representatives. Send them a concise report detailing the findings of steps one through three, as well as information describing the City in general, and financial incentives available to business who locate in the City.

In this project, emphasis would be on Step 4, an aggressive marketing campaign to acquaint retailers with what the City has to offer.

STREET SIGNAGE

Problem: Vehicles on the Pine Street Ring Road are not provided with adequate signs to identify streets.

Recommendation: At a minimum, all intersections should have signs which identify street names.

Problem: No signs exist to inform motorists or pedestrians who enter the area that they are in a special place. There

is no sense of "districtness."

Recommendation: Street signs could be designed to include district identification as well as street identification. (See Exhibit 10.1)

PRESERVATION

Problem: Deteriorated and vacant buildings create an appearance of decay which does not encourage individuals to enter the area. Some of these buildings, the Outlet Company and the Abbot Park Hotel Block, lie near important intersections where the sight of boarded up old buildings may act as a significant deterrent to pedestrians.

Recommendation: Rehabilitation of these structures should be targeted as an immediate priority. (See, Map 10.2) The Outlet has been severely damaged by fire; however, it retains its original features. Plans are well underway by a respected preservation developer who is committed to a certified rehabilitation of this building in order to develop 290 luxury apartments; therefore, recommendations for facade treatment, etc. are not felt to be necessary here.

The City should encourage the owners of the Abbot Park Hotel Block to either sell or develop the property in the near future. Because of the strong contribution these buildings make to the historic streetscape in the study area, their preservation, and not demolition, will play a major role in

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 10.2 PRESERVATION REHAB PRIORITIES

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

- 1 - THE OUTLET COMPANY
- 2 - THE SECOND UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
- 3 - THE FOOD BASKET
- 4 - THE HEDDISON BUILDING
- 5 - THE DYER BLOCK
- 6 - THE WEYBOSSET STREET COMFORT STATION
- 7 - THE (ENTIRE) ABBOT PARK HOTEL BLOCK

redevelopment of the entire block, including the area which now contains the Blue Cross parking lot. This report strongly endorses the residential/commercial project proposed in the Carr-Lynch 1986 "Downtown Development Strategy," shown in Exhibit 10.2. In this development, new buildings have been designed to integrate with existing buildings. They contribute positively to the historic character of the area because they incorporate many characteristics which are common to historic buildings on the street, discussed in "Streetscape Architecture." If possible, the storefront of the Champlin Building should be restored to its original condition as shown in Photo 7.15.

Problem: Remodeled facades, particularly at the sidewalk level, conflict with the historic character which has in many cases survived in the upper floors of buildings.

(Exhibit 10.3.)

Recommendation: If a complete structural rehabilitation is not feasible, recent additions such as tile veneer, sheet metal panelling, and plastic signs should be removed and storefronts restored to their original configuration. Map 10.3 depicts commercial storefronts on Weybosset Street which require moderate to extensive renovation to restore their original character.

Problem: The Weybosset Street Comfort Station, in its present dilapidated and vacant state, does not play an

Exhibit 10.1 Signs should identify the district as well as street name.

Exhibit 10.2 This recommended infill/restoration project proposed by Carr, Lynch Associates, Inc, (1986), integrates well with the indigenous architecture, incorporating many characteristics which are common to historic buildings on the street, including uniform sidewalk line setback, rhythmic repetition of structural elements in the facade, street level retail, and traditionally designed storefronts. (Source: Providence Development Strategy, Carr, Lynch Associates, Inc., March 1986.)

Exhibit 10.3 Remodeled facades, particularly at the sidewalk level, conflict with the historic character which often survives in a building's upper stories. (Source: Zuccelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984.)

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 10.3 STOREFRONT REHAB PRIORITIES

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

active role in the district's street life.

Recommendation: The Comfort Station should be restored and returned to its original use as public restrooms. As such, it could play a significant role in attracting people to the area. In Providence, as in many cities, there is a dearth of public rest facilities. For someone who comes downtown to shop, there is only one public restroom, on the third floor of the Arcade. Smaller specialty stores and boutiques downtown do not offer this amenity. One should not have to go into a restaurant and purchase food in order to have access to a restroom. To address concerns of security and over use of the facility by "undesirables," the City might explore the feasibility of employing a full time attendant.

STOREFRONT SIGNAGE

Problem: Inappropriate signs mask the charm inherent in many of the historic buildings on Weybosset Street, making the area as a whole less attractive. (Photo 10.1)

Recommendation: Incompatable signs should be replaced with signs which integrate with their host structures in terms of color, design, and placement. Exhibit 10.4 illustrates that simple sign changes and removal of a fire escape at the storefront cornice could significantly improve a Weybosset Street storefront.

Photo 10.1 Existing signage and fire escape mask much of the charm inherent in this facade.

Exhibit 10.4 After modest improvements, the facade contributes to the historic character of the street.

STREET CROSSINGS

Problem: Pedestrian entry into the study area on Weybosset Street is hampered by intimidating street crossings at both east and west entry points, where the obvious vehicular right-of-way at both Dorrance and Empire streets presents a serious hazard to pedestrians. (See Map 10.4)

Recommendation 1: Pedestrian crossing signals should be placed in service at the intersection of Dorrance and Weybosset streets and at the intersection of Empire and Weybosset streets.

Recommendation 2: At the intersection of Empire and Weybosset Streets, the crosswalk should be emphasized by raising it slightly above grade, and its area filled in with a series of heavy stripes instead of the simple outline currently employed.

Recommendation 3: A "No Right Turn on Red" sign should be installed on Empire at the Weybosset intersection, where vehicles turn right without coming to a complete stop. The right turn on red privilege causes problems for pedestrians throughout the City. It would be appropriate to develop standards based on pedestrian populations and traffic volume, which would establish when a right turn on red is not appropriate.

ACTIVITY SUPPORT

Problem: With the exception of the Providence Performing Arts Center, there are no programmed festivities to attract people from outside the immediate area.

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 10.4 PEDESTRIAN STREET CROSSING

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

- PROPOSED CROSSWALK
- CROSSING SIGNAL

Recommendation 1: Encourage formation of a Weybosset Street Merchants' Association to plan programmed events, street fairs, sidewalk sales, etc.

Recommendation 2: On weekends, when demand for parking is lower, utilize a surface parking area to hold a farmers market or flea market.

Project: The Read Street Market

Bordered on three sides by buildings, the enclosed space of Silva's Parking Station could contain a festive market on Saturday or Sunday mornings. See, Exhibits 10.5 and 10.6. The area could be made more attractive in several ways. The bare rear walls of the adjacent structures should be decorated by planting ivy or painted murals. At the point where the lot abutts the sidewalk on Richmond Street, a hedge and trees will buffer parked cars from view during the week. On weekends, the arched gateway at the lot's entrance will provide a celebration of entry, and also control access so that admission may be charged during special events. A calender could be posted nearby to inform office workers and other weekday downtown residents of weekend festivities they may wish to attend.

Problem: Clemence Street, an alley connecting Weybosset to Westminster Street, is dark, poorly maintained, and flanked by blank or bricked-in walls. This significantly reduces its potential linkage value.

Exhibit 10.5 Existing: Silva's Parking Station is located in "leftover space" remaining after building demolition.

Exhibit 10.6 Proposed: The Read Street Market is buffered by a hedge and trees. A decorative entrance and building murals contribute to the site's festive appeal.

Photo 10.2 Clemence Street is an alley which has an attractive European character which is not completely masked by its unkempt condition. It contains unmet potential as a pedestrian way.

Recommendation: The alley, because of its location in the study area, should be upgraded to encourage pedestrian traffic.

Windows which are currently bricked in should be opened to allow visual access into buildings. If buildings are used for storage, trompe d'oeil murals might be painted within window spaces. To make the alley safer at night, small white lights could be strung between Weybosset and Westminster Street to illuminate the area. This particular alley is important because of its proximity to the Dyer Block, the site of major improvements described later in this report, and because it has the potential to become a major Johnson and Wales pedestrian path.

Two commercial establishments currently serving Johnson and Wales students are located here: Ye College Pub and the Pub Laundrette. Photo 10.2 illustrates that the inherent charm of the building and alley cannot even be masked by exterior renovations and the adjacent parking lot. Future plans might include utilization of this lot and opening up the bricked-in walls within the alley for additional food/drink retail.

VEHICULAR CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Problem: Street parking is used by downtown employees and other long term users, thereby limiting the spaces available for short term shoppers' use.

Recommendation: The City should eliminate parking before 10 AM; and tag all cars which park between eight and ten. Thereafter, one to two hour parking limits should be strictly enforced.

be strictly enforced.

Problem: The cost of parking in lots or structures deters many shoppers from coming downtown by car to shop.

Recommendation: The feasibility of an incentive program to provide short term free parking with merchants validation should be seriously considered by the Weybosset or Downtown Merchants' Associations.

II: RECOMMENDATIONS

TO IMPROVE THE STREET LIFE

Once a pedestrian enters the Weybosset Retail District, a variety of factors influence the amount of time spent there, and the quality of that time.

ACTIVITY SUPPORT

Problem: There is little continuity of window shopping to lead pedestrians south or westward into the study area from the retail concentration at its northeast corner.

Recommendation 1: Based upon the market research discussed in the previous section, retail activities should be encouraged to locate in central and western portions of the study area.

Recommendation 2: Whenever possible, all storefronts should be designed to maximize display of goods to browsing pedestrians. Prohibit storefront businesses from blocking interior views from the sidewalk.

"Window displays, people in restaurants, even a glimpse into a working office are all part of the visual stimuli that are unique to the urban experience." (Cook, 1980)

Recommendation 3: Retrofit the Shopper's Arcade Garage to include small retail shops along Weybosset Street.

Project: Re-Design of Shopper's Arcade Garage

This project will benefit the study area by addressing several of the building's problems

identified in Part I of this report. (Exhibit 11.1) The new facade, with pilasters and arches, will emphasize the vertical, rather than the horizontal proportions, making the structure more urban in character. (Exhibit 11.2) One additional level will provide continuity at the cornice line with adjacent structures, and the cornice line is emphasized. The bleak sidewalk level facade will become a contributing part of the Weybosset streetscape with the addition of small retail stores.

STREET FURNITURE

Problem: There is an inadequate supply of seating throughout the study area. The only seating available is on the edges of the planters, which are concentrated in the vicinity of Union and Mathewson Streets.

Recommendation: Where sidewalk width permits, place benches on the sidewalk. (See Map 11.1) Areas with southern exposure are preferred. Where possible, walls and ledges should be constructed, or altered, to provide a useable seating surface. Currently, the low cement wall around the Blue Cross lot is just the right height for sitting down, and it faces southward. However, a wire fence mounted on the wall makes sitting impossible. More thoughtful design could have turned this small ledge into an amenity.

Problem: Trash receptacles are dirty, unattractive, and clutter the sidewalk.

Exhibit 11.1 Before: The Shopper's Arcade Garage conflicts with the surrounding historic structures, and provides no street level retail..

Exhibit 11.2 After: With street level storefronts and architectural vocabulary which echoes other structures on the street, this building is now an asset.

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

MAP 11.1 RECOMMENDED STREETSCAPE AMENITIES

- PRIORITY CORRIDOR FOR HISTORIC LIGHT FIXTURES
- RECOMMENDED BENCH LOCATIONS
- CONSTRUCT OR ALTER EXISTING LEDGES TO MAXIMIZE SEATING
- ◻◻◻ REMOVE PEDESTRIAN AWNING
- VEGETATION TO BUFFER SURFACE PARKING

Recommendation: Existing brown plastic trash barrels should be exchanged for smaller units which can be attached directly to street signs or light posts.

(Exhibit 11.3)

Problem: Existing open space areas are not meeting their full potential as amenities to the public.

Recommendation: Abbot Park and Weybosset Mall should be retrofitted to increase their attractiveness and useability.

Project: Retrofit of Abbot Park

To address the problems associated with Abbot Park, (See, "Open Space," Part I of this report), the following improvements are suggested. Abbot Park Place should be closed to vehicular traffic. Bollards should be installed so that vehicles may not enter from Read Street. The cracked and stained asphalt should be replaced with attractive paving.

Wooden benches with backrests should be placed around the perimeter of the area up against the buildings, and "up front" facing the sidewalk for people-watching. Grass should be planted in the central landscaped area so that persons may have the option of sitting on the ground, and the fountain repaired to provide an active focal point in this area. A food vendor, perhaps sponsored by Johnson and Wales, should be encouraged to locate in the park so that students and teachers in nearby college buildings

HISTORIC LIGHT

WALL-MOUNT FOR
SMALLER SIDE STREETS

WOODEN BENCH W. BACKREST

CAST-IRON PLANTER
CAN BE USED AS
PORTABLE BOLLARD

Exhibit 11.3 Desireable streetscape elements.

will be more apt to have lunch in the park. (Exhibits 11.4 and 11.5)

Project: Weybosset Mall Retrofit:

There are two critical areas which must be addressed in the retrofit of Weybosset Mall. The first is the general atmosphere of neglect created by the dilapidated structures and poor planter maintenance. The second is the fact that the area is exposed and there are no places which provide a sense of shelter or enclosure to pedestrians.

Phase I: Restoration of the Dyer Block

The Dyer Block should be maintained to prevent further deterioration, and rehabilitated so that it becomes an asset to the street. Old Photographs document the various stages in this building's life, providing some assistance in planning its restoration. Because this building is presently sub-divided into two separately owned parcels, and has been significantly altered at the street level, it may not be feasible to restore it to its original condition, shown in Photo 7.10.

Photo 11.1 illustrates the Dyer Block at a somewhat later period. As is evident from the photograph, the addition of awnings has the effect of unifying the two sections of the structure at sidewalk level. It is recommended that awnings be used in the restored structure. Aside from the benefit mentioned

Exhibit 11.4 Existing: In Abbot Park pedestrians share the space with parked cars. There is no grass on the ground, few places to sit, and no food nearby.

Exhibit 11.5 Proposed: Cars may no longer enter. Benches around the park's perimeter and newly planted grass provide many seating choices. A vendor provides food at lunchtime.

Source: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Photo 11.1 At this point in history, the Dyer Block had awnings which helped link the two sections of the structure and provide continuity at the sidewalk level.

Photo 11.2 Today, the Weybosset mall is underutilized and its neighboring buildings deteriorated.

above, they will help in providing shelter to pedestrians on the street, one of the concerns which needs to be addressed on the mall.

Phase II: Retrofit of Weybosset Mall

Once the Dyer Block and Comfort Station, described earlier, have been rehabilitated, the appearance of the mall will be greatly improved. However, further improvements will be necessary to give the area a festive appearance, to provide a seating alternative to the planters, and to create a sense of shelter to compensate for the wide open space of the street.

As Exhibit 11.6 shows, tables with umbrellas and chairs are a quick and inexpensive solution to this problem. Umbrellas may be thought cliché by some, but they work. They can be seen from a great distance away, alerting people to the fact that there is food and festivity ahead. Their color activates the airspace. Chairs can be moved around to suit users' needs. Finally, the umbrellas also provide that important sense of shelter which some individuals may require.

Food could be purchased from take-out establishments located in the Dyer Block or supplied by vendors. A restaurant might locate within a nearby storefront and provide table service to the area. This has proven highly effective in the small pub located

Exhibit 11.6 Umbrellas and an awning improve the sense of enclosure on the upgraded mall. Food is served on the site, and a public rest facility is nearby.

located in Kennedy Plaza. The functioning comfort station would be an additional amenity to serve this area.

Problem: No seating is provided at the Broadcast House RIPTA bus stop, which is heavily used by senior citizens.

Recommendation: A long wooden bench with backrest should be located along the north face of the building beneath the overhang, where individuals currently stand as they wait for the bus.

STREET FURNITURE

Problem: The existing lights are out of character with the historic buildings and their excessive width at the sidewalk level interferes with pedestrian flow. Lights should lead persons along the sidewalk at night, providing a sense of continuity from one area of the city to another. The existing fixtures provide "unfriendly" cool white light, and do not encourage pedestrian use of the street at night.

Recommendation: Replace existing lights with historic fixtures or with a distinct design which is in keeping with the neighborhood. To facilitate ease of maintenance and replacement, the City may wish to use similar lights to those currently in place in Kennedy Plaza. Bulbs should be warm toned and fixtures placed close enough together to provide a well lighted corridor down the street at night. These fixtures should also be located on Richmond and Mathewson

Streets, which have the potential to provide important north-south linkage to other parts of the City. (See Map 11.2)

The tall aluminum lights found on side streets should be replaced with smaller fixtures which are attached to buildings, thereby eliminating much of the visual clutter the existing "masts" create.

Problem: The angular pedestrian "shelter" located at the junction of Union and Weybosset streets combines with several light fixtures nearby to block a very pleasant view down the street and obscures the storefront of the building to which it is attached. (Photo 11.3)

Recommendation: Removal of this structure should be an immediate priority. The landmark Roundtop Church and other handsome historic structures at the study area's western border will then be in full view from the eastern end of the street. (Photo 11.4)

SIGNAGE/ORIENTATION

Problem: There are some excellent shops located on the side streets off Weybosset, but they are not visible from Weybosset Street to notify pedestrians of their existence. Placards have been employed by some establishments, but these block pedestrian pathways.

Recommendation 1: Attractively designed "store directory" signs could be located at or near intersections, identifying those shops to be found on side streets. (Exhibit 11.5)

Recommendation 2: Small pendant signs are in keeping

Photo 11.3 Existing: This pedestrian awning blocks an attractive urban vista.

Photo 11.4 Proposed: Once the awning is removed, these fine buildings will be visible from Dorrance Street.

Exhibit 11.5 Attractive "store directory" signs will identify the shops located on side streets and encourage people to explore.

Photo 11.6 This attractively planted area effectively screens parked cars from view.

with a historic district, and can be seen from down the sidewalk.

VEHICULAR CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Problem: Vehicles illegally parked on the sidewalk interfere with pedestrian circulation, and on Pine Street force pedestrians out into the street.

Recommendation 1: On Pine Street initiate aggressive enforcement of no parking laws. The sidewalk width on Pine Street does not permit the addition of bollards or street trees to make the sidewalk inaccessible to vehicles.

Recommendation 2: At the Clemence Street lot the access point across the sidewalk from Weybosset Street should be eliminated, and benches placed in the space formerly used as a driveway. The configuration of parked cars in the lot shows that Clemence Street is the commonly used access route into the lot; therefore, the wide sidewalk at this point should revert to full-time use by pedestrians.

Asset: The frozen lemonade truck which parks in the Clemence Street Lot in the summertime is a valuable amenity at this location.

Recommendation: This practice should continue, and a lemonade truck should be encouraged to locate in the Blue Cross lot near Weybosset Street to lure pedestrians from Weybosset Hill offices.

Problem: The absense of trees or bushes in and around

surface parking lots significantly alters the street climate in both summer and winter. In summer, their absence allows the lots to generate significant amounts of heat. In the winter, there are no trees to help deflect winter winds up above the sidewalk level.

Recommendation: Trees and hedges should be planted wherever parking lots abut pedestrian paths. Zoning should be changed to require that all parking lots contain a mandatory minimum amount of vegetation.

Photo 11.6 depicts an attractive planted area located in the Financial District. This significantly upgrades its immediate area.

PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

Problem: There are no crosswalks within the interior of the study area to give pedestrians a legal right-of-way in crossing the street.

Recommendation: At all major intersections, crosswalks should be painted across Weybosset Street, as illustrated in Map 10.4.

**GROUP III: RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESERVE THE HISTORIC
CHARACTER OF THE STUDY AREA**

Weybosset Steet has the rich architectural heritage and streetscape unique to a historic downtown location. Existing and proposed projects in other parts of the City, such as LaSalle Square and Capital Center, contain large scale modern structures, grand boulevards, and wide open spaces which arguably might best be viewed by automobile. In contrast, the richly ornamented historic structures along Weybosset Street stand as a reminder of an earlier period in the history of Providence when persons had the time to appreciate the fine details of the buildings as they passed by on foot.

Quincy Market and the adjacent new development in Boston stand as a striking example of the contrast between old and new. The warmth, human scale, and street life of Weybosset Street might provide a similar magnet to businesses and shoppers, when contrasted to newer areas within the City of Providence. Therefore, preservation and enhancement of the Street's historic character is of critical importance in paving the way for revitalization of this area.

This group of recommendations provides design criteria and establishes guidelines to the City and property owners which should be helpful in designing new infill structures, or altering existing buildings.

HEIGHT

Asset: Low building heights provide human scale and let a

maximum amount of sunlight into the study area throughout the day.

Recommendation: The current height and setback limits in a C-3 Zone should be preserved. Under existing zoning, that part of any construction which exceeds seventy five feet or six stories in height must be set back at least one foot for each three feet above six stories or seventy five feet. This will insure that tall structures are not visible from the sidewalk, and will not interfere with access of sunlight to the street. Map 12.1 depicts recommended building heights in the study area. At areas where the street is widest, taller buildings are required to contain the three dimensional space of the street, preserving the sense of an exterior room.

Liability: Adjacent structures which vary significantly in height weaken the continuity of the "wall" of buildings which enclose the street space. One existing problem is the St. Francis Chapel, which, at a low three stories, does not relate well to its eight story neighbor, McNulty Hall.

Recommendation: The height of new infill structures should not appear inconsistent with neighboring structures. At best they should have the same cornice line; at worst, they should not vary by more than two stories.

ARCHITECTURAL MASSING AND PROPORTION

Asset: Buildings on Weybosset Street are defined by

WEYBOSSET RETAIL DISTRICT URBAN DESIGN STUDY
MAP 12.1 RECOMMENDED BUILDING HEIGHTS

CPAD - URI

scale 1" = 160'

INFILL OR REPLACEMENT BUILDINGS

- 3 STORIES
- 4 STORIES
- 5 STORIES
- 6 STORIES
- BUILDING TO BE RETAINED

vertical walls which are perpendicular to the street, and the vertical architectural elements in the buildings are consistently emphasized, thereby linking them visually to one another; and providing continuity when the street is viewed in perspective. (Photo 12.1)

Recommendation: New construction should also contain these characteristics. Sloping walls, cantilevered overhangs, large horizontal openings, and deep recesses should not be permitted. (Photo 12.2)

SETBACK

Asset: All buildings, with the exception of Broadcast House, are built to an imaginary line which lies immediately adjacent to the sidewalk, and structures fill the surface area of each parcel. This provides continuity of shop-fronts and window shopping, as well as a cohesive wall to enclose the exterior room of the street.

Recommendation: With no exceptions, all new construction must follow the sidewalk "build-to" line which has been established by the existing architecture. This is a key element in the establishment of an "exterior room." Plazas or planted buffer strips are not permissible between building and sidewalk; they are contemporary features which will detract from the continuity of facades abutting the sidewalk. (Exhibits 12.1 and 12.2)

SCALE

Asset: The human scale of buildings along Weybosset Street makes a strong contribution to the liveability of the

Photo 12.1 Vertical architectural elements are consistently emphasized, and the rythm of opennings links buildings to one another as one gazes down the street.

Photo 12.2 Cantilevered overhangs and deep recesses should not be permitted on Weybosset Street.

Exhibit 12.1 Storefront design. (Source: Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984)

Exhibit 12.2 Storefront design. (Source: Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984)

street.

Recommendation: Most buildings on the street are three or four stories; therefore, new buildings should be similar in height, and have color, texture, and decoration which reduces, not exaggerates, their apparent size.

CONTRAST/CONFLICT

Liability: The Shopper's Arcade Garage and Broadcast House conflict with the prevailing historic character of the street.

Recommendation: Recommendations for improvements to the Shopper's Arcade Garage have been provided in another section of this Plan. Significant alterations to the Broadcast House may be financially, structurally, and politically infeasible. This structure will stand as a lesson to illustrate a building type which should not be permitted to locate within a historic district.

BUILDING ORNAMENTATION

Asset: The buildings in the study area display a variety of styles and structural elements: quoins, beltcourses, columns, and pilasters with decorative bases and capitals, entablatures, domes, turrets, and elaborately carved details. These all add character and a rich texture to the streetscape.

Recommendation: New construction should be required to incorporate some of these features. The

Exhibit 12.3 Historic architectural details. (Source: Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984)

incorporation of ornamental elements into new construction will provide strong visual linkage to the existing historic architecture. New buildings need not mimic historic structures; however, a visual tribute to the vernacular architecture will ensure that new infill buildings enhance, rather than detract from the district's overall architectural character.

(Exhibit 12.3)

BUILDING CORNICES

Asset: The assortment of decorative cornices make an important contribution to the festive quality of Weybosset Street architecture and provide a decorative emphasis at the roof line of buildings. Their overhang above the sidewalk plays a critical role in the creation of a sense of enclosure and protection at the sidewalk level.

Recommendation: The cornice line is a key area to emphasize and embellish in all new construction. All buildings should incorporate an emphasis at the roofline. (Exhibit 12.4 and 12.5) Decorative elements should project outward from the face of buildings. Glass roof treatments such as Broadcast House and a roofline which lies flush to the building, such as Shopper's Arcade Garage, are not acceptable; they reduce the impact of a building's roofline and do not contribute toward the sense of exterior room. Because cornices are also one of the first elements to be removed from a historic building due to structural

Exhibit 12.4 Cornices. (Source: Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984)

Exhibit 12.5 Cornices. (Source: Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984)

fatigue, it is important to preserve and maintain them on older structures.

MATERIALS

Asset: The variety of materials used ofr the brick, terra cotta, and stone facades, trim, and ornamentation of buildings; and a variety of color combinations within a building's facade, are important identifying characteristics of this historic commercial area. These materials in combination with the architectural forms provide a sense of warmth and playfulness which is not found in Broadcast House, a stark modern building.

Recommendation: New Construction should look to the existing architecture on Weybosset Street for ideas pertaining to color and materials. Rich earth tones are the warmest and friendliest. The combined use of different building materials, textures, and colors within a single facade is recommended.

RHYTHM

Asset: The repetition of vertical elements such as fenestration, pilasters, door openings, and other architectural features creates rhythm to provide pedestrians with a useful tool in gauging distances down the street. It also provides visual linkage between neighboring structures when viewed from down the sidewalk.

Recommendation: New construction must emphasize the repetition of vertical elements and opennings such as windows, pilasters, or doorways to continue the

rhythmic pattern which has been established on the street. (Exhibit 12.6 and 12.7) Wide horizontal openings such as the Shopper's Arcade Garage harshly conflict with this pattern and are not permissible. For the rhythmic repetition of elements to be visible from down the street, they must project slightly from the facade. Flush windows such as those found on the AT&T Building or the Old Stone Building will not add a rhythmic element to a building's facade because they do not create light and shadow.

Exhibit 12.6 Do not emphasize horizontal proportions in a historic district. (Source: Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984)

Exhibit 12.7 New construction must emphasize the repetition of vertical elements. (Source: Zuchelli, Hunter, and Associates, 1984)

SUMMARY

These urban design recommendations address three areas of critical importance to the revitalization of the Weybosset Street Study Area:

1. Attracting people to the district
2. Keeping them there for an extended period of time
3. Ensuring the future of the district as a historic area.

Problems, Assets, and Liabilities have been identified relative to eight urban design functional areas, and suitable recommendations have been provided to correct problems and assure that assets are protected and enhanced as the street continues to evolve.

The competition between different commercial areas for a limited number of retail establishments and customers can only increase as waves of commercial development spread further and further from the city core. Given this competitive environment, the Weybosset Street Retail District has a great competitive asset in the antique buildings which contain materials and workmanship too costly to extensively reproduce today. Recommendation Group III has provided the City and developers with guidelines to ensure that new infill development will enhance the historic character of the area, thereby contributing to its leverage over other commercial districts in the competition for new commercial tenants as well as for shoppers.

IMPLEMENTATION

Parts One and Two of this report have presented an urban design analysis of the Weybosset Street area as it exists today, and made recommendations to improve the street life and enhance the historic character of the district. It is hoped that this research will be used by several entities who have a stake in the downtown area.

The Providence Department of Planning and Development is currently re-writing the City Zoning Ordinance and updating the Zoning Map. Included in the new ordinance will be a Downtown Zone. This report's findings and recommendations regarding the streetscape architecture of Weybosset Street can be applied within the entire downtown area, because of the large inventory of historic buildings it contains. Where feasible, the Downtown Zone should contain language to facilitate protection of the historic character and enhancement of pedestrian street life.

In large projects such as the adaptive reuse of the Outlet Company, the City often provides infrastructure improvements to serve as an incentive to developers and to upgrade the area surrounding the completed project. The observations and recommendations provided here will insure that improvements, such as street furniture, will be the most effective in providing public amenities.

In its efforts to spur residential redevelopment of downtown buildings, the Providence Company can utilize portions of this report to form the basis for a marketing strategy to convince potential investors, owners, and

tenants of the merits particular to a downtown Providence location.

The information presented within this report has been designed to be easily understood by persons who have little or no background in planning or design. Many downtown property owners may fall into this category. It is hoped that this document will educate this group to be more aware of the "quality of life" impacts resulting from land use and development activities. This should lead to development decisions which lead to an improved street life as well as an economic return to investors.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Key to the successful implementation of an architectural and streetscape rehabilitation program is the cooperation and support of property owners. They must be made aware of the importance of their older buildings and of new programs to assist them in developing their potential. The owners of neglected structures should receive particular attention, to cultivate an increased sense of pride in the street.

In order to spur rehabilitation of some buildings, it may be necessary for the City to conduct feasibility studies, in which financing incentives are used in combination to determine what is necessary to achieve a profitable historic rehabilitation development project. At a minimum, property owners should be made aware of the financing and other incentives available. To facilitate this process, a list of property owners/managers, and map, is provided here.

- 1 - 57 Associates Joseph Paolino 274-6611
- 2 - Outlet Broadcasting Company 521-9559
- 3 - JRP Associates Joseph Paolino 274-6611
- 4 - Tailor Realty Inc. 141 Weybosset Street
- 5 - Historic Landmarks For Living, Philadelphia, Pa.
- 6 - 151 Associates Kates Properties 751-9600
- 7 - Capital Holdings, Inc. Kates Properties 751-9600
- 8 - Mason Associates Kates Properties 751-9600
- 9 - Union Fletcher Associates Kates Properties 751-9600
- 10 - Union Associates Joseph Paolino 274-6611
- 11 - Johnson and Wales College 456-1162
- 12 - St. Francis Church
- 13 - Demetrius Dampalis, 199 Weybosset Street
- 14 - Chung Wan Han P.O. 433 Brookline MA 02146
- 15 - AVA Associates Anjoorian Brothers 274-5300
- 16 - Ocean State Associates
- 17 - Children's Friend and Service 331-2900
- 18 - Chung Wan Han 274-2752
- 19 - R.I. Industrial Facilities Corporation
- 20 - Axlerod's Music 421-4833
- 21 - Weybosset Street Associates Hugh Vaughn 274-3259
- 22 - Gracilda Murphy Home Loan and INvestment 272-5100
- 23 - Avery Associates, Inc. 421-6000
- 24 - Hampton Associates 751-5650
- 25 - Johnson and Wales College 456-1122
- 26 - Johnson and Wales College 456-1122
- 27 - Johnson and Wales College 456-1122
- 28 - Johnson and Wales College 456-1122
- 29 - Johnson and Wales College 456-1122
- 30 - Woloohojian Realty 738-0200
- 31 - Beneficent Church
- 32 - Beneficent Church
- 33 - Philit R. DeSano 272-2558
- 34 - Johnson and Wales College 456-1122
- 35 - City of Providence
- 36 - Blue Cross of Rhode Island

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

Significant public and private investment will be required to achieve attainment of the goals and recommendations contained within this report. Fortunately, there are a variety of funding mechanisms and incentives available to the City, property owners, and commercial tenants. These, and their recommended uses, are described here.

National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is an independent agency of the U.S. government which makes grants to individuals, governmental agencies, and not-for-profit organizations for planning, design, program development, and media in support of environmental improvement. The NEA Design Arts Program can make grants to local governments of up to \$50,000. Grant money must be matched on at least a one-to-one basis.

Having as its 1988 theme "The Design of Cities," this program will fund projects such as design of street furniture; public artworks; an urban design plan; a collaborative project to paint murals on blank building walls; or design competitions. As long as the project is related to design, the NEA will consider an application.

Urban Development Action Grants

Urban Development Action Grants are provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to developers to finance socially and economically desirable

projects. The City submits the application, administers the funds, and is entitled to receive grant repayments which may then be used for other economic development projects. A minimum of 2.5 private dollars to every dollar of grant funding is required, and developers must show that, but for the grant money, the project would not be financially feasible.

The City has received UDAG funds for historic rehabilitation projects including the Biltmore Hotel and the Foundry (Brown and Sharpe Mill complex). UDAG funds are recommended for large-scale rehabilitation projects in the study area such as the Outlet Building, the Abbot Park Hotel Block, or the Dyer Block. To be viewed favorably by HUD, an application should show that the completed project will result in significant creation of jobs or removal of slum and blight.

PLDC Revolving Loan Fund

The Providence Local Development Corporation (PLDC) is a private non-profit corporation set up under the auspices of HUD and administered by the Providence Department of Planning and Development. Loans of up to \$75,000 are available at 5% interest (1988) for commercial acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, or purchase of equipment. PLDC funds can be used by property owners for facade rehabilitation; by tenants for storefront improvements; and by investors to assist in the purchase or major rehabilitation of a building. Because PLDC funds may be

used as part of the owner's equity component of a financing package, they are useful in leveraging larger loan commitments from conventional lenders.

The Providence Company

The Providence Company was formed in 1987 to encourage the rehabilitation of buildings for residential use in the Downtown and Jewelry District. This public/private partnership administers a loan fund of \$20 million. Loans of up to four million dollars are available at 75% of prime interest rate. This loan fund could provide significant assistance in rehabilitating the upper floors of structures for residential use.

Rhode Island Historic Preservation Loan Fund

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission (RIHPC) administers a \$2 million loan fund for historic preservation. The maximum loan is \$200,000; and the interest rate (1988) is 2 percent below prime. Principal and interest must be repaid within five years, unless an exception is approved by the Commission. Loan money may be used for needed rehabilitation work, or for acquiring and rehabilitation an endangered historic property. Funded work must meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. To be eligible, a property must be listed on the State Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of a historic district.

Investment Tax Credits

The Tax Reform Act of 1986 established a 20 percent tax credit for costs incurred in the substantial rehabilitation of historic buildings for commercial, industrial and rental residential purposes. A 10 percent tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation for non-residential purposes of buildings built prior to 1936 is also available. Put simply, if rehabilitation costs are \$100,000, the property owner may deduct \$20,000 from their actual tax bill in the year that the building is placed in service.

To qualify, a building must be either individually listed in the National Register, in a district listed in the National Register; or in a district listed locally by a certified local government. In addition, the rehabilitation costs must at least equal the depreciated basis of the property. The depreciable basis of the rehabilitated building must be reduced by the full amount of the tax credit claimed.

Tax credits have provided significant incentive for historic preservation development in the past. However, changes made by the 1986 Tax Reform Act have reduced the impact of the tax credit. First, it is now required that the straight-line depreciation method be used, and the depreciable life of buildings has been extended to 27.5 years for residential property and 31.5 years for non-residential property. Second, individuals may no

longer use tax credits from passive (real estate) investments to offset income from other types of investments. This, combined with a limitation on the income level of individuals who are allowed to use the credits, has significantly reduced the use of preservation projects as tax shelters by individuals. Because wealthy real estate investors have traditionally been a major source of equity for real estate projects, the Tax Reform Act may have dealt a serious blow to future large scale preservation rehabilitation. Legislation is pending in Congress ;to restore the tax credits to their pre-1986 form.

Preservation Easements

Preservation or "facade" easements consist of an agreement whereby a property owner donates the facade of a historic building to a non-profit entity, and may then claim the value of the donation as a charitable gift deduction on the income tax return in that same year. The RIHPC administers the program in Rhode Island, acting as the grantor and guardian of donated facades. The Commission will consider easements on buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places or which contribute to the significance of a registered historic district.

Facade easements serve two important functions in historic districts. First, they offer an important financial incentive to preserve historic structures, by

providing a significant tax break in the first years of (post-rehabilitation) operation, when it is most needed. Second, they guarantee the continued maintenance of a building's exterior. If the property owner neglects the building, the grantor may make the needed repairs and charge these costs to the property owner.

Property Tax Incentives

Tax incentives are among the most common state or local preservation rehabilitation incentives offered to property owners. After utilities, property taxes are one of the highest operating costs incurred by new or rehabilitated income producing investment property. Therefore, the fear of an increased assessment after rehabilitation may act as a disincentive to preservation development. Tax incentives are offered to dispel this fear and to reward those who improve the condition of their buildings.

Most property tax programs for historical buildings or landmarks must be based upon state legislation. The various programs currently in place across the nation fall into five general categories.

- A total or partial property tax abatement, exemption, or assessment freeze for historic building owners, whether or not renovation is involved;
- An exemption, abatement, or assessment freeze for renovation, restoration, or rehabilitation

- projects involving historic buildings;
- A property tax credit based on a percentage of renovation or restoration expenditures;
 - Assessment at a "current use value" rather than "highest and best use" valuation;
 - Recognition of decreased assessed value after donation of a preservation easement or landmark designation.

LEGAL MECHANISMS FOR URBAN DESIGN AND PRESERVATION

There are a growing number of regulatory controls which may be used by cities wishing to achieve urban design and preservation objectives. They fall into two general categories. First are those which provide incentives for developers to incorporate urban design into new development projects or preserve historic structures. Second are those which establish a legal framework in support of design review. Some of the legal mechanisms listed below are already in place in Providence. Others, such as transfer of development rights, may not be appropriate for the City at this time. However, if future development pressure threatens the character of the study area or other parts of downtown, these may become viable solutions to the problem.

Transfer of Development Rights

Transfer of development rights, or TDR's, are a relatively new incentive mechanism for encouraging the rehabilitation of historic structures. To be feasible, historic structures must be located in cities which have strong office, retail, and hotel development markets, in which a relatively small-scale, antique building would be considered small by comparison to the size permitted under existing zoning.

Recognizing this fact, some cities authorize landmark buildings to "transfer" the unutilized development potential from one site to another. The unutilized potential consists of the maximum allowable building size

permitted by zoning, minus the size of the historic structure. Generally, a TDR receiving area must be designated by the municipality and be within a certain proximity of the donor lot.

At present, the Providence CBD is not experiencing a strong enough real estate market to necessitate implementation of this process; however, it may be appropriate to research its feasibility and implementation now, in preparation for future periods of growth.

Incentive Zoning

Incentive zoning is a give-and-take process whereby a City grants a density bonus to a developer in exchange for a public amenity such as a plaza, playground, or public walkway. This is a form of development exaction, a process which has come under fire recently, resulting in the landmark Nollan decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in the summer of 1987. The Nollan decision has changed the development exaction process somewhat. Today, a municipality would be wise to have a plan which identifies specific objectives to be met by an exaction. In addition, there must be a direct relation between the public benefit being donated by the developer and the public harm resulting from the development.

Special Districts

Special districts are "overlay districts, superimposed on one or more existing zoning districts for the purpose of protecting or enhancing the special qualities of the area"

(Cook, 1981, in Shirvani, 1985) The special architectural qualities of Weybosset Street have been described in "Streetscape Architecture" and in "Recommendation Group III." In a "Historic Downtown Overlay District," or "Weybosset Retail Overlay District" these unique qualities could be protected by design standards which would be applied to all new development. It is critical to base the standards on documented criteria which specifically apply to the district; otherwise, they may not stand up to legal scrutiny if and when challenged in a court of law by developers.

Demolition Delay

Demolition Delay ordinances may be used to prevent the demolition of historic structures. These are temporary measures which "buy time" for preservationists and planners who may then negotiate with the developer in attempts to salvage all or part of the building(s) proposed for demolition. These ordinances have created problems for some municipalities by creating hostility between departments and agencies which have conflicting goals. For instance, the retention of a historic structure could stand in the way of a major development project. The issue to be addressed is "Which provides the greater public good: the historic building or the economic benefits attached to the new development?" It is likely that economic development and preservation administrators would not agree on the answer.

Historic District Zones

The City Council of Providence has designated three historic district zones, the College Hill Historic District, the Stimson Avenue Historic District, and the Broadway Historic District. Historic district status is an overlay zone that provides all the protection one could wish; no structure may be constructed, altered or repaired, moved or demolished in any historic district established by the City Council unless it has been reviewed by the Providence Preservation Commission.

Designation as a historic district zone would ensure the protection of the historic character of the study area. However, a significant amount of the power to negotiate and alter development proposals would be taken from the Department of Planning and Development and transferred to the Historic District Commission. The political feasibility of this action is not known.

Environmental Impact Assessments

The Department of Planning and Development in the City of Providence is mandated by the federal government to conduct environmental impact assessments for all projects which receive any amount of federal funds. Historic preservation is one of the categories under review. The City must ascertain that a new development project will not have a negative impact on the historic character of its environment. Because most projects are financed with some form of public assistance, the Planning Department may

become involved in their review.

Design Review

Design review is a process whereby design professionals, usually housed within the planning department, have the power to review development plans and proposals, and negotiate with developers to obtain the maximum public benefits from the project. Generally, a set of urban design criteria or guidelines are created to assist in the process.

Because Rhode Island does not have zoning enabling legislation to provide the legal framework for design review, it is not suggested for official application in Providence. Design review is, in general, not favored by the development community because of the increased soft costs and time lost in negotiation. The Rhode Island Builder's Association has successfully quashed past attempts to have such enabling legislation passed by the legislature. However, an informal design review process is in place in Providence today, and does have an impact on new construction.

It is hoped that the guidelines contained within this report will enable the design review team to make informed decisions regarding infill development in historic areas.

CONCLUSION

This thesis project has presented an urban design analysis of a portion of downtown Providence. In Part One of the project, the study area, called also "the Weybosset retail district," is evaluated within the context of eight urban design functional areas. This provides an effective means to illustrate urban design concepts, as well as to identify key assets and liabilities affecting the street life and architectural character of the study area.

After the analysis of existing conditions, Part Two of the project provides recommendations and proposals. These are designed to enhance existing assets as well as to remedy problems which have prevented the area from meeting its full potential as a vital downtown environment for pedestrians.

Part Three outlines various financial incentives which may be used to implement revitalization, with particular emphasis on rehabilitation of the historic structures which line Weybosset Street. In addition, this section provides an overview of several legal mechanisms which may be used to implement urban design in downtown Providence.

This thesis project has presented City administrators and public citizens with key urban design concepts which may be used to understand and evaluate the urban environment which surrounds us. Focusing the study on Weybosset Street, an area familiar and accessible to many, helps to clarify unfamiliar concepts more clearly. It is

hoped that this document will expand and enrich the public's appreciation of a somewhat neglected part of Providence, and make many aware of a rich environment which may have passed unnoticed.

Readers must realize that urban design is fundamental to the city planning process. It must play an essential role in the ongoing revitalization of downtown Providence, if the City is to strengthen its appearance, useability, and friendliness to the group which is the most responsible for creating a true city environment: its pedestrian population.

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