

Downtown Neighborhood Alliance

Meeting Notes

November 2008

Intro

Josh Cullion calls the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

I (Kim Snow) read the minutes of the last meeting. Minutes are voted on and accepted.

Josh acknowledges that Sen. Paul Jabour had secured the DNA the grant he had mentioned at our last meeting. We're very excited and can't wait to work on how best to use these funds. Thanks much Sen. Jabour!

Sidewalk Repair Update

Maria Ruggieri talks about the progress of the downtown sidewalk repair project. Councilman John Lombardi gave us 90k of his community fund grant and let us identify the sidewalks in most need of repair. The DID is also contributing their own funds to fix other sidewalks downtown. The repairs have begun and we're excited it's moving forward. Thanks to Maria for championing this and seeing all the moving pieces come together and thanks to John Lombardi and the Department of Public works for getting the job done right!

For the complete history of this project, which started earlier this year, visit the DNA website: <http://providencedna.com> (check out News and Meetings)

DID Update

Frank LaTorre thanks everyone for their continued support. Go us!

Right now the DID has 20 full time clean and safe crews. Their efforts have resulted in less graffiti and litter and general sense of happiness in the streets -- they're able to act on it so speak up if you see it. Truly, they can respond! Go here for more info:

<http://www.providencedowntown.com/about.php> or just call:

DID HOTLINE: 401.421.4530

The flowers and plantings were a huge success this year. (they really are gorgeous – I am pretty sure my family only visits me now to see them.)

There were 190 of them and the program had corporate sponsors as well for support.

The city has secured more money from Federal and state grants to do more with sidewalks and streets in addition to the money that the DID and John Lombardi provided for our neighborhood now. Frank and others are working hard to secure this for us and make sure it doesn't get lost in the system.

One issue with the sidewalks is the vaults below them – that can make them more difficult and pricey to fix. There will be a meeting to review the plans mid-November and get these efforts moving.

Hospitality Resource Group - There are a lot more clubs coming to the table to support this effort (reduce noise underage drinking, violence, etc. during late night/weekend hours). Not just the well-behaved locations, but others, too. 'Ray!

New Street Signs – this effort is in the works as well. We want all the signs to be consistent and clear. They'll adopt the "purple" template that you see on some current downtown signs. It costs about 28k. The DID has 15k and looking for 13k from Public Works. Still waiting to hear.

Parking Lot/Former Police and Fire Station Update

Once the former Police and Fire Station was demolished, certain promises were made on how to beautify and treat the land in the time before a buyer came along.

It's been stalled for a while with all sides saying "Who us? We don't know, ask them." So we put Sue LaPidus on it. (cue: the Law & Order theme song).

First, Sue at least got them to shut off their painfully bright lights that were blasting into the Regency (probably saved them money too).

She also kept asking people with the city what was going on and checking in about next steps.

The space can only be kept a lot until next Sept and you can only plant things downtown before a certain day (or else they'd freeze and die) so we're losing time!

But with Sue's hard work we have some decisions, trees are being planted now and the planters we'll need in warmer weather are being built. There will even be people assigned to keep it all clean. We'll keep an eye on this to make sure it happens. But good news that there's been some progress. Thanks Sue!

Business and Merchant News

Joelle Crane from the Providence Foundation talks about the new "wee" eatery and bar downtown, **Tini**: http://www.projo.com/food/content/fd-tini_11-05-08_BMC3NMT_v31.194117c.html

The new gym on Dorrance Street, opening in January -- **Boston Sports Club** (yours truly actually joined – I hope the Stairmaster has a martini holder...)
<http://www.mysportsclubs.com/regions/BSC.htm>

And **Ardeo**, a new Mediterranean restaurant to rise up where Raphael used to be in the Union Station plaza. <http://www.ardeocapecod.com/> and <http://www.ardeoprovidence.com/>

Visit www.providencedowntown.com or more info and a calendar of events.

In general, Joelle's group is looking to recruit more retail downtown, especially to take up the empty office space.

Great news – a downtown gift card coming soon. It can be used at several awesome downtown locations. And that list will hopefully be growing soon.

Gourmet Heaven will be our new bodega on Weybosset Street and there's a lot of excitement but no new details. Grocery, deli, wi-fi, open 24/7 eventually.

Also **Craftland** is returning to Westminster Street for the holidays. It's so much fun and great place to find amazing, unique holiday gifts while supporting local artists.
<http://www.craftlandshow.com/>

So what's the Arcade scoop? Tenants were asked to leave for renovations. The building is still on the National Registrar of Preservation Heritage list. There is a process in place to protect it and similar buildings. It also has to do with tax credits. (Snow Note: The DNA will definitely work with

PPS to keep an eye on this and keep the Arcade going safe and strong).

<http://www.quahog.org/attractions/index.php?id=1>

Are any of the Arcade's business moving downtown? Two are now on Peck Street but again hard b/c a mismatch with spacing needs and availability.

The Providence Preservation Society Stroll

Lauren Goldenberg from PPS announces a great annual holiday event – the **PPS House Tour and Stroll on Saturday, December 6th**. There's a house tour of 14 residences in our hood from 11-4 followed by tree lightings – including the mayor's -- and the stroll. Many of your favorite local merchants will be open as well.

There is a patron's reception at City Hall the night before.

The gorgeous wreaths go up downtown on Nov 15 and on Nov 22 it's Santa's Day, a promo with Coast 93.3.

For more info about these amazing events please visit the PPS site: <http://www.ppsri.org/>

We hope you can make it – you know your fav DNAers (ahem) will be enjoying this great holiday event!

And Now Our Guest Speak -- George Born from PPS

And what a great segue, George Born, Executive Director of PPS, steps up to talk to us about how amazing our neighborhood really is when it comes to historical buildings worth appreciating – and protecting. (PS he covered A LOT of locations and your humble recorder here caught about 75% of them pen to paper because she was also enjoying the talk. So consider these "highlights...")

Downtown is the second oldest neighborhood in Providence next to the East Side.

Some notable buildings:

- The Arcade (oldest indoor mall still standing)
- Grace Episcopal Church
- Old Custom House (used to be the Post Office and Court House. Has a very rare cast iron façade)
- City Hall (2nd French Empire Style, restored in the 70's)
- Cathedral of St. Peter & Paul (surrounded by a pedestrian mall)
- Shepherds Department Store (closed in 1974, PPS rallied and now URI calls it home)
- The Dreyfus Building
- RI Foundation at Union Station
- The Library (similar to Boston's -- addition in 1930's on Empire Street)
- Turk's Head (was the tallest building in Providence for a while)
- The Biltmore (this was also the tallest building for a bit, closed in 1975, reopened in 1979)
- PPAC (what an amazing interior!)
- Bank of America Building (the Superman building! Now this was once the tallest building in New England – and what officially the best place ever to wait in line to deposit a check.)

Our neighborhood is recognized as an entire historic district (makes sense, right?) First it was just the smaller Custom House District (13 buildings) and later downtown was added bringing 112 buildings with it. There may even be more now that are considered historical when they weren't years ago when the list was designated.

The preservation movement – the National Registrar helps guide what the government can do to such buildings, but not for private property.

The Downtown Design Review Committee helps regulate such decisions about buildings in and out of the hood. These members are appointed by the mayor.

Also, tax credits (state and national) help protect the buildings.

Where do we turn for code enforcement, ie when cars are parking on a pedestrian mall? It's agreed that it simply isn't enforced as much as it could and should be. That is step one. The Parks Department and the DID are good places to contact with concerns too. And of course please email the DNA with issues as we can help find the right people too.

To learn more about the amazing buildings downtown and in Providence, grab the Guide to Providence Architecture, a book put together by PPS. It makes a great holiday gift, people... <http://www.ppsri.org/?section=education&page=12>

And finally, how we can as downtown residents works with and empower PPS to help preserve our neighborhood? John Lombardi acknowledges that we all need to work together, keep the communications open and please, EMAIL THE DNA HERE: dna_providence@hotmail.com with ideas, issues and complaints – we can help! A tip: Get proof, grab those cameras and if you see something sketchy or curious, snap it and send along! The more levels that get involved (residents/hoods/city/state) the stronger the case.

A Word from Bravo

We're so happy to have John Martone (formerly of Tazza) back downtown and managing such a great restaurant as Bravo. It's a win-win. For those not in attendance John very graciously set up wine, cheese and fruit for us and let's just say the after-meeting mingling was quite delightful – *urp*.

Some notes, Bravo is now open on Mondays. Soon they'll also have a resident VIP card where you can always save 10% on your tab. They'll be having live music, events and wine & dinner specials. Sounds good to us.

Check out all the updates here: <http://www.bravobrasserie.com/>

Thanks again to our hosts and finally, as 830...

We're Adjourned!

Special thanks to Councilman John Lombardi and State Rep Dave Segal for making the time to attend the night before Election Day!