

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION  
PROVIDENCE  
1960-2000  
AND BEYOND

Francis J. Leazes Jr.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..."

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

# PROVIDENCE "ISSUES"

- ▶ 1960'S: Urban Renewal set to bulldoze College Hill & other neighborhoods- The city's historic fabric threatened
- ▶ 1974 the monkeys escaped from Roger Williams Park zoo
- ▶ 1974 The Biltmore Hotel closed its doors
- ▶ 1983 Wall St Journal: Providence "a smudge" on the road to Cape Cod
- ▶ 1980's: Retail dead in Providence
- ▶ 1970's-1980's: city near bankruptcy– Tax base eroding and middle class flight
- ▶ No city aesthetic: rivers covered, the city a sea of parking lots and railroad tracks with a berm bisecting Providence

# Next in Line



# Providence Projects (1960-2000)

## Pre-Renaissance (1960-1974)

- ▶ Rescue of College Hill/Formation Providence Preservation and of an active Providence Foundation
- ▶ Providence Civic Center (Now Dunkin Donuts Center)
- ▶ Providence Performing Arts Center
- ▶ Rescue of Biltmore Hotel/Formation of Providence Performing Arts Center

## Renaissance Projects(1975-2000)

- ▶ Relocation/burial Railroad tracks/Creation of Capital Center & Capital Center Commission
- ▶ I-95 Interchange/Memorial Boulevard
- ▶ Uncovering and Relocation of the confluence of three rivers
- ▶ Creation of Water Place Park
- ▶ Citizens Bank Tower
- ▶ Union Station Rehabilitation
- ▶ Providence Place Mall
- ▶ Westin Hotel
- ▶ RI Convention Center
- ▶ Providence Courtyard Marriot

# Pre-River Moving



# Post River Moving



# LESSON 1

## GOVERNMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

- ▶ FEDERAL-STATE-LOCAL-PRIVATE FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: \$1.1 BILLION 1981-2000 & more for I-195 Relocation
- ▶ COMMITTED POLITICAL EXECUTIVES AND LEGISLATIVE DELEGATIONS
- ▶ AGENCY ADMINISTRATORS AT ALL LEVELS WHO UNDERSTOOD THE GOALS OF VARIOUS INITIATIVES

## LESSON 2

# UNDERSTAND MIXED MOTIVATIONS

- ▶ PRIVATE SECTOR WANTS A FINANCIAL RETURN
- ▶ POLITICAL ACTORS WANT SOMETHING POLITICALLY SUCCESSFUL
- ▶ ADMINISTRATORS WANT PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION AND A LEGACY
- ▶ POLICY ENTREPRENEURS WANT THEIR PROJECT IDEAS TO COME TO LIFE



## LESSON 3

# FORM CONTINGENT COALITIONS

- ▶ ESTABLISH TRUST AMONG DECISION MAKERS BY SUCCESSFUL SMALL PROJECTS
- ▶ PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL
- ▶ DECISION MAKERS AND PROJECT ADVOCATES MUST BE WILLING TO MAKE ACCOMODATIONS AND SHIFT PREFERENCES SOMETIMES SURRENDERING PRIVATE INTEREST TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST
- ▶ LEADERSHIP MUST BE ABLE TO MOBILIZE QUICKLY AROUND WELL VETTED IDEAS WHEN AN OPPORTUNITY APPEARS

## LESSON 4

# LOCAL MATTERS

- ▶ LOCAL \$'s ARE IMPORTANT FOR SEED MONEY AND FOR PUSHING ACTIVITY ALONG
- ▶ INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WITH A LONG TERM HISTORIC AND FUTURE STAKE IN THE CITY ARE IMPORTANT TO SUSTAIN EXCITEMENT, THAT IS "CIVITAS" MUST BE PRESENT
- ▶ WHEN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP CHANGES NEW LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO BE READY

## LESSON 5

# IDEAS MATTER

- ▶ PLANS ARE IMPORTANT, BECAUSE THEY CONTAIN VISIONS, EVEN IF NOT IMPLEMENTED FULLY.
- ▶ THE IDEAS OF INDIVIDUALS MATTER AND OFTEN ARE SUCCESSFUL IN SPITE OF PLANS
- ▶ LEARN TO FORM CONSENSUS AROUND IDEAS, THAT IS, LEADERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE

## LESSON 6

### BE FLEXIBLE

- ▶ CREATE MEDIATING INSTITUTIONS AND GIVE THEM TEETH BOTH SYMBOLIC AND REAL TO RESOLVE INEVITABLE CONFLICTS
- ▶ BE CREATIVE IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS & AVOID EMINENT DOMAIN PROCEEDINGS IF POSSIBLE

# LESSON 7

## KNOW THE LIMITS OF YOUR GOALS

- ▶ PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN A REVITALIZATION HAS HAPPENED
- ▶ LOOKING GOOD IS ONLY PART OF THE STORY
- ▶ UNDERSTAND THAT UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES CAN AND WILL RESULT

# LESSON 8

## DEVELOP SUCCESS INDICATORS

- ▶ BUSINESS START UPS
- ▶ LOCAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
- ▶ RETAIL SALES
- ▶ ASSESSED VALUATIONS AND % OF TAXABLE PROPERTY IN THE BASE
- ▶ COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL SQUARE FOOTAGE
- ▶ BOND RATING
- ▶ SOCIAL INDICATORS E.G. CRIME STATISTICS, EDUCATION OUTCOMES, HOME OWNERSHIP

## LESSON 9

### HIRE A SOOTHSAYER

- ▶ PREDICT THE EASY MOVEMENT OF FINANCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CAPITAL WORLDWIDE
- ▶ PREDICT THE LOSS OF LOCALLY CONTROLLED FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS
- ▶ PREDICT THE ONSLAUGHT OF A NATIONAL HOUSING COLLAPSE
- ▶ PREDICT THE WORST ECONOMY SINCE THE 1930'S- TWICE (1991-1993; 2008-CURRENT)

# LESSON 10

## IT IS A LONG TERM COMMITMENT

- ▶ PROVIDENCE STORY BEGAN IN 1957
  - RESCUE OF COLLEGE HILL
  
- ▶ CONTINUES TODAY
  - I-195 RELOCATION PROJECT COMPLETION
  - RESULT IS 45 ACRES TO BE DEVELOPED ON THE WATERFRONT



# Providence Since 2000



# Providence 2000-2012

## ► Projects Completed/In Progress

- Renaissance Hotel
- Waterplace Condominiums
- Purchase of "Downcity" by J&W.
- Move across River by Brown and RISD
- Reconstruction of "The Dunk" and the RI Convention Center
- I-195 Relocation (45 acres)
- Appearance of Medical District/"Knowledge District"

# Conditions in Providence

- ▶ Near financial collapse
- ▶ Dropping Real Estate values
- ▶ School system needing major intervention
- ▶ Commercial square footage value dropping
- ▶ Sale of Commercial buildings
- ▶ Vibrant night life: Think WATERFIRE!
- ▶ Vibrant college scene
- ▶ Expanding opportunities in neighborhoods
- ▶ Declining State financial support

In the long run the Providence story reminds us that the right people from the public and private sectors need to be in the right place at the right time to bring projects to the table and to see them through to a conclusion when the opportunity comes to make changes.

**THANK YOU**