



Providence Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

Staff Report: Unified Vision for Downtown Public Spaces Conceptual Review – Downtown – Wards 1, 12 (For Action)

Presented at March 17, 2021 BPAC meeting

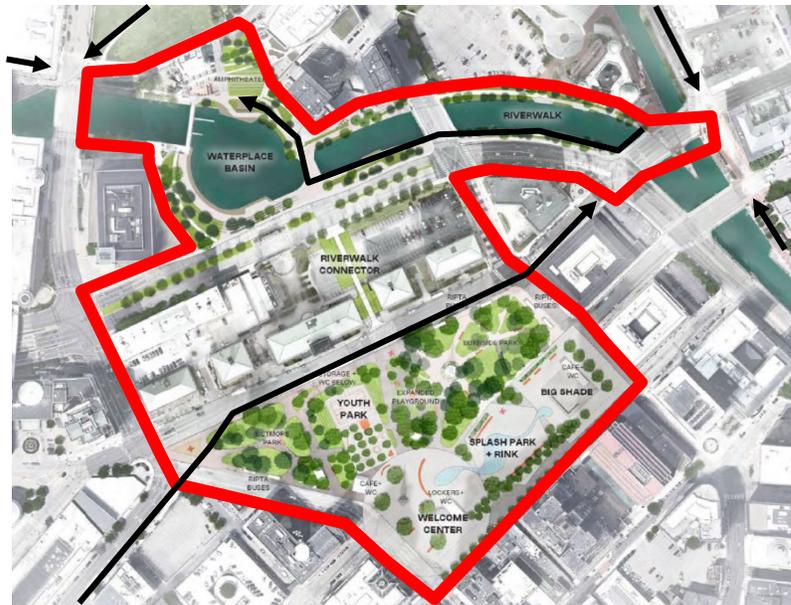
Project Background

The City of Providence Department of Planning and Development seeks comments from the BPAC regarding conceptual plans for Greater Kennedy Plaza, Waterplace Park, and the Riverwalk. This will be a conceptual level review of the project and will be the first of two reviews before the Commission.

In 2017, the City conducted public input to develop a vision for Greater Kennedy Plaza and subsequently developed a plan to consolidate bus berths within Kennedy Plaza, improve pedestrian safety, and create bicycle lanes on Exchange Terrace. Shortly thereafter, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation developed a multi-hub plan that would create two new Downtown bus hubs— one near the train station and one in the I-195 area— and consolidate bus berths surrounding Kennedy Plaza on Dorrance and Exchange streets. The Unified Vision for Downtown Public Spaces is a City initiative begun in 2020 to improve the City’s skating rink, the center of Kennedy Plaza, the Riverwalk, and Waterplace Park to be more inviting, inclusive, well-connected, and sustainable. The City’s plan accommodates RIDOT’s planned bus berth locations on Dorrance and Exchange streets.

The red boundary in the image below shows the project area, with black arrows indicating planned urban trail connections from the Great Streets Plan.

The Unified Vision for Downtown Public Spaces includes multiple different concepts. This Commission’s review will focus on the bicycle and pedestrian safety and connectivity aspects of the plan.



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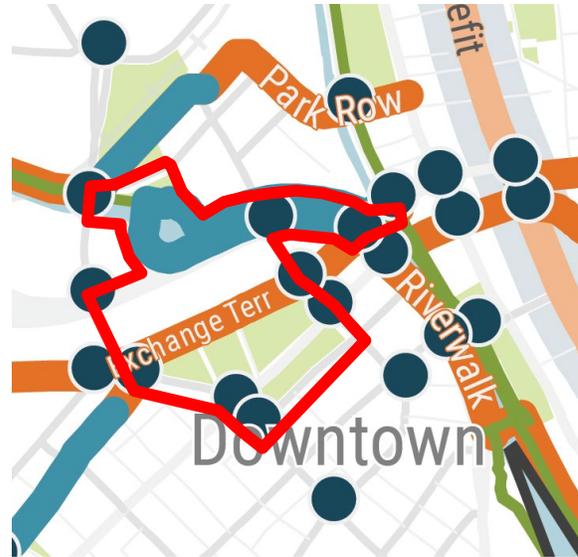
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Great Streets Plan Context

The Great Streets Plan recommends Urban Trail Network connections through the project area connecting to Fountain Street, Waterman Street, the intersection of Steeple Street with Canal Street, and the intersection of Francis Street with Finance Way. Through the project area, Urban Trail Network recommendations are based largely on existing conditions but recommend Exchange Terrace, Waterplace, and the Riverwalk feature accessible Urban Trails for their entire lengths.

Many intersections in the project area are recommended for safety improvements in the Great Streets Plan:

- Exchange Street & Exchange Terrace
- Fountain Street & Dorrance Street
- Dorrance Street & Fulton Street
- Memorial Boulevard & Exchange Street
- Memorial Boulevard & Steeple Street
- Washington Street & Exchange Street
- Washington Street & Dorrance Street



Project Elements and BPAC review

The major elements of the Unified Vision for Downtown Public Spaces are:

- Within BPAC scope of purview:
 - A new “Riverwalk Connector” that would connect pedestrians and bicyclists from Exchange Terrace across Memorial Boulevard and to the Riverwalk, to replace the existing tunnels beneath Exchange Terrace and Memorial Boulevard
 - Closing Washington Street through Kennedy Plaza to all motor vehicle traffic
 - Accessibility improvements to the Waterplace Amphitheater
 - Modifying the Riverwalk to address public safety issues, flooding and sea level rise, ADA accessibility, structural issues, and bicycle accessibility through the Riverwalk and Waterplace Park



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- Outside of BPAC scope of purview, but proposed as part of the Unified Vision for Downtown Public Spaces:
 - A new skating rink and interactive water feature in the middle of Kennedy Plaza
 - A new “Big Shade” structure in Kennedy Plaza across from the Federal Courthouse
 - Repurposing the current Rink area as a youth park
 - Relocating Soldiers & Sailors Monument to align with Washington Street
 - A new café building near the proposed youth park
 - Repurposing the existing RIPTA building and constructing a new addition to the building
 - A new fog feature in the center of the Waterplace Park Basin
 - A new stage area in Waterplace Park that meets the needs of a modern performance venue to addresses sea level rise concerns.

Commission discussion should focus on those elements within its purview as well as general pedestrian and bicycle safety and connectivity.

Respectfully submitted by Alex Ellis.